The Egyptian Revolution 2011: Mechanisms of Violence and Non-Violence

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Introduction

The starting point for our considerations is the frequently expressed view that the 2011 revolution in Egypt from the start of the mass demonstrations on January 25th up to the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak on February 11th was remarkably nonviolent, or at least showed very low levels of violence (see Steinweg 2012; Zunes 2011). This intuitive judgment is confirmed by a rough comparison with other revolutions and uprisings of 2011 in the Arab world.

The Egyptian revolution certainly has not been entirely non-violent: During the 18 days leading up to Mubarak’s resignation, nearly nine hundred people were killed, the vast majority of them protesters. The extent of violence, indicated by the number of casualties, needs to be related to and compared with other revolutionary and militant episodes. To facilitate this, we weight the number of casualties with the population of the countries involved, and project this number, according to the duration of the revolutions (from the outbreak of major protests to a regime change or, if this has not been achieved so far, until June 30th, 2012) to a full year.

From the table it is evident that the Egyptian revolution in 2011 with 22.3 deaths per 100,000 population per year can in fact be described as comparatively low in violence. Egypt thus has the lowest death rate of all revolutions or uprisings in the MENA region shown here. Even during the revolution in Tunisia, itself touted as low in violence, about twice as many people died, taking population size and duration into account.
### Table 1: Casualties in revolutions in the “Arab Spring” (and comparative figures).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Casualties</th>
<th>Casualties/100000 Pop./Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Egypt 2011</td>
<td>846</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen 2011</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>99.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya 2011</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>870.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria 2011–</td>
<td>23116</td>
<td>72.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia 2010/11</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War II</td>
<td>about 65 Mio</td>
<td>1100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homicides Egypt 2009</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
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These revolutions and uprisings in the Arab world in 2011 constitute a surprising fact, in particular for area studies which had classified the whole region as more or less democracy-resistant (Huntington 1991) and had concentrated on the analysis of persistence of authoritarian rule in the region (Baumgarten 2011: 5).

Even more surprising than the upheavals themselves, however, is the striking finding of an extremely low number of casualties in the Egyptian revolution, which begs the question as to the reasons for this low level of violence. This finding is even more striking since other preconditions were structurally similar compared with countries like Tunisia and Syria: high level of education and high unemployment rate of the under-30s, inequalities in wealth and income distributions in favour of the elite, corrupt ruling elites, and strong security forces serving the persistence of authoritarian rule (Schlumberger 2007; Loewe and Furness 2011; Demmelhuber and Roll 2007).

Thus, the relatively low level of violence in Egypt appears remarkable, in particular under the conditions of authoritarian rule: Since massive security forces and their use in the suppression of protests form part of the logic of authoritarian rule, the question arises why Egypt’s authoritarian forces either were not deployed or their actions proved unsuccessful. Neither does the fact that the Egyptian opposition had consistently declared its commitment to non-
violent resistance explain directly why the regime forces’ massive potential for violence was not put to use. And finally, the massive media coverage focusing on nonviolent forms of protest obscured the fact that on the side of the opposition there was potential for violence and some was used.

But why did the conflict not escalate out of hand? This issue is tackled by employing the approach of analysing causal mechanisms, in our case, of violence and nonviolence. Although the idea of nonviolent resistance certainly enjoys sympathy, the specific circumstances of this success need to be more closely illuminated. Therefore, we discuss whether empirical evidence shows non-violence to be a normatively guiding principle or to be merely considered tactically useful – both to avoid hasty conclusions, and to point out, especially concerning the example of Egypt, the problems surrounding non-violent resistance.

The central question of this paper is: What are the causes of the relatively low violence in the Egyptian revolution? We hypothesize that interaction and interdependence between a number of crucial factors has activated mechanisms resulting in non-violence.

**Structural Conditions**

To answer the present question of the causes of non-violent protest in Egypt, we assume that it is useful to relate historical events with the structural social context of political life in Egypt. Two contextual factors have been essential for shaping the events of January and February 2011: First, the specific form of authoritarian rule in the Mubarak system, and second, Egypt’s republican *raison d’état* since 1952.

*Egyptian Authoritarianism*

For the preparation of non-violent action before January 25th, 2011, it was of considerable importance that the opposition from civil society was acting in a neo-patrimonial authoritarianism (Pawelka 1985; Pawelka and Richter-Bernburg 2004) which remained in the saddle by using the iron fist of the security forces but still enabled certain open spaces in civic life. This is not to say that opposition groups were not monitored by state security and had not been exposed to repression, but that their leeway rather resulted from the systemic logic of the Egyptian brand of authoritarianism itself (Lesch 1989).

The ruling elite of the NDP surrounding Mohammed Husni Mubarak and his son Gamal
predominantly focused on the opposition organized and active in party politics. The policy of partial and periodic co-optation of opposition parties (Albrecht 2005) into political life could make the appearance, if not of a democracy, then of an incrementally transforming authoritarianism and so cushion the sharpest criticism by foreign countries as well as by civil society. At the same time, by making concessions – especially in the case of the Muslim Brotherhood – organizations’ public visibility and transparency could be increased and their representatives, e.g., members of parliament, made more manageable for the regime. The extreme fixation of the NDP elite on control or elimination of competing political candidates and political parties or movements opened some freedoms for civil society organizations in less politicized areas (Baumgarten 2011: 4–5).

Most of these organizations were not considered dangerous for the political survival of the system elite. The protests in which they were involved – bread strikes April 2008, and smaller demonstrations in the course of the years 2009 and 2010 – were viewed as a security rather than a political problem and suppressed by police. Thus, the enormous protest potential inherent in the social movements was underestimated (interview 11, 12). Media, new media and traditional NGO forms of interaction could flourish in the shadows of Mubarak’s authoritarianism and use the enormous frustration potential, especially of the young people, for mass protests. Here, the April 6th movement needs to be mentioned, which consisted of educated young people, who to declare their solidarity with the workers of the bread strike in Mahalla on the April 6th, 2008. Equally important was the widespread impact of bloggers, like Gigi Ibrahim, Asmaa Mahfouz and others. In particular, the killing of blogger Khaled Said by police in Alexandria in June 2010 inspired another mass movement, stirred up by the Facebook page “We are all Khaled Said”.

As the case of Khaled Said demonstrates, the authoritarian control state involves the use of force by the authorities, only superficially to grant security but rather to intimidate the population. Although many critics of the system from civil society had had encounters with police and police violence, few were systematically intimidated and threatened, or tortured (interviews 1, 12). More specifically, the middle class was not usually exposed to police violence or torture, in sharp contrast to what seemed to be the police’s standard way of dealing with members of the lower classes and the Muslim Brotherhood. The work of most organizations important for the January revolution was maintained remarkably unscathed.
Neither were the supporters of Mohammed el-Baradei affected by arbitrary repression (interview 1). Baradei had returned to Egypt in 2010 and was anticipated to announce his candidacy for the presidential elections planned for 2011, gaining followers especially in middle-class circles during the course of 2010 (interview 12). The main obstacle for his candidacy, however, turned out to be overly restrictive system-stabilizing legal rules for the registration of candidates, effectively permitting no one to run for presidential office except the NDP candidate.

The non-partisan character of the civil societal youth protest, the fixation of the elite towards the preservation of political power and the by no means widespread repression by the security forces constituted the freedom that was useful for the youth movement to organize protests and to give them continuity.

**Republican raison d’état of Egypt**

For the success of the nonviolent protest not so much the authoritarian context factor is of importance, but rather the positive appropriation of the Egyptian republican *raison d’état* by the protesters: The Egyptian Republic was founded in 1952 after the coup of the “young officers”. The Nasserism then established consisted of close ties between government, military, state socialism and nationalism. All four Egyptian presidents between 1952 and 2011 previously had been officers in the armed forces thus reinforcing close ties between government and military and letting military legitimization of civilian rule become a matter of normality. Under Nasser, a Soviet-inspired model of the state was established claiming to bring about freedom and prosperity for the masses through poverty reduction campaigns and land reforms (see Beattie 1994).

The military took the role of a training ground for all state functions. Its important role in the conflict with Israel also gave it foreign policy legitimacy. Over time, the national armed forces could also bring significant portions of the national food and energy production under their control, so they also became an economic factor in Egypt (see Albrecht and Bishara 2011). This dominant role for political and economic life in Egypt as well as for foreign policy – the guarantee of the peace treaty with Israel and the military cooperation with the U.S. – may be referred to as constitutive for Egyptian state politics (interview 14).

In addition, as an important component of authoritarian rule an excessive nationalism
developed, including a logic qualifying attacks on national institutions such as the military and the president as controlled by sinister foreign forces. Even Egyptians with links abroad have been stylized as agents of foreign interests (e.g., the sociologist Saad Eddin Ibrahim (Abaza 2010) or Mohammed el-Baradei due to his children’s alleged ‘Western’ lifestyle (Spiegel Online 2010)). By mobilizing colonial and neocolonial stereotypes even citizens extremely critical of the regime could be rallied behind the Egyptian regime. Despite the growing welfare gap in society and the waning prospects of the numerically ever growing youth, the plundering of Egypt by the government clique, newly rich elite and the military appeared to be a lesser evil than some form of outside control (interviews 15, 16). Thus, the activities of foreign governmental and non-governmental organizations were not only controlled by the security apparatus with the help of the NGO Law No. 84 – from 2002. Rather, even one year after the revolution many Egyptians of different strata of society were skeptical towards Western – not so much Arabic – organizations and believed that their activities should be controlled by the state (interview 17; M. Younis and A. Younis 2012).

The amalgamation of nationalism and military dominance in the Egyptian state policy can be shown by the example of the debate over the succession to Muhammad Hosni Mubarak. The main problem for the conservative wing of the NDP and the military was not to accept dynastic succession, but Gamal Mubarak’s lack of military background. His experience as a business manager had led to an economic system reform in the 2000s, which manifested itself in the rise of the so-called ‘biznizmen’ into the ruling elite (Wurzel 2011).

For the authoritarian system itself this termination of the Nasserist consensus created a point of contention between conservatives and reformers. The question, however, how such a transition to a non-military would be handled was an object of speculation among Egyptian and foreign experts up to the Revolution itself – since the presidential election was scheduled for 2011 (Ehrlicher and Jacobs 2010).

To summarize, the ambivalences of Egyptian authoritarianism consist in it acting politically repressive on one hand, and nationally unifying on the other, poverty-aggravating by its clientele system on one hand and superficially upholding its welfare functions by distributionally effective subsidization of bread and energy on the other, and that on the one hand it allowed scope for dissident activities, while on the other hand placing them under a general suspicion of unpatriotic machinations.
The Egyptian authoritarian rule, supported by a nationalist and egalitarian rhetoric, made the events of January and February 2011 appear all the more astonishing. We submit here the hypothesis that the protest movements have used these exact system features of Egyptian authoritarianism for their own benefit. They could establish themselves in the blind spots of political contention and, by their distributed organization, stay below the threshold of perception as an alternative political force – as opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood. In the concrete organization and implementation of the protests since January 25, 2011, they were able to take up the constituent motifs of Egyptian state policy and occupy these for their protest. The non-violent mobilization of the ideas of equality, prosperity and the nation as well as the inclusion of the military in the protest situation created their necessary legitimacy.

Causal Factors of Violence and Non-Violence

In the central part of our deliberations, we would like to analyse both those causal factors that have led to the avoidance or reduction of violence, but also those that have led to the occurrence of violence or its intensification. We want to to contrast and discuss both types of causal factors, both for the side of the opposition as well as for the regime.

The reception and implementation of nonviolent protest strategies included their specific preparation, planning and carrying out. The oppositional activists not only sought to achieve a mass participation of protesters, but also to avoid violent reactions by the security forces by acting unconfrontational and in a deescalating manner. Simultaneously, through slogans, appeals and use of national symbols the opposition conveyed a positive image of the protests to the entire Egyptian nation.

Preparation of Non-Violent Actions

Considerable activities aimed at organizing protest movements had their origin in the young, educated, mostly secular middle class. These activists have taken up and propagated strategies of nonviolent resistance, including practical exercises. One important medium for organizing the protest movements – ultimately one of the crucial factors for both their success and their peaceful nature – was networking via new social media like Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. The preparation of the protests goes back to at least 2008. In 2008, in support of a strike of textile workers in Mahalla el-Kubra, the “April 6th Movement” was founded. The April 6th
movement not only presented itself to the network public by a Facebook page, but also contacted the Serbian Otpor movement. Individual members of the group even travelled to Serbia, took part in trainings by the OTPOR training center CANVAS and returned back to Egypt with training materials, including videos (Interview 1, 7; Al Jazeera 2011). It has been claimed that up to 15,000 people in Egypt attended seminars in nonviolence (Steinweg 2012). Other sources, however, report that only a few hundred Egyptian activists have undergone such training (interviews 1, 2). Our research proves, that relatively small groups of activists seem to have been much more important in planning, adapting and implementing tactical skills to the Egyptian situation for the subsequent mobilization of large crowds. It is still an amazing fact that these groups were able to act largely unaffected by the state security forces, especially since they appeared regularly since 2008 with local non-violent actions, demonstrations and marches. In addition, a number of Egypt-wide well-known bloggers established themselves, like Khaled Said and Gigi Ibrahim (interview 3), even presenting their critical positions in public discussions.

Since mid-2010, a sequence of events unfolded which continued to increase the already widespread dissatisfaction with the Mubarak regime: In Alexandria, in June 2010, the blogger Khaled Said was beaten to death by two policemen, whom he had shown to be corrupt, leading to the founding of the Facebook page and movement “We are all Khaled Said”. This also resulted in showing the middle-class, previously pacified by their status, that they and their children were no longer safe from police brutality. The surge of protest, partly open, partly tacit, during 2010 may be connected with the case of Khaled Said, but also with the outcome of the parliamentary elections held in November and December 2010. In the election for the National Assembly (Maglis al-Sha’ab) Mubarak’s NDP won about 90% of the seats, a result that was widely seen as manipulated and seemed to render any chances of political change from within the parliament impossible.

On New Year’s Day 2011, 23 people died in an attack on the al-Qiddissin Church in Alexandria (BBC News 2011a). Mubarak instantly accused “foreign terrorists”. Rumours, however, had it that the Egyptian minister of the interior had masterminded the attack aiming to incite hatred between Muslims and Copts, a suspicion substantiated when the Egyptian attorney general opened in March 2011 investigations against the (then ex-) minister of the interior (Ismail 2011). The perfidy of a possibility of such a system strategy fueled the discontent among the population since the nationalistic and egalitarian raison d’état itself was
thus called into question inasmuch as it stood in the way of the ruling elite’s goals to maintain power. Since under Mubarak’s presidency the violent containment of the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic terrorism as well as the explicit protection of the Coptic minority were programmatic, the authorship of the attack in government circles was perceived as an act of termination of the national consensus – and this at the beginning of the presidential election year of 2011.

In addition to the preparation of various opposition groups in Egypt (see Rosenberg 2011), since 2006, a group of expatriate Egyptians in Britain appearing under the name “Academy of Change” started compiling texts on nonviolent resistance – including four books. They also organized the translation of works by the American strategist of nonviolent revolution, Gene Sharp. The Arabic translation of Sharp (2010) was in fact studied quite widely in Egypt, without necessarily connecting it with the original author but with the Egyptian translator – Khaled Omar Dar (interview 1, 4).

One essential factor during the preparations was the relevant organizations’ relatively large freedom from the organs of state repression and could act by their decentralized organization and by communication in new media. Several mobilization mechanisms can be identified: Ahead of the protests, a virtual mobilization mechanism came into effect: Here, new social media like blogs and Facebook facilitate the spreading of statements expressing dissatisfaction with the regime – which many apparently preceived to be relatively safe in these media – and also to assess the strength of oppositional attitudes. In addition, a positive feedback mechanism came into play, in which dissident remarks snowballed and promoted both affirmative statements and additional critical posts. So the Facebook group “We are all Khaled Said” is reported to have had 220000 members a few weeks after its founding (El-Hennawy 2010). The role of Facebook therefore consisted mainly in the role as a catalyst for this virtual mobilization. Social media also had their role in preparing the transfer of this virtual mobilization into actual mobilization on the streets: Since calls for demonstrations not only could be distributed easily and quickly, but also included requests for feedback about who was intending to participate, organizers could estimate comparatively well whether a critical mass could be expected to be reached.
Implementation of the Protest

January 25th, 2011, a national holiday celebrated as “Police Day” in Egypt was rebranded “Day of Wrath” by oppositional activists. This day saw the mobilization of crowds not seen for decades in Egypt at political demonstrations. After this positive, albeit sometimes violent experience, different groups started planning massive non-violent actions for the following days, in particular the following Friday, 28 January 2011.

The implementation of these protests on Friday, 28 January followed almost verbatim the leaflet “How to protest intelligently”, distributed mainly in printed form in Egypt, particularly in Cairo, during the days before (Anonymous 2011). The leaflet contained detailed instructions for the behaviour at demonstrations: It recommended to start out the demonstrations in the suburbs, focusing initially to gather in smaller side streets, until large numbers of people had come together and to venture on major streets and squares only where the number of protesters was so large it could not be dispersed easily by the police.

Another physical mobilization mechanism resulted from the fact that the Egyptian government had started blocking or switching off Twitter from 25 January, Facebook from 27 January and the internet as a whole as well as virtually all mobile phone networks from 28 January: This additionally drove people out of their houses, simply out of need for information. At the same time, these measures clearly showed the weakness of the regime and its fear of the protests.

As a starting point, the activists chose the Friday noon prayer in which all over Egypt men gather in the mosques. With this strategy, more of the population, especially poorer men were mobilized to join the protests. The choice of the routes for protest rallies from various starting points intended to let them converge on Tahrir Square in the centre of Cairo, through alleys and byways instead of major thoroughfares, thereby giving many more people the opportunity to join on the way. Chants were used to emphasize the peaceful nature of the rallies as well as to move as many bystanders as possible to join in through the articulation of widely shared grievances. Activists tell of the momentum that these marches developed and even encouraged the protesters that this time they might not be in a minority position against the security forces and might even be relatively protected from police violence by the mass. Thus, here we see a positive feedback mechanism at work again.

The decentralized tactics meant that over long distances the demonstrations were barely
confronted with police. But as soon as contact and confrontation with security forces started, the protesters at first used *de-escalating mechanisms*: demonstratively desisting from the use of force themselves, raising their hands to show their non-violent intentions, hugging and kissing policemen, and displaying symbols such as flowers and the Egyptian flag. This behaviour resulted in many marches being continued without major disruptions (interviews 1, 3).

As a target of the demonstrations the leaflet “How to protest intelligently” calls for the occupation of important public buildings. In fact, however, this apparently was not attempted on this day, rallies marching to the central Tahrir Square instead. Before rallies reached Tahrir Square, the police tried to stop the protesters by its massive presence, for example at bridges crossing the the river Nile leading to Tahrir Square. The police used rubber bullets and tear gas on a large scale as protesters tried to protect themselves against the attacks by wearing wet facemasks and by placing cardboard layers underneath their clothes, as recommended in “How to protest intelligently” (interviews 7, 8). At the same time, some of the demonstrators started provocations, attempts to break through and stone throwing, too: The majority of such actions showed a rather low intensity of violence. Eyewitnesses suggest that these were no typical thugs but rather people from poorer classes, who, unlike the middle class, had a lot of experience with police brutality and because of the repression had learned how to deal with violence and how to play games of cat-and-mouse with the police (interview 7).

Surprisingly, on the evening of January 28, 2011 after hours of clashes between police and protesters around the Tahrir Square, a full withdrawal of all police forces occurred. One direct reason for this withdrawal reportedly was that both human and material resources of the police were exhausted at this time (interview 8). The withdrawal, however, went far beyond a mere retreat from the hotspots of protests all over Egypt. Instead, it turned out to be a demonstrative withdrawal from the entire public space. In conjunction with the opening of prisons, this jeopardized the entire public order – either accepted as a side effect, or, more likely, planned deliberately. One must assume that this decision was also part of an escalation strategy targeted at unsettling the general population and delegitimizing the protesters (interviews 9, 10). The goal was obviously to blame the protesters as the disturbers of public order and as responsible for any acts of violence and crime and thus to create a climate that lets the return of the police appear to be desirable. The withdrawal of the police also led to the conclusion that, within the regime, the military elite had prevailed over the interior ministry
and was confident to be able to bring the situation under control.

Around 7 pm local time finally tanks rolled toward Tahir Square, received by cheering protesters. The enthusiastic reception led to fraternization with the soldiers, who were greeted with hugs and kisses as protectors and allies. This unusually positive attitude can not be explained solely by the tactical instructions given to the protesters for de-escalation of violence. Rather, the military, via Egypt’s republican state policy was loved in the Egyptian population as external protecting power as well as internal pillar of the state. (In Egypt, 94% of the population said they had “confidence in the military”, compared with 39% who had confidence in the police when asked in March/April 2011; see Abu Dhabi Gallup Center (2011).) Both factors, the positive image of the military as well as the de-escalation strategy had the effect that the demonstrators were not perceived as enemies of the state, but presented themselves as citizens, making legitimate demands and asking the military for protection. The exclamations “freedom (hurreya) – justice – dignity” and the demonstrative waving of Egyptian flags by the demonstrators also signaled that a use of force would be directed against Egyptians merely demanding fundamental norms of the Nasseristic raison d’état.

Thus, for all observers concerned, the protest movement had identified itself successfully with the Egyptian nation itself. By this move, protesters also had implicitly discredited the authoritarian elite system around Mubarak for the decades of repression and enrichment. In the concrete protest situation, the traditional media took over the role the new media had had during the preparations. For the wide media coverage it is relevant that Cairo is the media center of all major international and satellite TV stations in the Middle East (this is a key factor why protests in Syria have taken an entirely different course so far). The protest took place under the eyes of the international TV stations – while the Egyptian state television broadcast images suggesting nothing unusual happened in Cairo. This high level of media coverage, in particular live transmissions, made an essential contribution to the prevention of violence. Since all sides knew that their behaviour was constantly under scrutiny of the media and the general public, all had to expect that their own use of violence, in particular if seen as disproportionate, would lead to disadvantages of one’s own position. In addition, the Egyptian population was fully informed of the events, and many were motivated, by the peacefulness they witnessed, to participate themselves in the protests. This even led to children and elderly people taking part in demonstrations, pictures of which in turn reinforced the public’s
impression of peacfulness and brought even more people on the streets.

A further important role was played by cognitive or dispositional mechanisms relating primarily to changes in internal and external perception. First, the role model of Tunisia where president Ben Ali had been successfully overthrown on January 14th, 2011 with comparatively small amounts of violence was motivating the Egyptian opposition and demotivating the Mubarak regime (interview 5). Second, the protest actions occupied the state symbols of the Nasserist republic, both physically and cognitively. The chants “freedom, justice and prosperity”, “We are all Egyptians”, “Peaceful, peaceful” made it difficult to stylize the protesters as anarchists or terrorists. Here the mass effect assumes a crucial role. In addition, the awareness of the protesters to be showing their protest to the world public legitimized the protest movement and delegitimized the ruling elite. This and the fact that in Egypt, for the first time in decades, massive and nonviolent demonstrations took place, led, after the first few days that the previously ever-present fear of the regime and its security forces dissolved for very many people: a process that has been described by many as the decisive breakthrough – “then anything was possible …” (interview 7, 9, 18). The perception of already high and further increasing strength of the opposition, combined with weakness of the regime led in turn to further mobilization of protesters and confirmation of the chosen non-violent way.

The almost universal highly positive perception of the Egyptian army by the Egyptian population (Abu Dhabi Gallup Center 2011) in connection with the self-image of the Egyptian army to exist for the protection of the Egyptian people, led the military and protesters abstaining from using violence against each other, and the military declaring publicly on February 1st that, as a matter of principle, it would not shoot at demonstrators.

Finally, it must be taken into consideration that there were also factors and mechanisms contributing to violence on the side of the opposition. The basic attitude of the opposition was not a principled, but rather a strategic rejection of violence. Evidence for this can be drawn from the recommendations in the pamphlet Anonym (2011) to respond to the use of batons in the form of spraying the police, in particular their visors and windscreens, with paint cans (interviews 1, 7). Use of violence on the side of the opposition, then, was not excluded in principle, but massive use of violence was apparently perceived as being so defamatory and counter-productive that it was nearly completely avoided – whereas less violent actions, such as spraying paint and throwing stones were not really seen as violence and were only started...
to be considered as such when the interviewer began checking back (interviews 1–8). It had also been discussed in advance, since stone throwing could not effectively be used against police vehicles with windscreens protected by grilles, that windscreens would be sprayed with paint cans instead to disable the vehicles (interviews 1, 7).

When things turned violent on February 2nd, 2011 – the “Day of the Camel” – it became clear that some of the protesters were prepared to use other forms of violence, too. The attempt by thugs, most likely hired by the regime, to advance on Tahrir Square on horses and camels to disperse protesters was met with violent resistance. This opposition was primarily borne by hooligans of the Cairene al-Ahly football club who have had long experience in dealing with the police (Hermann 2011; Krauss 2011; Bilal 2011). These groups were well organized, alternated on the front line and had assistants who took over the supply of stones and the evacuation of wounded. However, neither this defence of the peaceful protest nor the occasional violent confrontations with the police alongside the rallies towards Tahrir Square on January 28, 2011, have been able to spoil the overall impression of peaceful protest. It seems more likely that these forms of violence of unarmed demonstrators with stones were rather regarded as legitimate self-defence against a much more martially equipped police or organized gangs of thugs. An important fact is that neither the police nor the thugs openly made use of live ammunition, and the demonstrators did not have firearms.

Conclusion

For the preparations of non-violent protests, the structural condition of widespread inattention of Egyptian authoritarianism with regard to the civil society youth organizations is crucial. On the one hand, the violent state repression of strikes, demonstrations, the death of Khaled Said and the manipulated parliamentary elections increased the potential for protest. On the other hand, the youth movement was not subject to the same strict attention by the state security organs as, e.g., the Muslim Brotherhood. Thus the decentralized organization and virtual mobilization of the protest using new media was possible, largely undisturbed.

The physical mobilization and the mass effect of the protest followed almost textbook-like the instructions for nonviolent protest and revolution formulated by, e.g., Gene Sharp and OTPOR. The cognitive identification effect of the protestors with the Egyptian state in general and the military in particular can be understood as an appropriation of nationalist-Nasserist
raison d’état. The strong presence of traditional media and their live coverage in turn enabled the identification of the non-protesting Egyptian population and the global public with the protesters. Conversely, they helped that delegitimizing violence on the part of the protesters as well as the authorities was avoided.

What lessons can be drawn from the Egyptian revolution in 2011 regarding the chances of success and the appropriate strategies and tactics of nonviolent protesting? In relation to four aspects, our analysis to a large extent confirms the strategic recommendations of nonviolent action which had been studied intensively by Egyptian activists:

First, the mobilization of masses and their perceivable withdrawal of support from the regime is crucial: Mobilizing large segments of the population to protest and to articulate their grievances and demands loudly and clearly, ideally in a form observable by as large a public as possible, usually strongly delegitimizes and destabilizes regimes (Sharp 2010; Zunes 2011).

Second, the nonviolence publicly perceived as such provides decisive advantages for the side of the protesters: domestic backing and participation, and sympathy and support for protesters as well as pressure on the regime from abroad lead to the delegitimization of the regime and the defection of parts of its apparatus (Sharp 2010).

Third, success in disentangling large power blocs – in this case, the military (or, at least during the first few days: the army) from their loyalty to the regime, lead to further strong destabilization of the existing regime (Sharp 2010).

Fourth, however, in Egypt the prediction has borne out, too, that non-violent revolutions, though indeed easier to protect against counter-revolutions or military coups than violent ones, nonetheless need protection and consolidation in their aftermath – an aspect that Egyptian revolutionaries do not seem to have taken as seriously as necessary. In this respect, the defection of the military from Mubarak, which led to his resignation, in retrospect has rather been the beginning of a ‘military coup in slow motion’.

However, the course of the Egyptian revolution in 2011 shows also that the notion that nonviolence, if used to serve as the basis for a revolutionary strategy, must be implemented consistently is not always true:
On the one hand, the decision for using a non-violent approach by the Egyptian activists was not motivated ideologically, but primarily pragmatically. In this regard, the Egyptian protest movement oriented themselves towards the strategies used by Otpor and many other movements and advocated and analyzed by Sharp, CANVAS and others. Such recommendations, however, emphasize throughout that non-violence must be maintained consistently in order to be successful.

The findings from Egypt, however, lead to a more nuanced assessment. Here, consistent non-violence has clearly not been maintained everywhere and at all times: on the contrary, in Egypt in 2011 we saw, on the part of the protest movement, a patchwork of much nonviolence – and some violence. Violence documentably planned and recommended by activists was limited to the use of paint spray against security forces (Anonym 2011). Presumably spontaneous violence by the protesters included the throwing of stones and emerged from small, well-organized groups, the majority of them football fans and seems not been planned. This limited violence, however, contributed at certain points to wear down units of the security forces or to disperse them, to allow rallies to pass through streets and onto squares, or prevent counterprotesters and thugs from accessing places such as Tahrir Square and chase away demonstrators.

As a result, the violence used by some of the Egyptian protesters did not only not harm the success of the revolution: On the contrary, it has kept the crowds of peaceful protesters covered at key points giving them the freedom of assembly and ultimately secured the success of the revolution. Therefore, all the benefits of the self-projection and the public image as a non-violent movement were used, but at critical points the benefits of limited violent action were utilized as well. What is crucial is that the scope and intensity of violence from the protesters were so low that in the overall domestic and foreign perception the Egyptian protests were still recognized as being *bona fide* nonviolent.
Interviews

1. Interview with Egyptian activist, April 16, 2012.
2. Interview with Egyptian activist, December 13, 2011.
3. Interview with Egyptian activist, March 15, 2011.
4. Interview with Egyptian activist, October 18, 2011.
5. Interview with Egyptian activist, December 27, 2010.
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