Summary Report of the
Religion and Nonviolent Action (RNVA) Dataset 1.0, 1945 – 2013

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Dataset Overview

The Religion and Nonviolent Action (RNVA) dataset was developed as a cross-team collaboration between the religion and inclusive societies and nonviolent action programs at the U.S. Institute of Peace. The RNVA dataset version 1.0 is compatible with version 2.1 of the Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) dataset. It focuses on campaigns whose primary type of resistance method was nonviolence from 1945 to 2013.

The RNVA dataset includes information on 183 distinct campaigns between 1945 and 2013, including the religious dimensions (i.e., ideas, actors, institutions, and symbols) for 102 campaigns. These data are suitable for analyzing the prevalence, dynamics, causes, and outcomes of nonviolent action campaigns that draw on religion. The RNVA dataset and codebook are available for download via the Harvard Dataverse (https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/FKVA0G).

In what follows, we discuss the general distribution of religious dimensions captured in the RNVA dataset. This includes information on the number of campaigns to draw on religion and the types of religious dimensions most present in campaigns. We also report on variation in the geographic location and timing of religious and non-religious nonviolent campaigns, as well as compare the success rates of these two types of campaigns. These descriptive statistics shed light on previously overlooked patterns; and, we hope this information inspire future research into the role of religion in nonviolent action campaigns.

Frequency of Religious Dimensions in Nonviolent Action

How often do nonviolent action campaigns draw on religion? Are a majority or minority of such campaigns characterized by religious dimensions? Figure 1 presents the overall distribution of nonviolent campaigns for major political change between 1945 and 2013 by type (i.e., non-religious, religious). More than half of these campaigns (55.7%), or 102 in total, drew on at least one of the four religious dimensions (i.e., ideas, actor, institutions, symbols) coded in the RNVA dataset.

Figure 1: Nonviolent Campaigns by Type

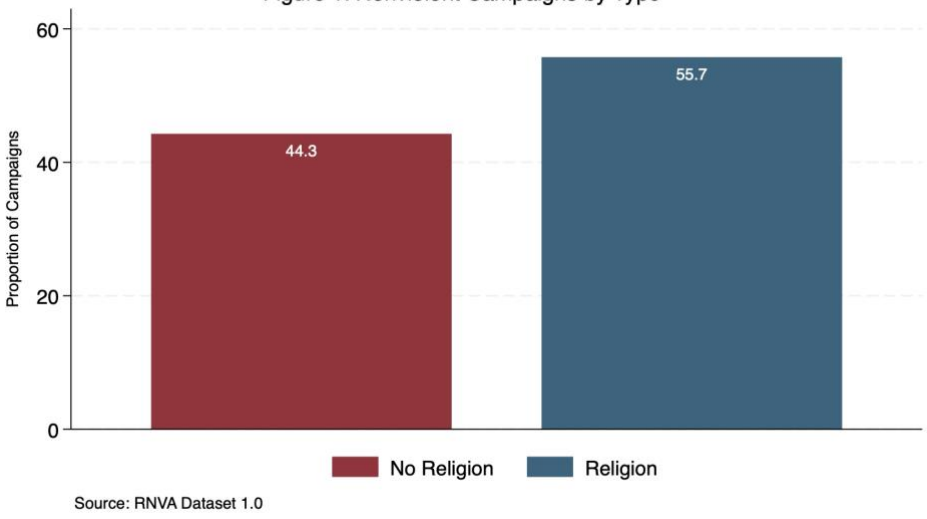
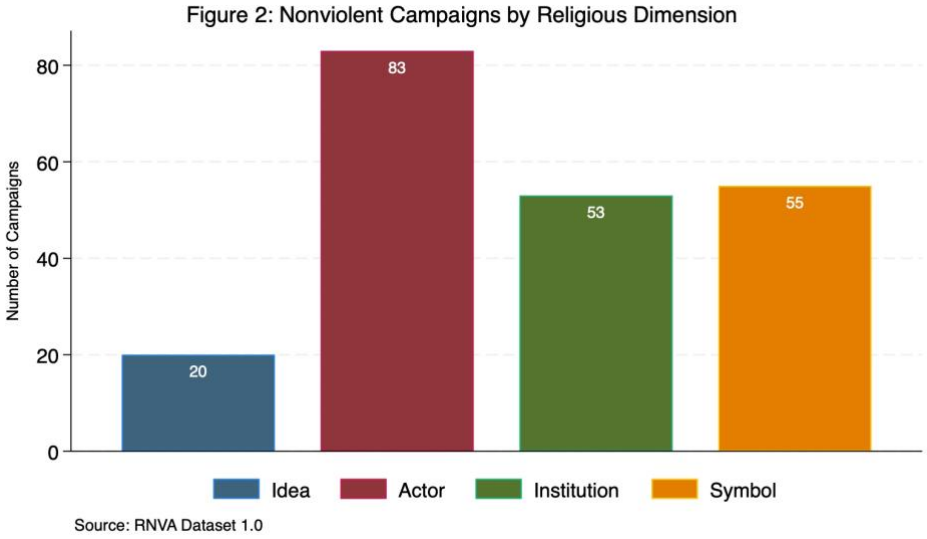


Figure 2 shows the total number of nonviolent campaigns in the RNVA dataset disaggregated by religious dimension. These are not mutually exclusive categories, so campaigns may exhibit more than one dimension. Accordingly, we report the total number of campaigns for which each religious dimension was coded.

Religious actor is the dimension most present in nonviolent campaigns (83 campaigns in total). Religious institution and symbol are the second most prevalent dimensions, with 53 and 55 campaigns exhibiting these dimensions, respectively. Religious idea is the least preset dimension coded; twenty campaigns were characterized by this dimension.



Location of Nonviolent Action Campaigns with Religious Dimensions

We now turn to the question of where nonviolent action campaigns with religious dimensions are most likely to occur. Figure 3 displays the number of religious campaigns in each of six global regions (i.e., Asia, Latin America & the Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and Oceania). The coding of these global regions adheres to conventions utilized by the Statistics Division of the United Nations Secretariat. The largest number of religious nonviolent campaigns occurred in Asia and Sub-Saharan African between 1945 and 2013, with roughly half of religious nonviolent campaigns occurring in one of those two regions.

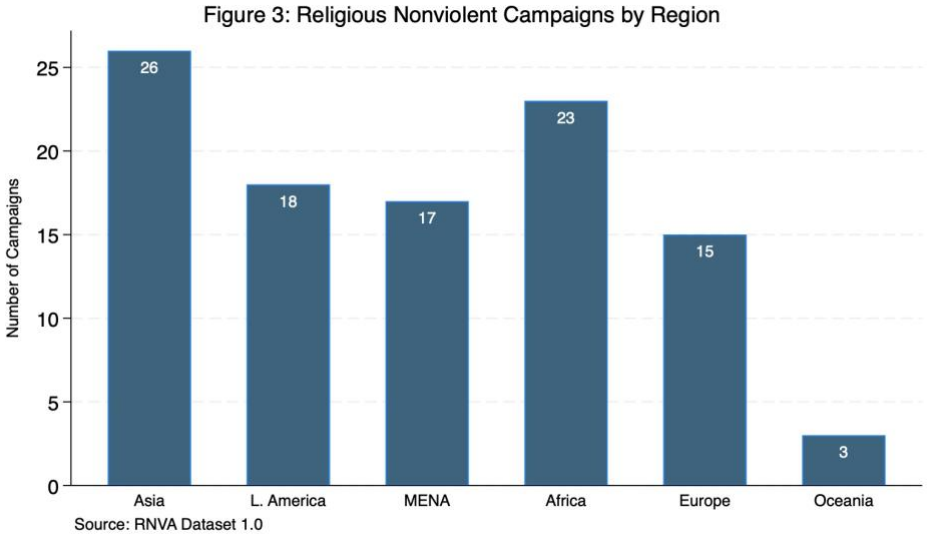
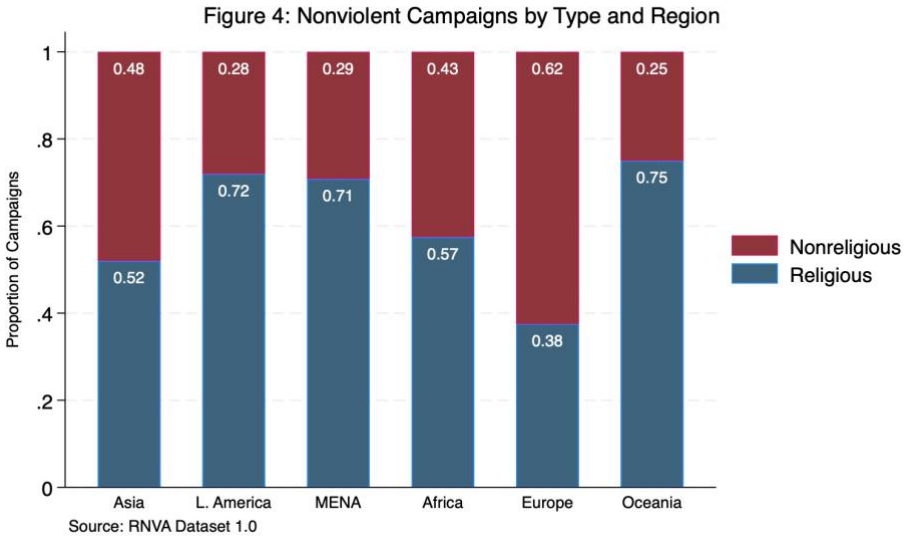


Figure 4 presents the proportion of non-religious and religious campaigns in each of the six geographical regions. This comparison highlights two patterns of particular note. First, nonviolent campaigns generally occur more frequently in Asia and Sub-Saharan African compared to other regions. In total, 90 of the 183 campaigns in the RNVA dataset took place in those regions with 52% of campaigns in Asia and 57% of campaigns in Sub-Saharan Africa drawing on religion. Second, religious campaigns occurred disproportionally more often in three other global regions. Roughly three-quarter of nonviolent campaigns in Latin America, the MENA region, and Oceania drew on religion in some way. Religious nonviolent campaigns account for the fewest number of movements in Europe, where just over one third of campaigns drew on religion.



Timing of Nonviolent Action Campaigns with Religious Dimensions

Next we consider variation in the initiation of nonviolent action campaigns. Figure 5 shows the number of religious campaigns that started in each decade between 1945 and 2013. As the RNVA dataset codes for when religious dimensions are observed at any point of a nonviolent action campaign, these data do not necessarily indicate the first use of religion. The 1980s and 2000s witnessed the start of the largest number of nonviolent campaigns that drew on religion at some point in their existence with just over half of all religious nonviolent campaigns initiating during those two decades. An interactive map displaying the location of religious campaigns included in the RNVA dataset, as well as details on the religious dimensions of each campagin, can be found on USIP's Religion and Nonviolent Action program page (https://www.usip.org/programs/religion-and-nonviolent-action).

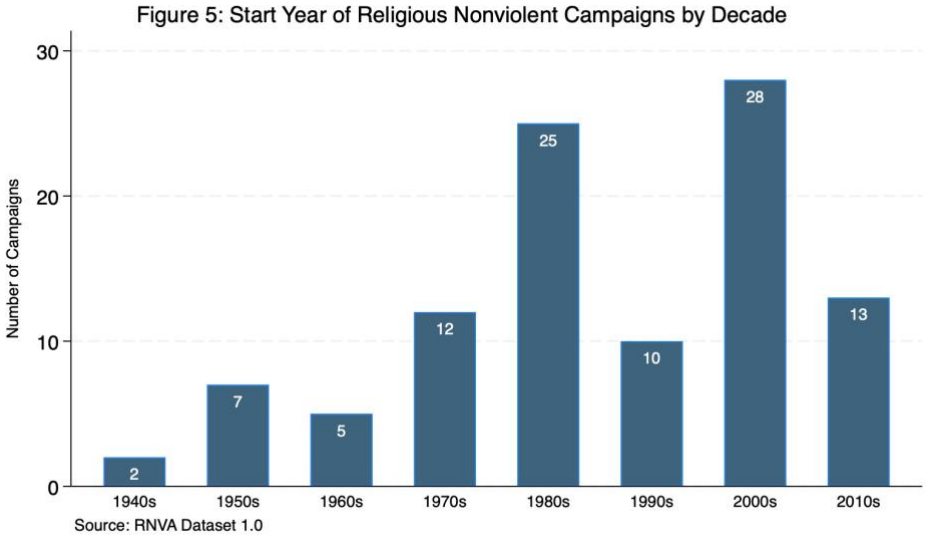
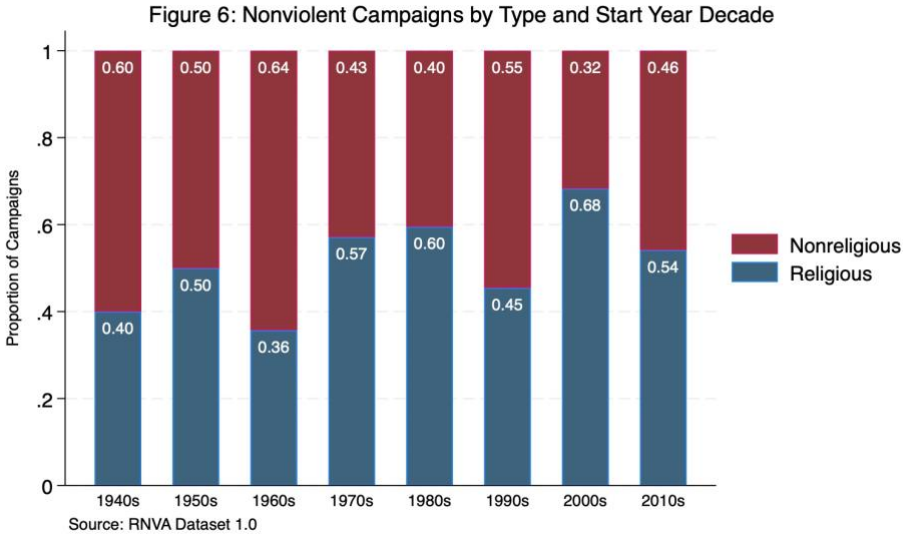
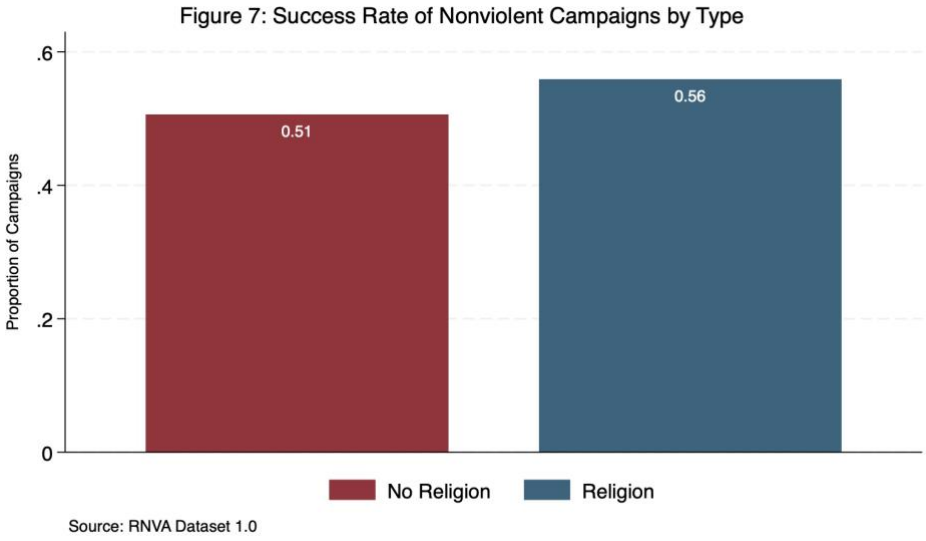


Figure 6 presents the proportion of non-religious and religious campaigns in each of the eight decades covered in the RNVA dataset. In general, the 1980s and 2000s saw the initiation of the greatest number of nonviolent campaigns (a total of 42 and 41 campaigns, respectively), with religious campaigns accounting for some three fifths of campaigns in each decade. Nonviolent campaigns that drew on religion also accounted for more than half of campaigns started in the 1970s and 2010s. The 1960s witnessed the start of the fewest number of nonviolent actions campaigns to draw on religion.



Outcome of Nonviolent Action Campaigns with Religious Dimensions

Finally, we compare the success rate of religious and non-religious nonviolent campaigns. As can be seen in Figure 7, nonviolent campaigns that drew on religion were proportionally more likely to achieve success. Out of 102 religious nonviolent campaigns, 57, or around 56%, achieved their goals for major political change. Just over half of nonviolent campaigns that did not draw on religion, or 41 of the 81 in total, were successful. However, this difference in proportion between religious and non-religious campaigns is not statistically significant.