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Gender and Contentious Politics: Women's Effect on the Success of Maximalist Protests

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PSCI-499H: Honors Project

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April 1, 2023

Political participation is characterized by both civil action (ex. voting) and contentious politics (ex. protesting). However, if a regime is unresponsive to its constituency, the populace may feel the need to turn solely to contentious politics that quickly erupt into maximalist demands. These maximalist demands are characterized by a call for the end of a regime. Maximalist protests over time have provided an abundant amount of information on what makes such protests successful. Violence and nonviolence, in particular, tend to be a popular topic in relation with protest success. A lesser studied variable, however, is the presence of women in protests. Women are increasingly participating in contentious politics for a variety of issues, particularly women's issues. These social grievances – when combined with a negligent government and a wholly dissatisfied populace – can lead to maximalist campaigns. This research argues that gender has a positive effect on maximalist movement success, as women who serve as leaders and in frontline roles promote nonviolence in their campaigns, a variable highly associated with movement success.

Literature Review

Women make up a substantial part of major protest movements, including women's rights campaigns and movements with more maximalist demands. There are multiple reasons why women lead or join protests, and scholars have sought to understand what grievances cause women to act. Henshaw (2016) attributes their motivation to ethnic and religious reasons or leftist ideology, especially in the case of combative movements, and Thomas and Bond (2015) assert that forced recruitment is a common occurrence (although women's support becomes less substantive in this case). The most compelling assertion, however, is the argument made by Murdie and Peksen (2015), stating that women are motivated for the same reasons as the rest of civil society.

If women's motives do not differ from men's, it is then necessary to ask whether women are more successful in their pursuits for political change (e.g., democratization, policy implementation, human rights, etc.). Scholars agree that women-led protests and protests with higher gender equality tend to result in higher levels of success than protests that lack these elements (Asal et. al., 2013; Braithwaite & Ruiz, 2018; Chenoweth, 2019c; Chenoweth, 2022; Codur & King, 2015). In terms of how gender affects movement success, the most common mechanism is the idea that women espouse more nonviolent ideology, leading to more peaceful interactions; scholars frequently draw a connection between nonviolence and women (or peace and gender equality) (Asal et. al., 2013; Caprioli, 2000; Chenoweth, 2019c; Codur & King, 2015; Costain, 2000; Schaftenaar, 2017; Thomas & Wood, 2018; Warren & Cady, 1994). This begs the question of why women espouse this ideology and implement it into their protests.

The easy explanation for such a relation would be the false notion that women are inherently more peaceful than men, and thus, they are bound to represent such an ideal. However, this has proven to be an incorrect over-simplification (Asal et. al., 2013; Chenoweth, 2019c). Rather, women tend to espouse more peaceful rhetoric because of existing gender roles. Enloe (2004), a leading scholar on the subject of gender and militarization, asserts that there is a long-entrenched relationship between masculinity and militarization, and thus, femininity has long been associated with the "gendered alternatives" (p. 218). This gendered difference results in different pursuits for change and protest models. Women, associated with more domestic roles within patriarchal structures, tend to maintain more nonviolent methods for expressing their grievances. These nonviolent "repertoires of activism" may include advocacy and activism (Akchurin, 2013, p. 680), petitions, or boycotts (Dodson, 2015). Of course, women are not always limited to these forms of protest, but gender roles – which may vary by society – may

allow for more limited organizational repertoires. Furthermore, Viterna and Fallon (2008) assert that a lack of mobilization opportunities and past movement failures may further tighten women's organizational repertoires. For example, women who face threats to their well-being if they protest may be disinclined to opt for more contentious modes of protest (Chenoweth, 2022a). Existing gender roles thus motivate women to opt for nonviolent methods of protest.

With this understanding in mind, it is necessary to question how these nonviolent methods result in success. One popular explanation emerges from Erica Chenoweth and their colleagues which asserts that nonviolent movements are two times more likely to succeed than violent ones, even in authoritarian regimes (Chenoweth, 2019c; Chenoweth & Gallagher-Cunningham, K., 2013; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2014). This assertion is agreed upon by multiple scholars (Asal et. al., 2013; Codur & King, 2015; Murdie & Peksen, 2015; Schaftenaar, 2017). This argument is sustained by three explanations, according to Chenoweth (2019c), each of which women fit. Firstly, nonviolent movements attract higher participation which is correlated with movement's success; this nonviolence may be enacted by women leaders or attract more women to the movement's cause (Chenoweth, 2019c). Secondly, women may encourage loyal elites and authorities to defect from the regime due to their perceived gender roles (Chenoweth, 2019c; Codur & King, 2015). Finally, as discussed prior, women then use a strategic array of sustainable tactics allowed by their societal repertoire as an alternative to violence (Akchurin, 2013; Chenoweth, 2019c; Dodson, 2015). These explanations do well to explain how nonviolence leads to greater success and thus, how women employ nonviolence to obtain their goals.

There is also frequent discussion of the sustainability of these successes. For example, if a protest's goal is democratization, assuming the movement is successful, it would also be

responsible for maintaining the democratic regime and preventing it from backsliding into autocracy. Scholars tend to agree that women are more effective at sustaining success due to their nonviolent and peaceful rhetoric, as they can muster greater support (Chenoweth, 2019c; Chenoweth, 2022; Hudson et. al., 2008; Shair-Rosenfield & Wood, 2017). This is an important distinction for a movement's success.

Overall, the literature supports the idea that movements with high levels of women's participation are more successful due to their nonviolent tendencies. As such, it is possible to discuss how my research fits into the discussion of women's protest and success.

Theory

This literature focuses on a mix of non-maximalist and maximalist movements. Specifically, Chenoweth tends to focus on women's effect on maximalist movements. Maximalist movements are waged in order to change an existing regime through removal, constitutional reform, or other methods of regime change. These types of campaigns have the tendency to be more catastrophic to society due to the highly contentious nature of the protests. Thus, they differ greatly from movements for specific policies or other societal needs. In this paper, I quantitatively and qualitatively test Chenoweth's theory. With this literature in mind, I address the research question, "does gender affect the success of maximalist protest movements?" Specifically, this research will look at protests pursuing the overthrow of an existing regime with women as leaders and in frontline roles. As such, I test the following hypothesis:

H: Maximalist protests with women in leading or frontline roles are more successful than protests that include few or no women or only include women in supporting or symbolic roles.

The literature evidences a strong connection between women and nonviolence, and as such, nonviolence likely acts as the causal mechanism in this relationship. Overall, I determine

whether women in significant roles influence the success of the movement and whether this success is sustained.

Research Design

Quantitative Methods

This research utilizes Erica Chenoweth's (2019a) movement-level Women in Resistance (WiRe) Dataset for several variables. The WiRe Dataset contains data from 338 "maximalist resistance campaigns" with at least 1,000 participants between 1945 and 2014 (Chenoweth, 2019a, p. 1) The independent variable (protests with women in leading or frontline roles) is measured using WiRe's ordinal variables "Extent of Women in Frontline Roles" (with 0 = none and 3 = extensive) and "Extent of Women Reported in Leadership" (with 0 = none and 2 = women primary campaign leaders). Women in frontline roles are those that are observed in combat on the frontlines of a protest or demonstration. Most protests in the dataset witness women in frontline roles to some extent. Women in leadership roles are women who lead their campaigns.

This research also uses Chenoweth and Lewis's (2019) Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO 2.1) Dataset which was published in conjunction with the WiRe Dataset and is composed of the same 338 maximalist campaigns between 1945 and 2014. The NAVCO dataset attributes scores to each year of a movement while the WiRe dataset averages the scores per movement. As such, I combined the two datasets by taking the highest score of "Extent of Women in Frontline Roles" and "Extent of Women Reported in Leadership" for each year of the movement. This research also uses the variables "Symbolic Role" and "Support Role" (both dichotomous variables). These variables determine whether women had symbolic or support roles in protests, meaning not represented on the frontlines but rather, in

smaller roles. Symbolic roles are characterized as women advocating for a movement online through social media. Support roles are non-frontline roles in which women work for a movement to help their cause (though some of these roles may signal coercion).¹ These two variables will determine whether the presence of women alone is enough for a movement to be successful or if women need to be involved as leaders.

Also from the NAVCO dataset, I use the variables “success” and “progress” as dependent variables. “Success” is a binary variable that measures whether a campaign was successful or not within a year of its peak. A movement’s peak can be defined as the point in the movement where it gains the most momentum. That is, the movement is acting with as much force as it can muster; this may include mass support, significant international support, and indicators of severe regime instability. Once this momentum declines, the concessions offered by the regime or the regime’s survival signals success or a lack thereof.

In order to check for a robustness, I use the variable “progress”. “Progress” is an ordinal variable that measures the number of concessions gained by a movement (0 = status quo and 4 = complete success). Due to the difficulty in determining the difference between 3 (“significant concessions”) and 4 (“complete success”), Chenoweth recommends recoding 3 and 4 as one category of the variable (“strategic success”) and 0, 1, and 2 as another category of the variable (“failure”). This creates the dichotomous variable “strategic success.” This variable thus has a lower threshold for success than the “success” variable.

Firstly, I run a crosstabulation between the dependent variables and independent variables to visualize the relationship between women’s participation and movement success. Next, I

¹ According to Chenoweth (2019a), these roles include “training for combatants/activists; hiding combatants/activists; slave labor; sexual slavery; gather, prepare and cook food; porter; looting, mine sweepers; child care and rearing; spies or informants; messengers; intelligence officers; [or] communications” (p. 5).

employ a binary logistic regression between the dependent variables “Extent of Women in Frontline Roles,” “Extent of Women in Leadership Roles,” “Support Roles,” and “Symbolic Roles” and the independent variables “success” and “strategic success.”

Controls

The binary logistic regression controls for campaign size, using NAVCO's variables “camp_size” (interval), as smaller campaigns may have less success than larger campaigns. It also controls for the dichotomous variable “nonviolence” in order to determine if nonviolence truly acts as the causal mechanism (Chenoweth & Lewis, 2019). We can reason that if there is no relationship between the dependent and independent variable when controlled for nonviolence compared to when it's not controlled for nonviolence, then nonviolence would be confirmed as the causal mechanism, supporting Chenoweth's theory.

Qualitative Methods

In order to test Chenoweth's theory on nonviolence and protest success for women, I use news coverage of the ongoing Iranian Women's Protest that began in 2022 to compare the elements of the theory with the actual events. These elements include higher levels of participation, elite and political defection, and an expansive repertoire of tactics. This qualitative research does not seek to provide a prediction for the movement's success but rather seeks to understand Chenoweth's argument and determine if it is applicable to a contemporary and well-known case.

In news coverage, journalists have struggled with defining this protest. On one hand, it seems to be a social movement due to the nature of the demands regarding women's rights and bodily autonomy. On the other, many have taken demands for the regime's end as evidence of a maximalist protest. In this research, I define the Iranian Women's Movement as a maximalist

protest that began with social demands. As such, the Iranian Women's Movement should be an adequate representation of Chenoweth's theory on maximalist protests, women, nonviolence, and success.

Furthermore, the Iranian women's movement is overwhelmingly led by women and features women on the frontlines against a durable authoritarian regime. The symbol of the movement is also a woman, Mahsa, or Jina, Amini, the martyr that set off the protest on women's rights in a deeply conservative structure. As such, the presence of women in these roles reflects the independent variables of Chenoweth's dataset and will serve as an effective case study to test the theory of women's nonviolence and movement success.

Analysis

Quantitative

It is necessary to attempt to visualize the relationship between the dependent and independent variables before delving into logistic regression models. The crosstabulation between the extent of women in leadership and success in Fig. 1 thus represents this interaction between variables with a chi-square value of .023. According to the crosstabulation, 35% of movements without women in leadership have been successful. Meanwhile, of the movements that had women in formal leadership, 50.3% were successful. This success rate increased to 57.1% in movements with women as primary campaign leaders. However, only 7 of the 298 movements had women as primary campaign leaders. This small sample size may have an impact on the findings later.

Figure 1. Crosstabulation of extent of women in leadership and success

Extent of Women in Leadership	Success?		Total
	Yes	No	
None	49	91	140
	35%	65%	100%
Women among formal leadership	76	75	151
	50.3%	49.7%	100%
Women primary campaign leaders	4	3	7
	57.1%	42.9%	100%
Total	129	169	298
	43.3%	56.7%	100%

The crosstabulation between the extent of women in leadership and success suggests that there is a tentative relationship between the variables. With a chi-square value of .013, the extent of women in frontline roles has a similar outcome when women are not involved. That is, 81.4% of these movements were unsuccessful. On the other hand, of the movements with women in limited and moderate roles, 47.2% and 44.9% were successful. Since the number of successes is higher than when there were no women, there may be some connection between success and women in frontline roles. Otherwise, there is little distinction between success and failure between limited, moderate, and extensive. Similar to the extent of women in leadership variable, there are very few movements in which an extensive number of women have frontline roles (only 11). This reflects the same problem that emerged in Fig. 1 which may prove difficult later. Furthermore, in Fig. 3 and 4, there appears to be no relationship between women in supporting and symbolic roles and success with, respectively, a chi-square value of .775 and .319. These findings support our hypothesis that women in frontline and leadership roles have more success than movements with women in support and symbolic roles.

Figure 2. Crosstabulation of extent of women in frontline roles and success

Extent of Women in Frontline Roles	Success?		Total
	Yes	No	
None	7 18.4%	31 81.6%	38 100%
Limited	85 47.2%	95 52.8%	180 100%
Moderate	31 44.9%	38 55.1%	69 100%
Extensive	5 45.5%	6 54.5%	11 100%
Total	128 43.3%	170 56.7%	298 100%

Figure 3. Crosstabulation of extent of women in support roles and success

Women in Support Roles	Success?		Total
	Yes	No	
No	16 41%	23 59%	39 100%
Yes	113 43.5%	147 56.5%	260 100%
Total	129 43.1%	170 56.9%	299 100%

Figure 4. Crosstabulation of extent of women in symbolic roles and success

Women in Symbolic Roles	Success?		Total
	Yes	No	
No	51 39.8%	77 60.2%	128 100%
Yes	78 45.6%	93 54.4%	171 100%
Total	129 43.1%	170 56.9%	299 100%

The implications of the crosstabulations call for further analysis of these connections (and lack thereof). Thus, in Fig. 5, four binary logistic regression models were run between success and the four measures of the independent variable without controls. Controls will be added later to determine if nonviolence is the causal mechanism at play. The conclusions drawn from the crosstabulations are evident in these models.

Figure 5. Results of binary logistic regression model, measuring effect of women involvement on movement success without controls

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Model</i>			
	1	2	3	4
Extent of women in leadership				
None	N/A**			
Women among formal leadership	.632***			
Women primary campaign leaders	.907			
Extent of women in frontline roles				
None		N/A**		
Limited		1.377***		
Moderate		1.284***		
Extensive		1.306*		
Women in symbolic roles?			.236	
Women in support roles?				.100

*p < 0.1 **p < 0.05 ***p < 0.01

In Fig. 5, both the extent of women in leadership and the extent of women in frontline roles have a positive, statistically significant effect on success. However, beyond limited amount of women in frontline roles, moderate and extensive amount of women in frontline roles warrants lower chances of success. This could be a result of a smaller number of cases in the moderate and extensive categories. Furthermore, there is a statistically significant, increasing effect on success between no women in leadership and women among formal leadership. The same relationship is apparent between no women in frontline roles, women in limited frontline

roles, and women in moderate roles. However, there is no statistically significant increase in effect on success between women among formal leadership and women as primary campaign leaders. The same can be said between moderate and extensive number of women in frontline roles. This is likely a result of the small number of cases available for these two categories. Furthermore, women in symbolic and support roles have no effect on a movement’s success. Overall, this first regression supports the argument to an extent, as women in leadership roles have a positive, statistically significant effect on success while women in symbolic and support roles have no impact on success. With this in mind, it is necessary to do a robustness check by employing a different measure of success.

Figure 6. Results of binary logistic regression model, measuring effect of women involvement on movement strategic success without controls

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Model</i>			
	1	2	3	4
<i>Extent of women in leadership</i>				
None	N/A			
Women among formal leadership	.282			
Women primary campaign leaders	.316			
<i>Extent of women in frontline roles</i>				
None		N/A***		
Limited		.852***		
Moderate		.577***		
Extensive		-.112		
Women in symbolic roles?			.090	
Women in support roles?				.190

*p < 0.1 **p < 0.05 ***p < 0.01

There are similar findings for women in frontline roles for strategic success as seen in Fig. 6. Similar to Fig. 5, beyond a limited amount of women in frontline roles, there is a smaller impact on success for women in moderate and extensive role. Again, this could be a result of the

smaller sample size. Women in symbolic and support roles have no significant effect on strategic success. Also, strangely, the extent of women in leadership appears to have no effect on strategic success even without controls. This may be a result of the inconsistent coding in the original variable or a result of a higher threshold for success. Both regressions support the hypothesis that women in frontline roles have a positive effect on success and strategic success while women in symbolic and support roles do not. Next, it is necessary to implement the controls to determine if nonviolence plays a role as a causal mechanism in this relationship.

Figure 7. Results of binary logistic regression model, measuring effect of women involvement on movement success

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Model</i>			
	1	2	3	4
Extent of women in leadership				
None	N/A*			
Women among formal leadership	.611**			
Women primary campaign leaders	.366			
Extent of women in frontline roles				
None		N/A		
Limited		.650		
Moderate		.426		
Extensive		.059		
Women in symbolic roles?			-.027	
Women in support roles?				-.122
Campaign size				
1-999	N/A*	N/A	N/A	N/A
1,000-9,999	-.454	.889	.684	.694
10,000-99,999	-.796*	.544	.353	.364
100,000-499,999	-.214	1.092*	.904	.920
500,000-1 million	-1.495	.095	-.193	-.208
> 1 million	-.117	1.325*	1.096	1.083
Nonviolent campaign?	1.215***	1.088***	1.147***	1.145***

*p < 0.1 **p < 0.05 ***p < 0.01

As seen in Fig. 7, nonviolence has a strong, positive correlation with success in all models. Meanwhile, there is no statistical significance for extent of women in leadership roles or frontline roles. It can be assumed that this is a result of nonviolence, and women in frontline roles and leadership roles implement nonviolence which allows them to have an effect on success. As such, nonviolence acts as the causal mechanism in this case.

Figure 8. Results of binary logistic regression model, measuring effect of women involvement on movement strategic success

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Model</i>			
	1	2	3	4
Extent of women in leadership				
None	N/A			
Women among formal leadership	-.124			
Women primary campaign leaders	-.103			
Extent of women in frontline roles				
None		N/A		
Limited		.852*		
Moderate		.577		
Extensive		-.112		
Women in symbolic roles?			-.171	
Women in support roles?				.095
Campaign size				
1-999	-N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
1,000-9,999	-.117	.027	-.098	-.058
10,000-99,999	-.846*	-.659	-.752	-.718
100,000-499,999	-.114	.085	-.010	.016
500,000-1 million	-1.578	-1.224	-1.394	-1.422
> 1 million	-.044	.251	.117	.102
Nonviolent campaign?	1.054***	.934***	1.038***	1.015***

*p < 0.1 **p < 0.05 ***p < 0.01

Another set of binary logistic regressions employ strategic success as the dependent variable as depicted in Fig. 8, and the result is the same as Fig. 7. Nonviolence still had a positive correlation with this measure of success, warranting the same assumptions as the previous models. Nonviolence, again, appears to be the causal mechanism given its statistical significance, taken from the independent variables.

Overall, there are numerous conclusions that can be drawn from this quantitative analysis. Firstly, women in formal leadership tend to have a significant positive effect on movement success, and movements with no women in leadership are more susceptible to failure. This relationship culminates as a result of women's use of nonviolence. In terms of women as primary campaign leaders, more movement data is needed in order to understand the relationship between this category and success. Secondly, a limited amount of women in frontline roles also has a positive effect on success and strategic success as a result of nonviolence. A lack of data on the moderate and extensive categorization in frontline roles may warrant future research on these effects. Thirdly, women in symbolic roles and support roles did not affect movement success in any scenario. Overall, these findings appear to support the hypothesis that women in frontline and leadership roles have a positive effect on success as compared to no women or women in symbolic or support roles. This relationship also appears to be a direct result of employing nonviolence in campaign strategy.

Qualitative Analysis

Understanding that women in leadership and frontline roles coupled with nonviolence leads to greater chances of maximalist movement success, it is necessary to understand how that relationship works. Erica Chenoweth's theory, discussed in depth earlier, provides the three explanations for this relationship. These explanations, as discussed prior, include higher levels of

participation, elite and political defection, and an expanded repertoire of tactics. This section will discuss the ongoing Iranian women's movement in the context of these three explanations to test Chenoweth's theory, using news coverage of the events as evidence.

To begin, it is necessary to provide the context of the Iranian women's movement. On September 13, 2022, Mahsa (or Jina, her Kurdish name) Amini was arrested by the morality police in Tehran, a policing organization created to enforce Islamic law. Bystanders recalled seeing the morality police physically beat her inside the police van, and later, she fell into a coma. She died while being hospitalized, and Iranian police reported she had died as a result of heart failure. However, family, friends, and witnesses asserted that her death was a result of her mistreatment at the hands of the morality police ("Mahsa Amini," 2022).

Amini's story was brought to light by Niloofar Hamed, an Iranian journalist. She posted an image online of Amini's parents, crying in the hospital where she passed. Hamed shared Amini's story, reaching Iranians who quickly began to organize into mass protest with women at the front. Hamed was subsequently arrested for her article (MacDonald, 2022). The protests were primarily led by women, challenging the Islamic Republic for its excessive enforcement of headscarves and Islamic law. The diaspora also got involved, calling for support abroad. According to McGrath (2022), Amini's identity as a Kurdish woman galvanized the country. The Kurdish population's history with contentious politics culminated in a unique experience that prepared them for further movements. Furthermore, while Iranian women saw themselves in Amini, Iranian men saw their "mothers, sisters, and their daughters" and thus, were inspired to fight for their lives (McGrath, 2022). This call for social justice quickly erupted into calls for the end of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's hardliner rule.

These protests have faced severe crackdown. As of February 2023, 500 protesters were killed and 20,000 arrested (“Overnight protests rock Tehran,” 2023). The Iranian government has offered concessions, but they have been symbolic for the most part. At this point in time, there does not appear to be an end in sight for the Iranian women's movement.

With this context in mind, it is possible to analyze Chenoweth's theory in the context of the Iranian women's movement. Chenoweth's first explanation is higher levels of participation. They reason that women in leadership and frontline roles will result in higher levels of support and thus, increase the movement size. As discussed by McGrath (2022), the martyrdom of Mahsa Amini gave groups other than women the incentive to protect the women they know, especially those with existing grievances. Furthermore, the use of violence against women also galvanized Iranians and the global community into acting (Hubbard & Fassihi, 2022).

Maximalist calls emerged from other aggrieved groups, including teachers and those impacted by water shortages during the summer prior (Takeyh, 2022). The culmination of these grievances (among others) effectively increased participation in the movement. Men, as discussed previously, also joined the movement due to their personal connections with women (McGrath, 2022; Seerhan, 2022).

The Iranian women's movement also gained significant support from prominent societal figures (Engelbrecht & Longman, 2022). Significantly, during the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, the Iranian men's soccer team actively expressed their support for the movement and discontent with the Iranian government. The players refused to sing along to the Iranian anthem and to celebrate their goals. Similarly, Iranian soccer fans adopted a more vocal approach, singing the prerevolutionary anthem, carrying prerevolutionary flags, and holding signs that said “Women! Life! Freedom!” (Engelbrecht & Longman, 2022). Other societal figures involved in

the protests are the actresses Hengameh Ghaziani, Katayoun Riahi, and Taraneh Alidoosti; rapper Toomaj Salehi; director Asghar Farhadi; athletes Elnaz Rekabi and Saeed Piramoon; an Iranian chess player; and several journalists. Many of these prominent figures have since been arrested for their role in the protests. The participation of these high-profile individuals has drawn greater attention to the protests and demonstrates the extensive nature of the movement.

The Iranian government has also faced intense condemnation for their actions against the movement. Human rights groups and Iranian clerical establishments “who questioned the religious validity of the death sentences” against protesters are just two examples of this coordinated effort to name and shame the Iranian government's abuses (Fassihi, 2022b). Iranian businesses have also condemned the government by going on strike and closing down their shops for extended periods of time (Fassihi, 2022a). The United Nations (UN) has also gotten involved, as the UN Commission on the Status of Women removed Iran from its seat (Kianpour, 2023). Furthermore, as a result of calls from Germany, Iceland, and UN human rights chief Volker Türk, the UN Human Rights Council has also launched an investigation into Iran's regime-sponsored violence against the movement (Robinson, 2022; “UN rights body launches,” 2022). The US has also taken more bilateral action, imposing sanctions on the Iranian morality police (Yee & Fassihi, 2022). While more symbolic than substantive, this sort of action demonstrates an attempt by the international community to push norms of gender equality and shame repressive behavior. As such, the Iranian women's movement satisfies Chenoweth's explanation of higher levels of participation, supporting the hypothesis.

Elite and political defection, Chenoweth's second explanation, is less evident in the Iranian Women's Movement. There has not been any outward profession of support from any regime insiders. Some in the government have loosened their perspective on compulsory hijabs,

however. In one Politico article, Suzanne Kianpour published excerpts from an interview she had with an anonymous source that is close to the Supreme Leader of Iran. In this interview, the source revealed that some authorities were willing to make the hijab optional in order to calm the protests. He reasoned that “women would be more likely to feel compelled to wear it, because ‘the Iranian woman is Najeeb (pure and virginal)’” (Kianpour, 2023). However, when Kianpour followed up with this source in later months, she found that he had grown aggressive towards the protests, blaming them for ISIS's attack in Shiraz in October (Kianpour, 2023). Sympathies, then, are elusive; while the presence of women elicits some support from upper levels, threats to regime stability from outside sources like ISIS make it difficult to take advantage of this limited support.

Other sources have detailed the lack of defection apparent in these protests. Even in the face of sanctions from the US, the Iranian government has remained durable. Instead, such sanctions have negatively impacted the Iranian population more than the government itself, hindering the protests more than helping. One Iranian woman called on the US government to bring an end to the sanctions, citing their “devastating long-term effects” leading to “generational trauma [and] increased gender violence” (Farzan, 2022). US President Joe Biden has since relaxed sanctions against the Iranian government.

The regime remains adamant on their position against the Iranian Women's Movement, and a major reason for this lies within the state's Revolutionary Guards. This group was created with the intention of preventing coups and revolutions in order to preserve the theocracy that emerged from the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The Revolutionary Guard has been active during the Iranian women's protests. According to the New York Times, this group is unlikely to defect, as “they have become so deeply woven into Iran's economy and power structure that they have

everything to lose if the system fails” (Hubbard & Fassihi, 2022). For example, a senior commander of the Revolutionary Guard, Mohammad Baqer Ghalibaf, serves as speaker of the Parliament, so he is not only a member of the militant Guard but also a major player in Iranian politics. They also have tight connections with various economic sectors in the region.

Furthermore, while there have been reports of reluctance to fight against women, the Revolutionary Guard has remained resilient against the movement, recognizing the protests as a threat to their own well-being. They have been told that losing to the movement will result in the institution of a new regime, one that would be unforgiving of their ties to the former regime and their corrupt actions (Hubbard & Fassihi, 2022). As such, military defection – along with political and elite defection – is also unlikely due to the entrenched nature of the military.

Despite this lack of clear defection, the protests have gained some sympathies to an extent. While hijab laws remain, there is less enforcement in certain areas of Iran (especially Tehran), marking some concessions in this fight (Sadjadpour, 2022). As such, while nothing has changed in law, there is lessened policing of hijabs, and some defection and sympathy remains possible. However, this is unlikely to turn to defections in support of maximalist demands; it may remain purely social in nature. The Iranian Women's Movement then does not entirely fit the requirements laid out by Chenoweth's theory; as such, it may not lead to success.

Chenoweth's final explanation is an expanded repertoire of tactics. As discussed prior, women have different repertoires due to the lack of access afforded to them in politics and other avenues; as such, women are required to adopt a distinct set of tactics apart from politics that tend to reflect their societal roles. These repertoires have their own unique advantages to them that are not necessarily achievable through law, giving them an edge in protest. Zoe Marks, an expert of nonviolent movements from Harvard University, remarked that there is “more tactical

creativity, there are more ties to society because women have all of these social relationships and resources that are slightly different than men's social and professional relationships and resources" (Seerhan, 2022). As such, in the Iranian women's movement where women have fewer avenues for political success, they should profess a more expansive repertoire of non-political tactics.

Women's roles in politics in Iran are extremely limited. Women can have positions in government, but they always make up a minority; in fact, women in Iran currently only make up 5.6% of the legislature with only 16 out of 286 legislators being women (IPU Parline, 2023). Iranian supreme leaders and presidential candidates are also always men, making for a lack of descriptive representation. To make matters worse, the Iranian government is dominated by "hard-liners," conservatives whose views go against the goals of the protests (Robinson, 2022). Many of these hard-liners have gone as far as to label the protests as "a foreign plot," lessening their legitimacy in the eyes of the conservative regime (Seerhan, 2022). Furthermore, there is intense gender inequality in Iran's employment with women's unemployment rates being twice as high as men's; this is a result of the lack of access to certain jobs for women (Robinson, 2022). The government has also limited access to expression through grassroots organizations as well, as they weakened such groups following the 2009 uprising (Tabrizy & Willis, 2022). Evidently, the Iranian government has been quite strategic in suppressing expression of grievances; however, this has not hindered Iranian women's efforts to find other avenues for change.

One method that women have employed in the face of repression is civil disobedience ("Overnight protests rock Tehran," 2023). Demonstrations have taken place in multiple areas in Iran, and women remove their hijabs as they go about their daily business. Furthermore, these

tactics have also included hair-cutting, headscarf burning, boycotts, mourning ceremonies, and strikes. The hair-cutting practice is particularly symbolic, as it is a “cultural practice with ties to mourning and protests against injustice” (Seerhan, 2022). Such nonviolent means have been successful at garnering international support and creating impressive optics for the movement itself. This support has further culminated in response to the antithetical violence of the regime's crackdown, with the Iranian police employing tear gas, beating protestors with batons, and pelting them with “pellets, paint and live bullets” (Fassihi & Engelbrecht, 2022). The brutal repression of the civil disobedience efforts has garnered significant international attention and efforts to name and shame the Iranian regime.

The strikes have also signified a fruitful avenue for success by targeting Iran's economy. In December, many Iranian businesses closed during strikes across more than 50 cities in Iran, emerging as “the largest general strikes in decades” and demanding an end to the regime (Fassihi, 2022a). This came after some businesses were targeted by the regime for their support of the movement, including soccer player Ali Daei's restaurant and jewelry shop and a much-trafficked pharmacy in Shiraz (Fassihi, 2022a). This sort of action has the potential to cripple the Iranian economy, creating stress for the regime. Furthermore, it is reminiscent of the successful tactics used during the 1979 revolution (Sadjapour, 2022). Despite this, maximalist demands have not been fulfilled.

This contentious repertoire has also included attacks on symbols of the regime. In some places, protestors have set fire to municipal buildings and government complexes and have defaced and removed portraits and images of the supreme leader and the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (Tabrizy & Willis, 2022). While symbolic, it demonstrates the desire for maximalist change and the extent that the movement is willing to go

without employing violence. Overall, Chenoweth's explanation of strategic repertoires is adequately fulfilled by the Iranian Women's Movement.

In total, the Iranian Women's Movement fulfills two of the three mechanisms attributed to success, nonviolence, and women. It is difficult, then, to ascertain whether the movement will be successful or not, given that it has not resulted in elite or political defection. This research is not equipped to make predictions regarding the movement's success, but with this information in mind, we can discuss the possibility of both. In terms of success, the Iranian Women's Movement has achieved some concessions. For example, women have increasingly opted to choose whether they should wear hijabs. While some women continue to wear the hijab as usual, others have opted to loosen it or disregard it entirely. Despite the hijab law still being in place, in more urban areas like Tehran, there has been a lack of police response, and women have been able to choose freely (Sadjadpour, 2022; Seerhan, 2022). The regime has also discussed possibly reconsidering the law, and there were reports (although later proven false) of the morality police being abolished (Yee & Fassihi, 2022). While the hijab law is still enforced heavily in more conservative areas and the morality police retains prominence, the increasing laxation on the hijab law can be considered a concession.

Another sign of the movement's success is its durability. The movement has experienced intense brutality as a government response. Between the violence and the execution of Majid Reza Rahanavard, Mohsen Shekari, and 11 other protestors without a proper trial, it would be easy to assume that the protests would become discouraged and scared to move forward. However, this violence galvanized the movement, with protestors immediately protesting in the neighborhoods of the two men killed (Fassihi, 2022b). Similarly, in Shiraz, two gunmen killed 15 people at the Shah Cheragh Mosque, and ISIS took responsibility for the attack (Fassihi &

Englebrecht, 2022). The government then proceeded to blame the movement for the attack, discouraging maximalist demands by stating that “[T]he alternative is ISIS” (Kianpour, 2023). Despite these attacks, the movement has remained resilient. The only threat to this movement's longevity appears to be the lack of a central leader. However, the movement continues to sustain itself, for they are sure to respond to further instances of women being punished for wearing a hijab improperly. According to Suzanne Maloney of the Brookings Institutions, “[T]he security forces will have to decide to arrest and potentially abuse one of those women, precipitating yet another round of protests, precipitating yet another potential situation of martyrdom, which itself creates a self-sustaining momentum to the gatherings and demonstrations” (Robinson, 2022). As such, the protest should be able to maintain itself in the face of repression.

For every inch of progress, the Iranian Women's Movement has been met with equal resistance from the Iranian government. As such, the movement may just as likely fail to meet at least some of its goals. One reason for this is a lack of international coordination among the diaspora and foreign response. While there have been bilateral sanctions and symbolic gestures by the UN, there has been an insufficient response to the Women's Movement on a global scale. Particularly, in comparison to the response to the invasion of Ukraine, the foreign governments have struggled to pursue a unified effort. Furthermore, a boomerang effect has not occurred due to the lack of grassroots organizations in Iran and a lack of coordination among the diasporas. Some exiled Iranian dissident figures have attempted to come together to formulate a solution on a global scale, but they do not expect to have a set of unifying goals until the end of 2023 (“Iran exiled opposition,” 2023). The movement could easily be suppressed by the end of the year, so such optimism may be difficult to see come to fruition. Overall, while there is coordinated action within Iran, on an international scale, little has been done.

The presence of ISIS also poses a threat to the movement. Not only does ISIS pose a consistent threat of militarism against women who do not properly wear their hijab, they also drive Iranian government decision-making. The Iranian government had begun to consider some type of reform (supposedly) before October 2022. However, the attack on the Shah Cheragh Mosque prompted a more “aggressive” response to the protests, blaming the movement and opting to repress it in order to prevent further attacks by ISIS (Kianpour, 2023). The government has also begun to frame the movement as a result of foreign interference, further delegitimizing it (Seerhan, 2022). These efforts to destabilize the movement through framing are more symbolic than anything but could easily lessen the chances of political and elite defection within the government itself.

Furthermore, while there have been some successes, none of them have been maximalist. This is likely a direct result of the lack of political and elite defection. This demonstrates the final barrier to success of the Iranian's Women Movement: the durability of the authoritarian regime. This durability directly rivals Chenoweth's theory by preventing success even with the lack of violence and presence of women in a movement. One explanation for this is that authoritarian regimes are simply becoming harder to overthrow. Max Fisher (2022) argues authoritarian durability is a result of an increasingly sophisticated repertoire of anti-revolutionary tactics (what Chenoweth dubs “digital authoritarianism”). As such, Fisher (2022) asserts that nonviolent movements are becoming far less effective.

Another explanation rests on the idea that authoritarian regimes born from violent conflict are more lasting. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2012) assert that authoritarian regimes retain stability by creating “identities, norms, and organizational structures” during periods of “sustained, violent, and ideologically driven conflict,” providing a “critical source of

cohesion” (p. 870). The current Iranian government – born of the brutal 1979 revolution – perfectly fits this idea, as it is based on conservative, Islamic ideology that was promoted during the course of the overthrow of the previous monarchy. They then maintain this regime over time through “patronage distribution,” “strong identities, solidarity ties, and discipline generated by violent origins,” resulting in greater durability (Levitsky & Way, 2012, p. 870). The current Iranian government fits this conception, and this is evident in the lack of political and elite defection despite the Iranian Women's Movement being nonviolent. As such, both Chenoweth's theory and Levitsky and Way's theory seem to be at play in this case study.

News coverage of the event has also documented the durability of the authoritarian regime. The source that Kianpour (2023) interviewed, for example, stated that “this generation is not like that of 1979.” That is, the current regime is unlikely to fall as the Shah of 1979 did. This is also apparent in the creation of the Revolutionary Guard after the 1979 revolution (Hubbard & Fassihi, 2022). Due to the violent origins of the current Iranian regime, it is not surprising that they have prepared for this sort of uprising far beforehand and are comfortable with addressing it head-on. While Western news outlets continue to profess optimistic hopes for the Iranian movement, the durability of the regime has made it difficult for actual change to occur.

Conclusions

Overall, this research supports the hypothesis that maximalist movements with women in frontline and leadership roles are more likely to be successful than those with no women involved, women with limited roles, and women in supporting or symbolic roles. This is supported quantitatively through binary logistic regressions. This quantitative research also determined that nonviolence acts as a causal mechanism. Furthermore, Chenoweth's theory

demonstrates how the Iranian Women's Movement managed to concessions by connecting women, nonviolence, and maximalist success.

There are certain weaknesses associated with this research, however. For the quantitative section, the lack of movements with an extensive number of women in frontline roles and movements with women as primary campaign leaders makes it difficult to ascertain whether there is comparable growth in success rates. Furthermore, the Iranian Women's Movement has failed to gain maximalist concessions, only social ones. As such, the movement's successes are not as closely associated to the hypothesis as would be expected. Future research should seek a case with women's clear maximalist successes. Furthermore, this research may be more nuanced, as there may be more maximalist protests led by women as time goes on.

In conclusion, this research supports the hypothesis. This is important, as it adds to the existing literature on protest success, using two measures of success to ensure robustness. The analysis of the Iranian Women's Movement provides a contemporary perspective to Chenoweth's theory and Levitsky and Way's theory, making implications about nonviolence and success against durable authoritarian regimes.

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