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Chapter 3

The Outcomes of Political Violence: Ethical, Theoretical and Methodological Challenges

Lorenzo Bosi and Marco Giugni

In 2009, a young Italian Muslim woman recalled her experiences at school, stating:

There was never enough discussion in class about intercultural issues, but after 9/11 many controversies about what was happening started to emerge. So also in our class you could see that people were starting to talk about what foreigners do, about what they come to do here, and about what Islam really is. From that moment on, many schools have started to work on intercultural issues. (Bosi and della Porta 2010: 18)

The Italian educational system has been often criticized for the absence of intercultural approaches and its strong Catholic biases against other religions (Queirolo Palmas 2006). Paradoxically, this seems to have improved after the events of September 11. As the quote shows, a young generation of Muslims in Italy, while explicitly condemning political violence and terrorism, felt somehow “empowered” by 9/11 because it gave an explicit sign that they should be counted and listened to. This was one, unanticipated consequence of political violence.

Whether unanticipated, threatened, or actual, political violence is a particular confrontational repertoire aimed at inflicting material damage to individuals and/or property with the purpose of influencing audiences for political purposes.¹ While violence is not an intrinsic feature of contentious politics (McAdam et al. 2001), neither is it rare—particularly in today’s world. Contentious politics can include different forms of violence such as rioting, attacks on property, sabotage, squatting, bombing buildings, bodily assaults, kidnapping, public self-immolation, hunger strikes, murders, suicide attacks, to mention only a few. These radical forms of contentious politics may be called either terrorism or resistance, “depending on the circumstances and who is doing the naming” (Steinbock and Zwerman 2008: 213). Also, violence is culture-dependent in that what is violent for one society can be perceived as an accepted, non-violent tactic in another, or in another historical period. Also, technological change can challenge the definition of violence. So-called “hactivism” strategically damages or attacks virtual property

¹ We acknowledge the importance of state or state-sponsored violence as an object of research, but this chapter focuses mainly on non-state actors as perpetrators of violence.

(e.g., hacking, defacing web pages, email floods, viruses and worms, and data theft or destruction). Although it does not inflict material destruction characteristic of older forms of protest violence, it is still perceived as violent action (Jordan 2002). Thus, when we deal with political violence, much depends on how it is perceived, received and, eventually, how much reaction it invites. It is obviously context dependent.

In this chapter we focus specifically on the outcomes of political violence, especially violence committed by armed groups. The literature on political violence and terrorism has grown massively since 9/11, but has so far been mostly silent about outcomes (Abrahms 2006, 2008; Crenshaw 1983; Gurr 1988). This is even more striking if we consider that the very purpose of the vast majority of tactical political violence is precisely to elicit reactions from the state. Although states and state agents are the most common targets of armed groups, there are other targets, such as private enterprises and corporations, as in the case of the Red Brigades (della Porta 1995) or the Animal Liberation Front (Lutz and Lutz 2006). Sometimes political violence may even express its concerns indirectly, by targeting one institution but aiming to affect another—what social movement scholars call “a proxy target” (Walker et al. 2008). Tourism, which has suffered in different armed conflicts from attacks by armed groups that were indirectly targeting this sector in order to influence state policies, is a clear example of that (Drakos and Kutun 2003). Whether political violence has an impact or not is important for governments and the general public, but also for the analysts of political violence as its impact is critical to understanding its emergence, uses and spread both across time and across places. Ethical issues and disagreement on how we can measure political violence outcomes at the methodological level seem to have hindered systematic investigation and theoretical developments in this important research area. Our intention in this chapter is to stimulate further work on the outcomes of political violence.²

First, we focus on the range of potential outcomes associated with political violence. Second, we briefly review the difficulties of research on the outcomes of political violence. Third, we compare non-violent and violent action, from the less extreme to the more extreme, and ask which is more likely to be successful and under which conditions. We conclude by underlining some avenues for further research and how research on political violence contributes as well to the social movement literature, particularly by enriching the relatively scant attention it has paid to violent forms of political action. Throughout, we draw on empirical examples obtained from the literature on contentious politics.

² Throughout, we use the terms “outcomes,” “effects,” “impacts” and “consequences” interchangeably.

Political Violence and its Possible Domains of Impact

Drawing on the social movement literature (Bosi and Uba 2009; Giugni 2008),³ we point to two main distinctions to establish a typology of the possible outcomes of political violence. On one hand, we can distinguish between the political, cultural and biographical impacts of political violence. On the other hand, we distinguish between internal and external impacts, depending on whether they occur inside the armed groups or affect the external environment. If we combine these two dimensions, we obtain a typology that includes six main domains the effects of which are possible.

Table 3.1 A typology of the outcomes of political violence

Outcome dimensions	Internal	External
Political	Power relations within armed group	Policy, procedural, institutional
Cultural	Value change within armed group	Public opinion and attitudes
Biographical	Life-course patterns of militants	Life-course patterns of violence targets

An example of an internal political outcome is a change in the power relations within the armed group. Armed groups are not static actors possessing a single, fixed program and strategy to advance their armed campaigns. The dynamic of internal power relations may induce competition among members of the same armed group. Competition for influence over the support base and the sectors of public opinion that the armed group wishes to influence is an ongoing process. Certain factions may disengage or deradicalize (Horgan 2008; White 2010; Bosi and della Porta, forthcoming), leaving the armed group in the hands of other cohorts and leading to changes in the group’s trajectory because of modifications in the group’s composition. Such changes can lead to either radicalization of action repertoires or to moderation, as when militant groups institutionalize into political parties. The case of the armed group *Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19)*, in Columbia, is a good example of this. In 1990 it reorganized itself in the *Alianza Democratica* and contested its first parliamentary elections. Internal splits, however, usually lead to further radicalization, as was the case of the IRA in Northern Ireland during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Subsequently, the Provisional IRA (PIRA) and the Official IRA battled for the support of the broader republican constituency, their competition leading to further radicalization. Once the radicalization process

³ For more on what has been done regarding social movements outcomes as well as on who is working in the field today, see <http://www2.statsvet.uu.se/moveout>.

begins, it usually becomes more difficult to disengage from armed activism, as the case of the Official IRA clearly shows (Rekawek 2008).

External political effects are outcomes that alter the political environment in some way. They can include substantive political changes (i.e., alteration of decision-making processes), especially in the state's provision of economic goods and changes in the legal rights of the armed groups' constituencies (the Northern Ireland case is particularly interesting here, see Schmidt 2010), or changes in the political institutions (e.g., the decolonization of Cyprus or Algeria where colonial power's departure led to the establishment of new institutions), or the violent campaigns by right-wing groups in Italy and Germany after World War I that established authoritarian fascist regimes there (see Chapter 7 in this volume). Fundamental for our thinking about outcomes are indications that governments would have ignored the political demands of the armed groups' larger constituency without the use of political violence. Obviously, armed groups might also invoke negative external impacts. The response to radicalization can take the form of strengthening armed groups' opponents (see Chapter 7 in this volume), stabilizing the order they are challenging, provoking more physical repression (Crenshaw 2010), for example, as occurred with left-wing armed groups during the 1970s in Latin America, (Fagen 1992; Lutz and Lutz 2005) and in Europe (della Porta 1995), or fomenting death squads, paramilitaries, or vigilante groups, as occurred in Latin America or in Northern Ireland.

Regarding Table 3.1's category of cultural effects, internal cultural outcomes occur when political violence changes the views of participants, affecting in the long run the identity, frames of reference, and discourse of the larger constituency of the armed group. Political violence can create, stabilize, and reinforce militant identities, all internal solidarity-building effects. Within these groups, violence has the power to make militants see themselves as participants in something greater than themselves, or it may foster a mentality of embattlement, or impart self-affirmation and achievement. It may be a way of reclaiming dignity and rejecting subordination, real or perceived. The use of political violence can increase communal identification and improved morale of discriminated communities. The example with which we have opened the chapter is illuminating here because the effect can be indirect and unintended.

Regarding external cultural outcomes, influences on public opinion or on the attitudes of sectors of society apart from the subordinated minority also occur as a result of political violence. These include the social-psychological dimensions of culture embodied by individual values, beliefs, and meanings; sociological dimensions relating to cultural production and practices, in which culture is formed by signifiers and their meanings; and a broad dimension usually embraced by anthropologists and social historians, where culture frames the worldview and *mentalités* of communities (Earl 2004).

Internal biographical impacts of political violence are profound effects on the life-course of individuals who have participated in political violent activities—effects that have been brought about at least in part owing to their involvement

in those activities. Individuals who have been involved in armed groups, even at a lower level of commitment, seem to carry the consequences of involvement throughout their life. The armed activists' perceptions of their past struggles are fundamental in determining which kind of effect armed activism has. In Northern Ireland former volunteers of the Provisional IRA had continued to espouse republican attitudes and remained active in contemporary forms of social and political activities (Shirlow et al. 2010).

Several external biographical effects of political violence derive from life-course patterns of armed groups' targets. One might look, for example, at how violent right-wing activism impacts on the biographies of Jewish people or ethnic minorities. There exists a literature on victims of violence that looks at how victims of hate crimes suffer trauma as a result of their victimization (Bjorgo 2003; McDevitt and Williamson 2003).⁴ Trauma studies have started to explore the short-term and long-term impacts of political violence. Another helpful literature examines how political violence affects the psychological well-being of children and young people (Browne 2003).

Ethical, Theoretical and Methodological Challenges

The study of political-violence outcomes has a number of ethical, theoretical and methodological challenges connected with it. Regarding ethical problems, although it is widely recognized that non-violent protests can produce important results, the same cannot be said of political violence and terrorism. Precisely because of the issues we will take up in this section, the handful of existing studies of political-violent outcomes have not given clear and unambiguous answers (see Abraham 2006, 2008; Gurr 1980; Issac and Kelly 1981; Piven and Cloward 1993, Gamson 1990; Giugni 1998). Moreover, studying the outcomes of political violence raises dilemmas about ethical obligations felt by many scholars to use research for the public good, "giving rise to moralistic positions rather than scholarly discussions" (Bonanate 1978: 197). For example, Frances Fox Piven (see Chapter 2 in this volume) recently became the object of condemnation from the political right in the US for her essay, "Mobilizing the Jobless" (2011). In that essay, she discusses the effectiveness of militant action, "angry crowds, demonstrations, sit-ins, and unruly mobs," in forcing political responses, which some took as a call for violent revolution.⁵ These kinds of issue pose important ethical challenges that researchers need to be aware of in order to navigate the divide between their values and the scientific credibility of their work (Polletta 2006). It may appear obvious, but nonetheless worthy of mention that this chapter's exploration of political-violence

4 Research on the life-course patterns of political-violent targets could have important extensions and implications for the social movement literature. This is clearly a silent zone, where research is much needed in the future: the life-course patterns of movements' targets.

5 We thank Hank Johnston for pointing this out to us.

outcomes is not an attempt to legitimize this repertoire of action, but rather an attempt to systematize our thinking about its payoffs and its social effects in terms of politics, culture and individual biographies as part of the broader enterprise of social science.

The study of the outcomes of political violence also faces conceptual and theoretical hurdles. The first and most obvious concerns the delimitation of the phenomena at hand, and providing operational definitions for them. This implies defining both terms of the concept: “violence” and “political.” On the one hand, there is no consensus in the literature about what is violence, nor do popular and commonsensical usages of the term help much, as they often include both physical as well as verbal acts. In this regard, we can follow Tilly (2003: 3), who defines collective violence as “episodic social interaction that immediately inflicts physical damage on persons and/or objects.” He also includes two further aspects in the definition: it “involves at least two perpetrators of damage” and it “results at least in part from coordination among persons who perform the damaging acts” (Tilly 2003: 3). Such violence is political to the extent that it is exerted strategically in order to change the existing distribution of resources or power relations. Finally, we need to be clear about the actors making use of political violence. The most basic distinction in this regard is between “members” and “challengers” (Tilly 1978). In other words, violent actions for political purposes may be made by the state actors as well as by actors who are excluded from the institutionalized political arenas (such as social movement organizations). Here we restrict our attention to the latter. Thus, as we stated at the outset, we conceive of political violence as the strategic use of physical force to influence several audiences and to be perpetrated by non-state actors for political purposes.

Once we have defined our explanandum (political violence), we need to do the same with our explanans (outcomes). We have already discussed our six kinds of outcome (internal and external dimensions of political, cultural and biographical effects), but, harkening back to our opening quote, we also need to acknowledge that political violence might produce unintended or even perverse effects, referring to consequences that are not among the outlined goals of an armed group. Violence intended to modify the status quo can end up, for example, “involuntarily transforming itself in the opposite of what it wants: that is the restabilising instrument of the existing system” (Bonante 1979: 208). Public statements of armed groups are often just propaganda designed to mobilize support or claiming more than they hope to achieve in order to provide room for negotiations or compromise. As Abrahms (2008) suggests, it seems that often the real aim of small armed groups is not their political objectives but such goals as survival, recruitment and procuring funds. So, the major effects of armed groups often have little or nothing to do with their stated goals (Beck 2008), as it is often the case for social movements (Tilly 1999).

Consider, for example, the public backlash or the support for paramilitary or vigilante groups that arise in response to armed groups. Or look at the long-term biographical consequences of armed militants, at the spillover effects from one

armed group to the other across time (e.g., the Republican movement in Ireland) or across countries (e.g., the transnational diffusion of violent repertoires in the 1970s, Klimke 2010), and at the incorporation of new values, beliefs, discourses and alternative opinions. In other cases, for example, in the case of transnational terrorism such as the Algerian FIS, armed groups may aim to provoke a backlash that will cause the masses in regions hosting the domestic dispute to mobilize against their perceived oppressive state. Armed groups seldom have a direct impact. They derive most of the time any significant impact from the reaction of states and electorates to their actions.

The issue of unintended and perverse effects is related to the problem of the often very narrowly defined concepts of success and failure. Success implies that the armed groups' stated program is realized. Studying the outcomes that expand beyond stated goals is one way of taking into account not only unintended and perverse effects, but also goal adaptation (armed groups might adapt their goals to changing conditions), time reference and effect stability (the impact of armed groups might be delayed or temporary), and interrelated effects (different kinds of effects of armed groups might influence each other).

Methodological obstacles to studying political-violence outcomes mirror those of studying social movement outcomes. The dilemma of causal attribution, referring to the cause and effect relationship between an observed change and its supposed causes, is perhaps the most fundamental problem in this field of research. With regard to the study of political-violence consequences, the difficulty lies in proving that a particular change, such as the revision of legislation, is actually the result of a violent repertoire and not something else. Can we be sure that the change would not have occurred without violence? One way to inquire into the causal effects of political violence is to compare them with non-violent actions typical of social movement protest. A sort of counterfactual reasoning may be applied here: Would a movement (or a group) be more or less successful by acting violently? What are "value-added" dimensions of political violence with respect to non-violent actions? Are outcomes longer lasting, and for what kinds of claim and demand? The literature on social movements does not provide consistent answers to these questions.

Much work on the effectiveness of disruptive protest, rioting, and political violence was done back in the 1970s in the aftermath of the urban riots of the 1960s in the United States. These studies often found different results, sometimes pointing to the ineffectiveness of violence, but other times showing its usefulness (see Gurr 1980; Isaac and Kelly 1981; Piven and Cloward 1993 for reviews). One of the main thrusts of early work was to assess the extent to which disruptive movements more successful than moderate ones (Giugni 1998). Gamson (1990), for example, found the use of radical and violent tactics to be associated with success (while being the target of violence made it more difficult). More recent studies have found little evidence that political violence is effective (Abrahms 2006, 2008). These studies rarely explore the effects of types of violence or varying levels of violence. Does categorical terrorism (Goodwin 2006) have the same effects as guerrilla-type

violence? Do impacts differ in relation to religious, social revolutionary, right-wing, or ethnonational violence?

Regarding the internal consequences of our typology, once an armed group has made use of violence, it is plausible that returning to peaceful tactics is difficult, especially if the violent action was perceived as successful and/or if the police intensify their targeting of the group. However, this is likely to depend much on who is the initiator of the violence. Although it is not always easy to establish who turned violent first, we can say that if the violence was started by the armed group as a strategic choice, then a path-dependency effect would be at work to make it more difficult to refrain from using it again. In the most extreme case, a given organization or group steps over the line of legality and eventually goes underground, a situation where escape is very difficult (della Porta 1995). In contrast, if the (legitimate) violence is started by the state through repression, then a political group prone to violent tactics is more a recipient than a perpetrator of violence and it is therefore easier to refrain from adopting such tactics in future actions.

Following recent work on the consequences of social movements, we can stress two important contextual factors upon which the outcomes of political violence are contingent. The first and most obvious are the political opportunity structures characterizing a given country or place where political violence takes place. Just as it constrains the political consequences of social movements and protest activities in general (Amenta et al. 1992; Giugni 2004), political opportunity structures are likely to play a decisive role for the outcomes of political violence. In particular, the power alignments within the institutional arenas (government, parliament) may prove crucial to determine whether a violent action is successful or not. Reactions by political authorities are likely to differ according to the configuration of power among institutional actors.

The second important contextual factor is public opinion. How public opinion evaluates violent action, and, more generally, the actor using it, is likely to be crucial in determining the degree of responsiveness of the political authorities to a group's demands. A plausible hypothesis is that the more favorable public opinion, the more likely it is that state authorities will respond positively to violent tactics, at least in democratic political regimes. The mechanism at work is electoral politics, namely, that political authorities' responsiveness would increase if demands are supported by potential voters. In other words, the more legitimate the claims of a group using violent tactics, the greater its impact, and the greater the chances that it may influence the population at large.

To reiterate, the study of outcomes needs to look beyond the stated goals of a movement to examine unintended and perverse effects of political violence. While the responsiveness of political authorities refers to political outcomes, public opinion may also play a role in the broader cultural outcomes of political violence. Looking exclusively at an armed group's agenda limits the analysis, excluding the broader consequences of armed groups, which are crucial for understanding the dynamic development of political struggles.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a preliminary outline to direct scholars as they look to understand how political violence matters. We have offered systematic schema for considering the range of potential outcomes associated with political violence. We have also reviewed the problems of causal attribution, time reference and effect stability, goal adaptation, interrelated effects, and unintended and perverse effects associated with the assessment of the consequences of political violence. Our discussion has placed the study of political-violence outcomes in a broader perspective by comparing them with those of non-violent actions. The simple but important central message of the chapter is that an effort to assess movement effects in terms of the extent to which they achieve their explicit goals is limited if we consider the broader social impacts of political violence.

Future work on the outcomes of political violence would benefit from bringing together two research strands that have too often followed separate tracks: the literature on political violence and terrorism, on one hand, and the literature on social movements and contentious politics, on the other. We agree with Beck (2008: 1565) that “social movement theory, due in part to its integrative and interdisciplinary nature, is uniquely positioned to contribute a necessary conceptual framework for the study of political violence and terrorism.” Obviously, Beck is not the first and the only scholar who has taken this path (see della Porta and Tarrow 1986; della Porta 1988, 1990, 1995; Tilly 2003; Oberschall 2004; Zwerman and Steinhoff 2005; Alimi 2006; Goodwin 2006; Gunning 2009; Bosi, forthcoming).

We believe that a research agenda in this field can then take advantage from some recent developments in the study of social movement outcomes. Three developments in particular deserve mention (Giugni and Bosi, forthcoming). First, recent research on the policy outcomes of social movements has shifted the focus of attention from the organizational features of movements that are more likely to be conducive to success (including the use of violence) to a broader view that takes into account the crucial role of external facilitating factors in the social and political environment, such as powerful institutional allies or a favorable public opinion. Acknowledging the conditional and interactive nature of the effect of political violence surely is a fruitful avenue for further research.

Second, research can benefit from bringing a comparative perspective into the study of the outcomes of political violence (Giugni 1999). Most existing research in the field is based on single case studies, and comparative research designs are quite rare. Comparisons across countries, across time, and across types of armed group (social-revolutionary, religious, ethnonational) allow the researcher to put the findings into a broader perspective, permit the testing of rival hypotheses and explanations, and permit generalization of the findings beyond the specific cases.

Third, and perhaps most important, much like research on the consequences of social movements in general, the study of the outcomes of political violence could be improved by shifting the focus of the analysis from the conditions favoring the impact of violent actions to the search for the processes and mechanisms

