

point made by the author but to highlight that not only the domestic but also the international deserve deeper analysis by going beyond great power geopolitics to consider the international as shaping who and where “we” are in the world.

### **Why Nations Rise: Narratives and the Path to Great**

**Power.** By Manjari Chatterjee Miller. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. 208p. \$99.00 cloth, \$27.95 paper.  
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Manjari Chatterjee Miller’s *Why Nations Rise* asks an important question about great power politics: Why do some potential great powers become actual great powers while others do not? Material explanations fall short because numerous states have the material power potential to be great powers, but there is no evident material reason why some of those states are unable to realize their potential. Instead, Miller argues that the explanation lies in the narratives that attend the trajectory of great powers. Those states that are able to tell themselves and others a convincing narrative of their rise and their rightful place in the international system are able to continue their rise to great power status. Those that do not—that either do not try or that cannot locate a captivating enough narrative—fall short and are relegated to a secondary status in international politics.

Miller’s book is commendable for three reasons. First, scholars of great power politics have a tendency to choose the dependent variable when it comes to rising great powers. Scholars study the rising powers that made it and the consequences of their rise, giving less attention paid to those that fell by the wayside. A complete analysis of the dynamics of rising powers requires attention to both successes and failures. Second, the focus of those who study power transitions does tend to be on the material dimensions of state power. The prospect that a rising state’s power might overtake a relatively declining state’s power is what makes power transitions so dangerous, but Miller points out that rising powers and the power transitions they precipitate have an important ideational dimension that demands attention. Third, Miller studies cases empirically that have garnered less attention than some of the more familiar cases of rising great powers. Her study of the Dutch experience, for example, will be unfamiliar to many readers, and her examination of contemporary China and India is a comparison that is not as commonly seen as one might expect.

That said, as compelling as these three reasons are, the book ultimately falls short of making a wholly convincing argument about the role of narrative in the rise of great powers. The first significant issue with the argument

involves the claimed direction of causality. In Miller’s telling, narrative is the locomotive that drives a state either toward great power status or some alternative; yet it seems equally plausible that foreign policy behavior and others’ reactions to that behavior are driving the narrative that states choose to adopt. Whether a state adopts a narrative that is more “active” or “reticent” is likely to depend not just on the exogenous generation of a narrative but also on both the experience of that state in enacting its foreign policy and the growth in that state’s capabilities. Any narrative is likely to be used strategically to frame certain foreign policy decisions to make them more palatable either to domestic or foreign audiences. Thus, narrative is as much a product of foreign policy and the growth in a state’s power as it is a cause, and Miller’s analysis fails to recognize this endogeneity.

A second concern with the argument involves its falsifiability. Miller provides the reader with little indication of how one would know *ex ante* whether a particular narrative is going to facilitate a state’s continuing rise to great power status or will impede its rise. Instead, we know that a narrative was a well-chosen one only when we know the outcome. That is, the indication of a narrative that facilitates a country’s rise is that the country rises, and the indication of a narrative that impedes a country’s rise is that the country does not rise. The outcome of the dependent variable itself becomes the only way to measure the value of the proffered critical independent variable. As a consequence and in the absence of a clearly specified way to assess the viability of certain narratives, it becomes difficult to imagine a case in which the argument could be shown to be false. Moreover, it is also not clear whether a particular successful narrative was a uniquely successful one or whether some other narrative conceivably could have also facilitated a state’s rise. The result of these concerns is diminished confidence in the validity of the theoretical argument.

Finally, although Miller makes an interesting case for the importance of narrative in explaining why some great powers rise more successfully than others, she also punts on perhaps the most important question of why some narratives prevail over others. Miller identifies the narratives that accompanied the trajectories of various powers as they attempted to rise but provides little indication of why each particular narrative was adopted. This is a critically important question. If the adoption of a narrative is, for example, a product of domestic political dynamics, that is important for scholars of great power politics to understand. If alternatively, it is driven by the underlying material power that a country possesses, that, too, would be of fundamental importance to understand. What narrative prevails may indicate a deeper spurious relationship between narrative and the outcome in any particular case where some other factor—domestic politics, capabilities, or perhaps the political acumen of a particular leader—is

responsible for both the narrative and the prognosis for the state's rise. In the book's final pages, Miller identifies this question as one for future research, but this book itself would have been strengthened by an effort to address it.

Manjari Chatterjee Miller's *Why Nations Rise* represents a useful contribution to the literature on the rise of great powers. By drawing scholars' attention to the importance of narrative in explaining the trajectory of rising powers, she helpfully illustrates that material power alone cannot explain the observed variation in why some rising powers continue on an upward trajectory and others fall back. She is to be commended, in particular, for highlighting the need to focus on that variation and not just on those countries that reach their potential as rising powers, as so much of the power transition literature tends to do. At the same time, the book's theoretical argument is ultimately dissatisfying in some consequential ways: the causal direction of the argument is unclear; it is not evident how the argument could be falsified; and the question of ultimate importance—why some narratives prevail over others—is left unanswered. These challenges matter not just for academic theory but also for contemporary questions involving policy and the rise of great powers. How critical is narrative to the rise of China compared to other contributing factors? The answer to that question is consequential for how other countries, including the United States, formulate policy toward a rising China, yet Miller's book does not provide as compelling an answer as it might. All that said, Miller's book is one with which scholars of great power politics will be grappling for many years to come.

**Civil Resistance: What Everyone Needs to Know.** By Erica Chenoweth. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. 368p. \$74.00 cloth, \$18.95 paper.  
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*Civil Resistance: What Everyone Needs to Know* introduces readers to the concept of civil resistance, “a method of active conflict in which unarmed people use a variety of coordinated, noninstitutional methods—strikes, protests, demonstrations, boycotts, alternative institution-building, and many other tactics—to promote change without harming or threatening to harm an opponent” (p. 2). Erica Chenoweth is well established as one of the leading voices in the study of civil resistance and thus is well placed to offer an authoritative view of what we do indeed need to know about this phenomenon. In this book, Chenoweth reviews and clarifies basic terminology commonly used in discussions about civil resistance: they describe how and where civil resistance tends to be used; explore its juxtaposition with violence, both by participants within dissident movements and by government forces; and conclude

with a discussion of long- and short-term impacts of civil resistance campaigns.

Original scholarship in the form of theory development and hypothesis testing is not Chenoweth's primary endeavor here; rather, they focus on reviewing key concepts and lessons that are well established in the existing literature on civil resistance while acknowledging the persistent gaps in our knowledge regarding the causes and consequences of this form of dissent. The literature with which Chenoweth engages is preponderantly situated within political science, although there are myriad valuable references to work in other social science disciplines, as well as writings and other insights from activists who have engaged directly in civil resistance.

Throughout their book, and as the title suggests, Chenoweth highlights a set of features of civil resistance that everyone should know. First, this method of dissent is indeed effective and often is more likely to succeed than violent tactics. Second, its efficacy is rooted in a movement's ability to draw on a large and diverse base of participants and to secure defections from “pillars” that support the targeted regime. Third, civil resistance involves myriad forms of action beyond protests, and in fact these campaigns tend to be more effective when they adopt a wide variety of tactics. Fourth, in the twentieth century, civil resistance was much more effective than armed antigovernment conflicts like rebellion; however, Chenoweth also highlights some interesting findings that the rates of success of civil resistance campaigns have declined somewhat over more recent years. Finally, although the regimes and other groups threatened by civil resistance campaigns often attempt to discredit nonviolent methods, those are valuable and viable strategies to pursue revolutionary change.

The question-and-answer format that apparently characterizes this “What Everyone Needs to Know” series from Oxford University Press may feel different from standard academic texts at first, but it actually works quite well: it makes the content feel conversational and accessible to readers at all levels of knowledge about contentious politics, from beginners to those who have spent years studying the subject. Indeed, many of the questions motivating the dialogue throughout the book are ones I have often pondered myself. As I began reading Chenoweth's book, I wondered whether cyberwarfare and hacking could ever be considered civil resistance; lo and behold, pages 62–67 discuss this very theme! Many of the questions Chenoweth tackles also address topics that commonly arise in conversations with students at undergraduate and graduate levels: “Does property destruction count as civil resistance?” (p. 57); “Is armed resistance required to fight genocidal regimes?” (p. 208); and “Why does civil resistance sometimes result in authoritarian backsliding after the movement wins?” (p. 241). Thus, Chenoweth offers a resource that will be valuable for academics interested in various