

Youth mobilization and the peace movement: a comparative analysis of resistance struggles in Czechoslovakia, China and Bangladesh

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Abstract

The Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, the Tiananmen Square protests in China, and the Quota Movement in Bangladesh are three historically significant nonviolent movements that have had a profound and lasting impact on modern history, each characterized by the active participation of young people. This study aims to compare and contrast the dynamics of these three movements. This study explores secondary sources, including books, newspapers, archives, scholarly research articles, and journal publications, and analyzes them using an explanatory narrative approach. The findings indicate that although all three were driven by collective aspirations for democracy and social reform, the outcomes varied significantly. The similarities and differences lie in factors such as the role of youth leadership, the scale and nature of the youth demonstrators, the influence of social media, government responses, and broader implications. Thus, a key contribution of this study is that it highlights young people as the initiators, organizers, and symbols of resistance. The study seeks to understand the conditions that lead to the success or failure of youth-led nonviolent actions. Although there is a substantial body of literature on this topic, comprehensive comparative analyses of these movements remain scarce, underscoring the importance of this study.

Keywords: youth-led demonstrations, student activism, non-violent movement, peace movements, peace and conflict.

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Introduction

Nonviolent movements have changed the political dynamics and played a crucial role in shaping the social context in several countries. We saw this trend in the 2024 Bangladesh protest, the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1989, and the Tiananmen Square protest in the same year. One of the several common threads connecting these nonviolent movements include the leading role of youth and the use of social media platforms. Despite similar aspirations visible in these movements, they were different in their political and social contexts and their outcomes. For example, the Velvet Revolution exemplifies the success of using nonviolence to achieve democratization, Tiananmen Square highlights the brutal consequences of the state repression to a peaceful protest, and the Quota protest in Bangladesh demonstrated the evolving role of nonviolent protest in a semi-authoritarian political system (Tkach, 2014). All three cases took place in varying socio-cultural and historical contexts which contrast the movements against each other. Given these three diverse cases, this paper aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the movements, focusing on the roles of

social media and youth leadership, as well as examining the composition of youth protestors and the nature of their respective governments.

The Velvet Revolution of 1989, also known as Gentle Revolution (Lila, 1994), took place in Czechoslovakia (now split into Czech Republic and Slovakia), was a very peaceful transition towards democracy (Horvath, 2011). Many factors including economic stagnation, political repressions, and some reforms by the communist government acted as catalysts for mass protests and demonstrations (Rybnikova, 2020; Horvath, 2013). But it yielded to the resignation of the communist government (Wheaton, 2018) and the establishment of a democratic political system (Bakke, 2011; Přebáň, 2019). The Tiananmen Square Protests in China exposed the brutal suppression of opposition by an authoritarian state (Mason & Clements, 2002), which was a blatant contradiction to the Velvet Revolution. The movement began with students protesting for their political freedoms and rights (Lee, 2009) but it quickly extended to include many sectors of Chinese society (Goldman, 2005; Kluver, 2010). But in response, the government took drastic measures, imposing martial law to put an end to the nonviolent demonstrations (Mitchell, 2012; Yeoh, 2019), which ultimately resulted in a bloodbath (Nepstad, 2011). The pro-democracy movement met a disastrous end due to these unfortunate developments. Similarly, the 2024 quota protest in Bangladesh demonstrated the potential of nonviolent resistance (Mahmud, 2025; Islam & Faisal, 2026) within a semi-authoritarian system (Rashid, 2025; Rana et al, 2026). Led by students and supported by a coalition of civil society groups (Zainuddin et al, 2025; Reza & Bhuiyan, 2025), the movement employed strikes, human chains, and demonstrations to pursue their goals through nonviolent tactics (Akter, 2024; Hasin, 2025). These three incidents illustrate divergent approaches to political transformation and democratization.

The primary aim of this study is to explore why some non-violent movements succeed while others fail. There are many examples of nonviolent movements in the 21st century in the shape of Arab spring which effected more than half a dozen of Arab states in 2011 and onwards period (Grinin & Korotayev, 2012; Brownlee et al, 2015; Magen, 2012). Same is the case with the youth led Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) in Pakistan which rose in 2018 to talk about the state excesses against the Pashtun tribes (Mahsud, 2024; Raza, 2025). The government responses in various states have been different for example in African Union to avoid such movements whether violent or nonviolent the governments have taken action to have sustainable peace and security (Terwase, 2017). It seeks to analyze the roles of government actions and social media, which significantly influence the outcome of these movements. The three cases examined in this research serve as suitable examples to investigate and address this question. By comparing these divergent cases, the study aims to fill a gap in existing literature specifically, the lack of a comprehensive comparative analysis of movements driven by democratic aspirations.

This analysis will contribute to a deeper understanding of the political factors that determine the success or failure of democratization movements. To achieve these goals, the following research questions will be probed in this study: How has the role of social media and the involvement of youth influenced the three movements, with focus on Velvet Revolution 1989, the Tiananmen Square Protest 1989, and the Quota Movement 2024? How do socio-political contexts and regime characteristics influence the success or suppression of nonviolent movement in transitioning from authoritarian rule to democratic governance? In what ways do leadership dynamics, strategies and

protestor composition shape up the Velvet Revolution, the Tiananmen Square Protest and the Quota Movement in a post-totalitarian and oppressive regime?

Peaceful protests have become commonplace in developing countries (Zunes, 1994). In the case of Bangladesh, for example, the protests in February 2018 are highlighted by Jackman (2020), who notes that a coalition of students from various higher education institutions united to organize a massive protest against quota discrimination in public employment, employing nonviolent tactics. This was followed by a significant student-led demonstration for road safety in July 2018, where students from schools, colleges, and universities participated in campaigns that combined nonviolent civic disruption with advocacy efforts. Jackman (2020) further argues that social movements have historically mobilized key societal groups in Bangladesh, particularly students, to confront regimes, leading to significant political change. Student-led movements frequently challenge authoritarian regimes by referencing past protests, harnessing social media, and exposing state repression. These movements pose an ongoing threat to ruling parties, particularly during election years. Even prior to the 2024 protests, there was a growing trend among ordinary citizens to participate in nonviolent protests, including sit-ins, slogans, marches, and demonstrations.

If we further look in the context of Bangladesh, most work has been done on the use of technology in the student movement in Bangladesh. This type of work is focused on how social media propelled the movement and provided the necessary momentum. It is believed that social media is a prominent factor due to which this movement became globally recognized and resulted in achievement of student agendas. According to Hasan et al. (2020), Facebook laid the foundation for the success of the movement since 67.5% of students came to know about the movement through Facebook. Student organizations also became easier through Facebook. The authors concluded that social media changed the nature and structure of the social movement in Bangladesh. Similarly, another significant work by Roy (2024) showcased how the internet shutdown by the government impacted the economy of Bangladesh since in modern times, markets and economy heavily depend on such technology. Another research article by Jackman (2020) emphasizes the rising threats to authoritarian government posed by student movements such as delegitimizing the ruling governments and increasing tensions among various interest groups. The author also goes on to conduct a comparison between the quota reform movement (2018) and the Road safety movement (2018). This comparative analysis is also seen in the work by Ghosh (2024) where the author analyzes the movement through the three components of Political Process Theory (PPT). However, this paper only focuses on limited factors and local movements that occurred in 2018.

Kurtz and Smithey (2018) argue that when authorities respond to strategic nonviolent action with intimidation, coercion, and violence, they often undermine their own legitimacy, precipitating significant reforms or even governmental overthrow. Chiang (2021) further adding into that, says repression's impact on mobilization depends on opposition tactics, with nonviolent movements often deterred by repression, though participation may increase when repression sparks public outrage or violent resistance.

Overall, the protests in Bangladesh highlight how young people's political mobilization serves as a response to social dissatisfaction, addressing injustices and inequalities while emphasizing their role in shaping democratic processes and confronting authoritarianism as written by Rivers and Lovin (2023). As the recent mass mobilization protests in Bangladesh over quota reform lack literature, the study draws

primarily on secondary data derived from existing research on the issue and a systematic review of major newspapers in Bangladesh and International over the relevant period, conducting content analysis on relevant articles from leading English-language newspapers including the BCC, the CNN, Al-Jazeera, The Daily Star, Dhaka Tribune, and New Age.

The available literature on non-violent movements in China explores the relationship between various protests and how the Chinese government has consistently suppressed these movements. This is notably discussed in the work "Tiananmen Square Thirteen Years After." The prospects for civil unrest in China" where Mason and Clements (2002) have mentioned various student-led demonstrations that took place before Tiananmen Square dating back to the May Fourth Movement which took place in 1919. They also discuss why such a protest has never reoccurred since the Tiananmen protest and suggest the rigorous method employed for the movement's suppression as one of the primary causes.

Along with that, China's economic growth during the 1990s has been named as one of the reasons as it may have alleviated the grievances of the people. The authors have also attributed the presence of democratic ideals among the students to the visit of intellectuals such as Gene Sharpe. Furthermore, the authors have also resorted to the application of theory of dissident and collective action to explain the emergence of Tiananmen Protests and why no such other movement has emerged afterwards. Bond and King (1985) have discussed the response of the Chinese leadership in combating various threats as mentioned in "Coping with the threat of westernization in Hong Kong". In this article, the authors describe that developing countries show concern that they will have to trade-off their cultural integrity should they allow foreign models of development to prevail in their systems. It is also discussed that the Chinese have been a victim of this concern ever since their colonization in 1841.

Moreover, other literature is focused on how and why the Chinese leaders attempt to hinder the introduction of Western values as portrayed in the work published by Sarotte (2012) titled "China's fear of contagion: Tiananmen Square and the power of the European example." Here, the author discusses the release of confidential sources showing contact between the Chinese government and foreign leaders. These sources reveal that the Chinese leaders were wary of Western democratic values and were prepared to take violent action if such an event were to take place on Chinese land. While looking at Tiananmen Square Protest, Cheng (1991) has divulged the political, economic and cultural aspects behind the origin of the movement and the decision making of the Chinese leadership. Wheaton and Kavan (2018) have discussed and analyzed the events of the Velvet Revolution, focusing on its dynamics, causes, and outcomes in their book. They have also assessed the challenges of democracy in post-communist Czechoslovakia.

Instead of only reacting to the structural structures and pressures around them, Mullins (2019) says that the primary reason for the revolution was ideology. Whereas Zittoun (2018) argues that the historical and cultural condition of 40 years of communism was the reason for the trigger of the Velvet Revolution. Saxonberg (1999) in his work has used rational choice models and several other models like the threshold model to explain how non-violent revolution in Czechoslovakia was based mainly on demonstrations. Glenn (1999) asserted that prior to 1989, Czechoslovakia was among the most oppressive governments in Eastern Europe, with a weak and fragmented democratic opposition. Interestingly, however, the country's reconstruction progressed

more rapidly than in other Eastern European nations, which may have contributed to more significant and impactful changes.

An extensive review of the existing literature on these movements shows that, despite significant research on each individual case, there is limited comparative analysis of their patterns and dynamics—particularly concerning the Tiananmen Square protest, the Velvet Revolution, and the 2024 Quota Reform movement. These movements, originating under oppressive regimes, share common roots but differ significantly in their strategies, trajectories, and outcomes. Throughout the literature review, only a few works were identified, including one journal article that attempted to explain the variations in the results of movements such as Tiananmen Square and the Velvet (Thompson, 2001). Although this work aligns closely with the approach of this research, it fails to examine the differences and patterns among these movements, overlooking the roles of social media and youth leadership.

This study analyzes how the Tiananmen Square protests in China and the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia led to different democratic outcomes. Although the outcomes differed, both events provide valuable insights into the process of democratization. We examine the underlying causes using the Individualized Comparative Analysis method proposed by Charles Tilly (Pickvance, 2001). In Individualizing Comparative Analysis approach, each case is first analyzed as a distinct relational process shaped by its own political opportunities, state structures, repertoires of contention, and mobilizing networks rather than being immediately forced into a uniform explanatory model. This is suitable for the present study because the three movements differ significantly in historical context, communication infrastructure and regime environments which means that direct variable-matching alone would risk flattening important historical and structural differences. Therefore, by first “individualizing” each case, the study is able to reconstruct how contention actually operated within each setting. Through this contextual reconstruction, the study moves to a systematic comparison which allows differences and similarities to emerge from grounded understandings of the cases. In this way, Tilly’s individualizing comparison strengthens both the internal validity of each case analysis and the explanatory depth of the cross-case synthesis by ensuring that comparison is built on analytically rich and context-sensitive case foundations.

To enhance methodological rigor and transparency, this study operationalized key variables relevant to the dynamics of youth led movements. Elite cohesion is measured by degree of unity within ruling elites and decision making bodies during periods of mobilization. Communication infrastructure assesses the availability and management of information channels, such as social media platforms and other forms of communication. Three criteria are used to select cases: first, all three movements were started and led by young people; second, they take place under different types of regimes, such as competitive authoritarianism, one-party communism, and declining communist authority; and third, each case allows for the analysis of how political, technological, and historical contexts influence protest outcomes.

Other methods proposed by Charles Tilly, such as the Universalizing Method, Variation-Finding Comparison, and Encompassing Method cannot be applied due to their differing frameworks as the paper does not aim to treat the Velvet Revolution, Tiananmen Square Movement and the Bangladesh Quota Reform Movement as identical instances of a single protest type but instead, as historically specific configurations of contentious politics that must be understood on their own terms before meaningful comparison can occur. Our goal is to contribute to the ongoing

discussions by examining the historical, political, and socio-cultural circumstances and contexts surrounding these movements. To address the gap and the goal, the following methodology outlines the methods and data sources used in this study.

Research Methods

This research employs a comprehensive qualitative methodology to examine the intricate dynamics of the Velvet Revolution, the Tiananmen Square Protests and the Quota reform Movement in Bangladesh. The Velvet Revolution and Tiananmen Protests were selected to contrast peace movements in differing environments with one being in Europe and the other in China but taking place in the same year. The Quota Reform Movement of Bangladesh was later selected to contrast this comparison to the dynamics of a recent movement taking place in 2024. This study explores secondary sources, including books, newspapers, archives, scholarly research articles, and journal publications, and analyzes them using an explanatory narrative approach.

The research involved reviewing works by published authors available in online journals and libraries. It includes PhD dissertations, scholarly work published in reputed publishers/journals/books of the indigenous authors, to have an in-depth understanding of the nonviolent movements and inside-out approach, from China, Europe and Bangladesh. To minimize biases the work of authors from the institutions in other parts of the developed and developing world is analyzed and cited. The sources were collected and analyzed using comparative analysis. Key components were identified such as the role of social media, composition of protestors, role of leadership, role of ideology and regime type which was compared to highlight patterns and differences in the selected peace movements. By leveraging secondary data, this study aims to provide a comprehensive insight into the subject, shedding light on the multifaceted factors that influence the success of nonviolent movements.

Results and Discussion

The Role of Social Media in Capturing the Historical Movements

Social media has played a significant role in shaping historical movements by amplifying their causes and motivating participation both within and beyond national borders. Theories such as the Connective Action Theory, proposed by W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segeberg, along with the concept of Affective Publics, effectively explain the crucial role that social media plays in the success of nonviolent movements. The logic behind Connective Action theory is the rise of networks that are personalized where people from various backgrounds communicate about common problems faced by humanity while the Affective Publics concept put forward by Papacharissi explains the use of social media by the public to achieve an emotional connection to participate in politics (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Papacharissi, 2014). The Connective Action Theory explains modern protest movements as being organized through digital and networked communication rather than through formal hierarchies and is used to evaluate the degree of organizational centralization or decentralization enabled by communication infrastructures. The Affective Publics concept complements the Connective Action Theory and explains that political participation is shaped by emotionally driven publics where feelings such as anger, hope and solidarity circulate through communication networks and helps construct temporary collective identities. Affective Publics theory explains how emotional mobilization circulates through different media environments.

In Bangladesh, social media has improved political engagement among users and increased political knowledge among individuals. During the protests, social media played a pivotal role as the primary mode of communication among students, especially since media outlets and newspapers were closely linked to the government. The organizers used platforms like Telegram and Facebook to coordinate meetings, share information, and raise awareness, providing the Bangladesh movement with the much-needed momentum and visibility. Additionally, through X (formerly Twitter), people worldwide—including foreign journalists—voiced their support and brought international attention to the situation in Bangladesh. The situation started to take a turn when the videos of violence and attacks on the students of Dhaka University on 15th of July became viral. The execution of Abu Sayeed, a student of Begum Rukeya University in Rangpur, triggered the emotions of the people as the footage of his execution became viral on major social media platforms (Khan, 2024). Afterwards, social media became a platform for aggrieved families to voice their concerns and express grief for victims like Farhan Faiyyaz and Mir Mughdo, two of the students who lost their life during the protests. The government of Bangladesh, on the other hand, attempted to minimize the use of social media by various means including the suspension of 3G and 4G services (Abbas, 2024; The Daily Star, 2024). In some cases, false information disseminated through social media fueled anger and resentment overpowering the concerns of the students and increasing the intensity of the protests (Blackburn, 2024). Viewing through the lens of Connective Action, the Quota Reform Movement represents a digitally networked and a decentralized mobilization driven by personalized grievances and social media connectivity. The Affective Publics lens reflects rapidly amplified emotional circulation, especially outrage and solidarity, accelerating mobilization but increasing organizational instability.

Tiananmen protests are a significant part of the Chinese history where the citizens of the country did not stand by and watched the events unfold but actively participated in it. It is estimated that the 60% of the people involved in the protests relied on Facebook to disseminate information. It was seen that Twitter and Weibo were less popular (Lee & Chan, 2015). In the beginning of the protests, the government attempted to suppress information, but the advent of the internet became an exceptional tool in bringing political discussions to the front (Chi, 2012). Deng Xiaoping also introduced the Four Cardinal Principles to ensure the ideological foundations. These principles were also focused on restricting the use of social media and promoting censorship. Another strategy employed by the Chinese leadership was the adoption of the “Velvet Prison” technique, a term used to describe censorship and the coercion of individuals to uphold the state's ideals. Haraszti, who introduced this concept, argues that the Velvet Prison is a more effective strategy than overt oppression. While China's implementation of this technique did not fully align with Haraszti's original concept, it proved to be highly effective within the Chinese context (Goodwin, 2010). Viewing through the lens of Connective Action Theory, Tiananmen Square Protest reflects a mobilization constrained by state-controlled communication systems where coordination relied primarily on physical student networks with limited scalability while, through Affective Publics, it demonstrates emotionally intense but spatially contained collective solidarity which was shaped by embodied protest and symbolic resistance.

Although social media did not exist at the time of the Velvet Revolution, the strategic use of alternative media was crucial to its success. Independent publications, underground networks, and broadcasts such as Radio Free Europe disseminated

uncensored information, fueling resistance and exposing government repression. These channels became vital tools for mobilization, enabling students and dissidents to spread news about demonstrations and rally public support. Since the Communist Party had control over the mass media, the underground press played a critical role in informing the citizens about the situation and it became easy to mobilize them (Saxonberg, 1999). Writings of Vaclav Havel and other intellectuals were also published by the underground press. Computers and mimeograph machines were also employed to disseminate announcements, proclamations, and critiques of the regime, enabling widespread communication and coordination. Parallel structures, especially critical theatre, music, and home seminars had a crucial influence on the revolution.

Music, particularly rock, also served as a powerful medium of rebellion and resistance. The close connection between rock music and politics in Czechoslovakia was demonstrated in Havel's essay 'The Power of the Powerless', where he linked the Charter 77 movement to a campaign defending the underground rock group, the Plastic People of the Universe (Mitchell, 1992). The cultural and media efforts collectively serve as a mobilization strategy for revolution. Viewing through the lens of Connective Action, the Velvet Revolution illustrates semi-structured mobilization enabled by civic organizations and analogue communication networks while through Affective Publics, it shows how institutionally mediated emotions fostered moral unity and sustained nonviolent collective identity.

Youth Protestors and their Alliances

Initially sparked by university students, particularly from Dhaka University and other major educational institutions like Brac University, Barishal University and Jahangirnagar University among others, on July 1, the protests quickly evolved into a broader coalition (Corea & Erum, 2024). Led by the university students and activists fighting against systemic discrimination, the movement gained nationwide traction after the death of Abu Sayed, a student of Rukeya University, at hands of police forces (Chowdhury, 2024; Star, 2024). The composition of protest included people from multiple professions like education, legal system, parents of students, and working-class individuals, including auto drivers (*rickshawalas*). While the initial demonstrations were primarily driven for abolishing the quota system (Ethirajan and Ritchie, 2024) but, the movement quickly evolved to encompass a broader range of demands, driven by frustration with the oppressive regime and broader socioeconomic inequalities. Their mobilization was fueled by a sense of injustice with the ruling party's policies and a desire for greater democratic participation.

Women played pivotal roles in the protests such as Tabassum and Nahida Bushra, they were coordinators of protest that mobilized people and led street rallies, challenging both societal expectations and government policies. Despite facing arrests, harassment, and government attempts to suppress their voices through misinformation and internet blackouts. Women utilized digital tools like VPNs and SMS to coordinate protests. Women were crucial agents of change and strategic organizer throughout the movement.

Political parties, including the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh (JI), actively supported the protests, exploiting the unrest to further their own political agendas. Their involvement contributed to the politicization of the movement and heightened the confrontation with authorities. Additionally, trade unions and other civil society organizations joined the demonstrations, expressing solidarity with the students' demands and raising issues

related to broader labor rights and economic justice. This participation expanded the movement's support base and helped articulate a wider range of grievances. Their involvement demonstrated the widespread nature of the discontent and underscored the broader implications of the unrest. The alliance of diverse groups reflected the deep-seated frustration across society with the government's repressive measures, poor governance, and economic inequality. What began as a student movement (Anbarasan and Limaye, 2024) rapidly transformed into a mass movement for educational reform, economic justice, and democratic rights, uniting people across class, profession, and political backgrounds. The movement was called a Gen Z revolution, ignited by young Bangladeshis' frustration at years of unemployment, allegations of theocracy, and shrinking civil liberties.

During the Tiananmen Square Protests, the majority of participants were students. Over two million students from more than 600 institutions of higher education actively participated. In Beijing alone, students from 80 different institutions joined forces, along with urban workers, government employees, and party members. The Chinese Communist Party's efforts to implement deflationary measures exacerbated issues for both rural and urban migrants. On May 4th, an estimated 300,000 students gathered in the square and were joined by journalists, intellectuals, and party members, marking a significant escalation of the movement (Mason and Clements, 2002). In May, the protests received major media coverage by foreign journalists who were present in Beijing to report on Mikhail Gorbachev's visit (Britannica Editors, 2024).

However, the Velvet Revolution was inclusive and was marked by a broader coalition. Students, intellectuals, workers, and members of the artistic community united for democratic demands. The moment began on November 17, 1989, with a peaceful student demonstration in Prague to commemorate international student's day in the honor of those who were killed by the Nazi regime in 1939. The brutal suppression of the protest drew more attention and mobilized hundreds of thousands.

The protests were shaped by involvement of diverse groups. A larger youth group, known as the "underground," was primarily anti-establishment, and had taken part in politics since the mid-1970s. They supported the opposition for many years, though they did so without any formal organization. Christian-oriented youth were significant contributors, and actively participated in the activities of several civic initiatives, but did not create their independent structures. Student groups also played a significant role in organization and mobilization. The Student Press and Information Center (STIS) and independent groups like STUHA ("ribbon") were instrumental in linking university journals and activism. With the participation of three-quarters of the population and mass demonstrations involving one million people in a country of less than 16 million, the Velvet Revolution was the proof of the power of unity and creativity in political change. In a nutshell, the participation of multiple groups strengthens the revolution and legitimacy.

The Role of Ideology

A 2023 study by the International Labor Organization (ILO) showed that the youth unemployment rate in Bangladesh stood at 12.3%, more than three times average. Bangladesh has 32 million people out of jobs with a population of 170 million. The controversial quota-based civil service hiring system, which reserves 55% of positions for specific groups and allocates only 45% based on merit, heightened feelings of hopelessness among students and young professionals (Jahan, 2012). Many

viewed the system as unfair, further deepening grievances over unequal access to socio-economic and political opportunities. The protests that initially started as peaceful demonstrations against the quota system eventually escalated into larger anti-government protests. In a severe crackdown (Al Jazeera Staff, 2024), the government ordered a nationwide internet blackout for four consecutive days, as reported by the cybersecurity watchdog Net Blocks. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina remarks further inflamed tensions by labeling the protesters "Razakars" means volunteers, a term historically associated with individuals who sided with the Pakistani military during Bangladesh's 1971 Liberation War (Hossain and Ethirajan, 2024). This remark added fuel to the fire, and the protests quickly turned violent, with calls for the Prime Minister's resignation. The unrest eventually culminated in a bloody confrontation, with reports indicating that over 650 people were killed and thousands arrested (PTI, 2024). The protests were a culmination of longstanding grievances, triggered by a flawed quota system that sidelined merit-based hiring in favor of political sponsorship. These issues, along with widespread corruption and limited opportunities for the youth, have created deep social divides and a harsh political climate in Bangladesh.

The primary cause behind the violence in Tiananmen Square Protest lies in the social identity of the Chinese people who are considered to be vastly proud of their identity which is categorized as 'Sinocentrism' (Bond and King, 1985). According to Tajfel's idea of Social Identity Theory, when one's social identity is under threat, an individual may resort to individual mobility, social competition, or social creativity to resist (Tajfel, 1974). Initially, in the year 1989, students came out to protest over campus-related issues but these protests gradually evolved into a nationwide protest aiming for democratic reforms. Hu Yaobang was reluctant to resort to extreme measures to deal with the escalating situation which led to his removal from the office of general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. However, his death in 1989 encouraged the students to gather and ask for the restoration of his reputation (BBC, 2019).

The ideological foundation of the Velvet organization was rooted in a desire for democracy, social justice, and the abolition of totalitarianism, resonating with citizens exhausted by decades of oppression. The movement drew inspiration from the ideals of Charter 77, emphasizing the importance of ethics and the protection of fundamental human rights. The Czechoslovakia movement was related to the country's economic turmoil, which caused the political crisis. Another reason for this was the change in the outlook of national interest which became the reason for the revolution. The crucial occasion of the 1968 Prague Spring served as a basis for the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia.

The Role of Youth Leadership

Youth leadership was pivotal in shaping the trajectory of the Bangladesh protest movement, with Abu Sayed, a 25-year-old student, emerging as a prominent figure who significantly influenced the dynamics of the movement (Ethirajan and Menon, 2024). The protests were organized with the assistance of coordinators from the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement. Key organizers, such as Nusrat Tabassum, Nahid Islam, Abdul Kader played an instrumental role in mobilizing the protests for quota reform (The Daily Star, 2024). Despite the unified efforts, divisions eventually emerged within the leadership. Kader, a key coordinator of the movement, rejected a statement issued by six primary coordinators, which called for nationwide protest rallies to continue the movement.

The leadership of the student organizers embodied core values of justice, equality, and democratic governance, which were vital in uniting a diverse coalition of students, professionals, and members of the working class. This sense of unity was crucial in building momentum and transforming the protests into a broad-based social movement. Under the guidance of student leaders, protesters adopted strategic tactics such as non-cooperation, tax boycotts, and utility bill non-payment, while also urging workers in key industries, including the garment sector, to strike. These actions aimed to increase pressure on the government and underscore the movement's demands for systemic change. Protest mobilization was strongly articulated through sentiments such as *"We want a reform of the quota system,"* reflecting a digitally amplified demand for merit-based reform (Al-Jazeera, 2024).

The leaders of protestors during the Tiananmen Square Protest were the youth mainly composed of students from various universities who made significant contributions towards the cause of the protest. It included students like Wang Dan who was the most famous leader hailing from Peking University (Human Rights Activism in Post-Tiananmen China, 2019). People from different ethnicities were also actively involved like Örkesh Dölet whose Chinese name is Wu'er kaixi. He belonged to the Muslim Uyghur minority and arranged a huge-scale march through the streets of Beijing and received appreciation for his involvement in hunger strikes. Women also played an important role as leaders during this protest including Chai Ling, a 23-year-old graduate student in psychology at Beijing Normal University and Wang Chaohua or 'Big Sister Wang'. Another prominent leader was Zhou Fengsuo who started an official radio station for the protests and provided medical assistance to the students. An exception was Han Dongfang who was one of the few protest leaders that did not belong to any universities. Instead, he was a railway worker and labor rights activist (Savitt, 2024). The movement was framed by student leaders as a struggle for democratic reform and anti-corruption, with participants expressing willingness to make significant personal sacrifices (de Antonio & Wintonick, 1995).

While the Velvet Revolution was profoundly influenced by visionary leadership, Václav Havel emerged as its most iconic figure. A playwright and co-founder of Charter 77, Havel became the prominent face of the movement. Although multiple leaders played important roles, it was through coordinated civic action that the movement was able to garner widespread support and effectively mobilize the populace. As stated by Václav Havel, "Truth and love must prevail over lies and hatred," reflects the moral-ethical framing of resistance that shaped the mobilization dynamics (Havel, 1985).

The Role of the Regime Type

The divergent outcomes of these movements are not contingent or incidental; rather; they are systematically shaped by interaction between elite cohesion and coercive strategy. While all three cases exhibit high levels of youth mobilization, variation in state responses can be explained by differences in internal unity of ruling elites and their capacity to deploy coercion effectively.

In Bangladesh, the government operates under a parliamentary democracy, where the Prime Minister is the head of government, and executive power is exercised by the Cabinet. However in practice state of governance was dysfunctional. According to Muhammad Mohabbat Khan in 'State of Governance in Bangladesh', notes that social, political and economic governance show little progress and prosperity. The state infrastructure exploited for benefit of individual, families and political parties. He further mentions how the head of the government has unquestionable power and unchecked

authority, leading many scholars to argue that the form of government shifted from democracy to autocracy (Khan, 2003). According to Danile Ziblatt, the backsliding in Bangladesh accelerated with a constitutional amendment in 2011, which weakened opposition and increased executive over judiciary (Riaz, 2024). The July Massacre of 2024 where the protestors of the quota movement were killed by the government in an attempt to suppress the movement, further reinforced public perception of authoritarian rule.

The cases of Quota Reform Movement therefore presents a more dynamic trajectory in terms of state response. The initial crackdown during July indicates a high degree elite cohesion and clear willingness to employ coercion. However, this unity turned out to be unstable in contrast to more established authoritarian governments. The protester was able to take advantage of digital political structure, which reduced the regimes ability to control public narratives by bypassing traditional state controlled communication channels using social media. This contributed to elite fracture while mobilization continued to grow. Over time military placed priority on institutional neutrality than unwavering support for the government.

The Tiananmen Square protests did not result in a prolonged split among the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) elite, but rather led to a consolidation of power. Reformist leader Zhao Ziyang opposed the use of force, yet conservative factions ultimately prevailed, transforming internal disagreement into high elite cohesion. The shift was enabled by China dual layered system, compromising the Politburo Standing Committee, responsible for the country's decision-making, with its members holding all major positions of power and the Party elders served in an advisory capacity. While Politburo Standing Committee, formally responsible for state decision-making, remained divided and indecisive during crises, the Party elders intervened to override dissent and impose a unified strategic direction.

The transition from elite discord to enforced cohesion was critical: it allowed for alignment of political leadership with military apparatus, thereby a coordinated and lethal coercive responses was possible. Internal divisions initially produced paralysis, marked by in hurried decision-making and neglecting moral and ethical considerations. However the fragmentation didn't exist long enough to weaken the regime, rather, it triggered a consolidated process driven by mutual distrust among elites. In this, context, the dynamic of Groupthink theory further explains that the members of a group will prefer to accept a majority opinion to maintain peace within the group (Lee, 2020).

Czechoslovakia was governed by a communist one-party regime, and the Velvet Revolution emerged during the late Cold War as a movement to end communist rule. Its success was shaped by the weakening of Soviet control under Mikhail Gorbachev, whose reforms and economic pressures reduced Moscow's influence over Eastern Europe, including Czechoslovakia. As domestic unrest grew, around 200,000 people demonstrated in Prague. Unlike in China or Bangladesh, elite fragmentation and weakened coercive capacity allowed the movement to succeed without major repression. More broadly, regime type helps explain such outcomes: cohesive authoritarian regimes can repress dissent more effectively, while fragile or hybrid regimes are more vulnerable to institutional limits, mobilization, and elite division.

Outcomes and Implications

The success or failure of social movements often has profound implications for a country's future stability and trajectory.

Table 1. Conditions for Success and Failure

Conditions	Present in Successful Case	Present in failed Case
Youth Leadership Continuity	Yes	No
State Cohesion	No	Yes
Repression Intensity	Low	High
Regime Type Transformation	Yes	No
Future Preemptive Repression	No	Yes

Source: processed by author, 2025

Table 1 suggests that the outcomes of the movements are not solely determined by the intensity of repression but also by the interaction between the internal continuity of youth leadership and state cohesion illustrating that fragmented state structures in combination with sustained youth leadership increase the likelihood of regime transformation. Repression intensity alone is therefore insufficient as an explanatory factor unless combined with internal coherence within the state. Consequently, regime transformation occurs only when youth leadership organizational stability aligns with weakened state coordination which allows sustained pressure of the mobilization to translate into political concessions. This table also highlights that in peace movements that were subdued, the state took measures to prevent such mobilization in the future.

The movement in Bangladesh reflects a South Asian socio-political culture characterized by vibrant student activism, strong collective identities and a history of street-based protest as a legitimate form of political expression. At the same time, societal norms around group solidarity and honor intensified emotional mobilization while existing political polarization shaped both participation patterns and state response. Beyond national impacts, these movements can also significantly influence international actors and regional dynamics. The events occurring in Bangladesh, for instance, have regional implications that extend beyond the national context, affecting neighboring countries and broader geopolitical interests. Bangladesh has long been seen as a turning point in South Asian geopolitics (Farooq, 2024).

The situation in Bangladesh poses uncertainty for many stakeholders in the national and international arena. With Sheikh Hasina's government overthrown, the primary domestic challenge is the formation of a credible interim government that can bring about stability and soothe people's emotions. Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, has been suggested as a chief advisor and the student leaders have rejected administrations backed by the army. The Awami League's exit has created a power vacuum that many parties wish to fulfill. Although there was collaboration among other political parties in the ousting of Sheikh Hasina, now they will be divided since their goals have diverged.

Apart from that, there have been direct consequences of the movement on the population of Bangladesh, especially the middle class. The shutdown of the internet upon which the digitized economy depends brought about financial disturbances throughout the country. On a regional scale, China and India are the major stakeholders. If parties like the BNP come into power, they could pose a threat to India, given their historical hostility towards Indian influence in Bangladesh. Although it will be challenging for future Bangladeshi governments to distance themselves from India due to its deeply ingrained influence within the country, India still remains a potential

threat. Similarly, China has maintained cordial relations with Sheikh Hasina's government, benefiting from trade and cooperation. It is likely that China will continue to sustain its relationship with any future government, regardless of its political orientation. During the protests, the repercussions were also felt in the UK where the BNP and Jamaat-i-Islami activists attacked a UK Chattra League meeting in East London. British politicians seized this opportunity to draw attention to the UK's system of integration of immigrants. Meanwhile, UK Awami League led a rally to garner favor of the British MPs against BNP and Jamaat-i-Islami (Blackburn, 2024).

The Tiananmen Square Protests unfolded within a socio-cultural context influenced by Confucian traditions that emphasized hierarchy, respect for authority and social harmony. While students drew on moral legitimacy to challenge the state, broader societal participation remained cautious, as cultural and historical prioritization of stability over confrontation limited the expansion of dissent, thereby reinforcing the effectiveness of state suppression. These aspects considerably shaped the outcome of the movement. The Tiananmen Square Protests have, without a doubt, shaped the current governing policies of the Chinese leadership. The Chinese leadership adopted the strategy of social control. The initial step the Chinese leaders sought to take was to restore the economy and reduce inflation to eliminate grievances and break the coalition among the students and government workers. The next step the Chinese government took was emphasizing the importance of political education through university curriculum and mass media. The freshly enrolled students at universities like Fudan University and Beijing University were sent off for military and political education for a period of one year. They used the narrative of "national humiliation" which was a concept the Chinese people were familiar with due to Western colonization to portray the Tiananmen Square Protests to consolidate the social identity of the people. Another important component of the social control strategy was buying the loyalty of urban workers and students by granting them a share of the country's GDP (Mason and Clements, 2002).

The Velvet Revolution was shaped by a European intellectual and civic culture with a strong tradition of political thought, public debate and organized dissent. Cultural spaces such as theatres and universities historically functioned as sites of resistance, enabling the movement to extend beyond student groups and evolve into a broad-based civic mobilization grounded in shared democratic values. The Velvet Revolution had profound implications, not only for Czechoslovakia but also for the world. Domestically, it facilitated a peaceful transition to democracy, culminating in the election of Václav Havel as president and effectively ending four decades of communist rule. The movement's success highlighted the triumph of nonviolent resistance against authoritarianism. Additionally, the revolution laid the groundwork for Czechoslovakia's integration into European institutions and the establishment of a democratic political system. However, the post-revolution period was marked by challenges to national unity. Divergences between Slovak and Czech leaders over economic and governance reforms, coupled with the rise of Slovak nationalism, ultimately led to the peaceful separation of the two states on December 31st, 1992. Although the split was amicable, it underscored the complexities inherent in nation-building (Babinova, 2021).

Globally, this movement became a symbol of change and freedom achieved through nonviolence. Its success was bolstered by favorable international conditions, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which inspired other nations to pursue democratic reforms peacefully. Economically, both successor states adopted free-market policies. The Czech Republic emerged as one of

the wealthiest nations in Central Europe, while Slovakia faced certain challenges in comparison to its neighbors.

The table below shows the different dynamics of youth involvement and leadership, the response of the regimes and the utilization of communication tools across the three movements.

Table 2. Comparative Overview of the Three Movements

Dimension	Velvet Revolution (Czechoslovakia, 1989)	Tiananmen Square Movement (China, 1989)	Quota Reform Movement (Bangladesh, 2024)
Youth Involvement	High (Student initiated; later mass public support)	High (University Student led)	High (University Student at forefront)
Role of Social Media/ Communication Tools	Alternative communication networks bypassed state control and built social trust.	Strong state control over the media hindered communication.	Social media enabled rapid mobilization and narrative formation.
Leadership	Civic forum and Intellectual dissidents	Student leaders; fragmented	Youth lead from student union
State Response	Restricted repression	Violent suppression	Partial concessions after initial suppression.
Outcomes	Successful (peaceful regime transition)	Failure (movement crushed)	Partial (border political crisis)

Source: processed by author, 2025

Table 2 shows that while youth involvement is consistently high across all three movements, it does not explain divergent outcomes by itself. Differences emerged from how communication infrastructures, leadership structures and state responses interact to shape mobilization dynamics. In the Velvet Revolution, alternative analogue communication networks enabled coordinated mobilization with high trust while uneven state repression, caused by elite divisions and external pressure, created space for negotiation and ultimately a peaceful regime transition. Alternatively, the Tiananmen Square Movement faced strong state control over information, fragmented student leadership and violent suppression which restricted diffusion and prevented sustained coordination.

By comparison, the Quota Reform Movement in Bangladesh 2024 operated in a digital environment where social media enabled fast and decentralized mobilization and the mixed coercive response from the state was constrained by the visibility and speed of online mobilization which resulted in partial concessions rather than full suppression or transition.

Table 3. Similarities and Differences (Cross-Case Analysis)

Analytical theme	Similarities Across Cases	Key Differences
Youth Leadership	Youth initiated and symbolically led all three movement.	Organizational strength varied
Social Media	Communication tools were central for mobilization and narrative framing.	The degree of governmental control varied
Collective Identity	Reform-oriented, language centered or justice and accountability	Varied political reform trajectories
Outcomes	Strong early momentum in all cases.	Differing regime outcomes: consolidation, partial reform and full transformation.

Source: processed by author, 2025

All three movements have significant similarities and differences across the themes that have been analyzed. The table 3 highlights this comparison of the three movements through the comparative organization of the core dimensions. Table 3 indicates that despite clear contextual differences, all three movements share a common foundation of strong youth initiation, early mobilization momentum and reliance on communication tools to construct collective identity and frame demands around justice, reform, and accountability. However, important structural differences underline these similarities that shaped the divergent trajectories across the three cases. While youth leadership was present in all cases, its organizational strength varied significantly ranging from highly coordinated civic leadership in the Velvet Revolution to fragmented student leadership in Tiananmen and a hybrid, partially decentralized, structure in the Bangladesh Quota Reform Movement.

Similarly, although communication tools played a central role across all cases, the degree of state control over these tools varied, with tightly controlled media in China which limited diffusion, analogue but semi-open channels which enabled coordination in Czechoslovakia and digital platforms in Bangladesh which allowed rapid but less controlled mobilization. Collective identity formation also differed in its institutional translation. In some cases, it evolved into sustained civic transformation while in others, it remained unable to overcome state coercion or it fragmented into partial reforms demands. As a result, despite similar early momentum, the outcomes diverged significantly ranging from violent suppression in Tiananmen, the negotiated democratic transition in the Velvet Revolution, to partial and ongoing reform outcomes in Bangladesh. This suggests that early mobilization strength alone is insufficient to determine success without supporting conditions in leadership cohesion, communication openness and state responsiveness.

This study shows how elite cohesiveness, leadership continuity, and communication infrastructure interact to shape youth-led movements in addition to the severity of official repression. In order to minimize escalation, these insights assist governments at home in anticipating and responding to mobilization more strategically by striking a balance between coercion and negotiation. Movements like the Quota Reform Movement in Bangladesh serve as regional examples of how digital platforms enable decentralized mobilization and impact activism in nearby nations. By fostering open communication networks and bolstering youth leadership potential, international players and NGOs can more successfully support democratic efforts. The study provides a more complex framework for comprehending democratization and the dynamics of nonviolent protest by theoretically highlighting that early mobilization alone is insufficient to predict outcomes; success depends on structural conditions, regime type, and state responsiveness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, all three social movements are markedly different from one another. Our analysis of various themes surrounding these movements suggests that the most fundamental factor contributing to their divergence is the nature of the governing regimes. These cases also illustrate that cultural orientations toward authority, dissent and collective action significantly shape how youth-led movements mobilize, scale and interact with the state, thereby influencing their trajectories and outcomes. The type of regime and the governmental response to the protests had a significant impact on the outcomes. For example, in Czechoslovakia, a peaceful transition occurred because the government did not oppose the movement. In contrast,

China experienced a violent crackdown on protestors, which led to their dispersal and was facilitated by the lack of governmental accountability.

Conversely, in Bangladesh, an authoritarian regime masked as a democracy, student pressure was sufficient to compel Sheikh Hasina to abandon her post. Despite oppressive measures, democratic elements within Bangladesh's political structure prevented her from achieving full invincibility. Another crucial factor was the support or neutrality of armed forces (Degaut, 2019), which was evident across these cases but varied significantly and proved decisive in shaping the outcomes. In the Velvet Revolution, the military did not intervene decisively against protesters which reflected a broader elite fragmentation and a reluctance within the coercive apparatus to enforce large-scale repression. This lack of intervention allowed sustained mobilization and facilitated a negotiated regime transition.

In contrast, during the Tiananmen Square Movement, the military remained firmly aligned with the ruling leadership and ultimately deployed force to suppress the protests which demonstrated high cohesion within the regime and a prioritization of political stability over public dissent which effectively terminated the movement. In the Bangladesh Quota Reform Movement 2024, the military's role was more indirect with the primary responsibility for repression falling on police and paramilitary forces. The absence of overt military presence limited the intensity of coercion and, combined with sustained public pressure and digital visibility, contributed to a situation in which the state resorted to partial concessions. These variations suggest that the explicit stance of the armed forces comprising of non-intervention, active repression and indirect involvement play a critical role in determining whether youth-led movements can sustain momentum and translate mobilization into political outcomes.

Additionally, social media played a vital role in the relative success of the Quota Movement compared to Tiananmen Square, despite both regimes employing oppressive tactics. In China, the media was heavily censored and controlled by the state, limiting the movement's reach. Although social media was used to mobilize support, it was less effective than in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh movement in 2024 benefited from advanced social media infrastructure and higher digital literacy among youth, enabling them to leverage these platforms more effectively for their cause. The timing also played a role, as the Bangladesh movement occurred when social media was more developed, further enhancing its impact.

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