

Nonviolent Struggle

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Introduction

Mohandas Gandhi once claimed that nonviolence was the greatest power with which humankind had been endowed. Recognition of the power of nonviolent struggle has since gone well beyond followers of the Gandhian tradition and other spiritual pacifists to encompass a wide range of social scientists who have recognized how civil resistance movements, with increasing frequency, have been able to succeed where strategic alliances, armed guerrillas, and intergovernmental organizations have often failed, including bringing down some of the most entrenched dictatorships on the planet. The study of nonviolent struggle has become part of the international studies curriculum only recently, but world events have led an increasing number of scholars to recognize the importance of the application of such non-conventional social action, leading to a dramatic increase in the scholarly literature over the past four decades.

Definition and Terminology

[Gene Sharp \(1973\)](#) formulated a now widely accepted definition of nonviolent action as a general technique of protest, resistance, and intervention without physical violence (quoted here in a recent version):

Such action may be conducted by (a) acts of omission – that is, the participants refuse to perform acts that they usually perform, are expected by custom to perform, or are required by law or regulation to perform; (b) acts of commission – that is, the participants perform acts that they usually do not perform, are not expected by custom to perform, or are forbidden by law or regulation from performing; or (c) a combination of both [...]. (Sharp 2005:547)

Sharp writes that the term “nonviolent struggle” can be a synonym for the term nonviolent action, but that nonviolent struggle also “connotes the waging of strong forms of nonviolent action against determined opponents who are prepared to impose serious repression” (2005:548).

Nonviolent action distinguishes itself from the terms “nonviolence” or “pacifism,” which often carry religious, ethical, or philosophical connotations that are not intrinsic to the use of nonviolent action. Although some people engage in nonviolent action because of their ethical principles, most of those

who engage in nonviolent action do so for pragmatic reasons, out of the belief that it is the most effective way for them to wage their struggle. It is not necessary for people to have a belief in nonviolence or pacifism in order to engage in nonviolent action. Indeed, as [Lahey \(1987:57\)](#) and others have observed, most people who consider themselves pacifists have never participated in nonviolent action and the vast majority of people who have participated in nonviolent action are not pacifists.

Nonviolent action is referred to by many names, including: civic defiance ([Sharp 2005:543](#)), civil resistance (Gandhi, cited in [Iyer 2000:112](#); [Roberts 2007](#)), political defiance ([Sharp 2002:29](#)), and people power. The century-old term “passive resistance” has long been superseded in the research community since nonviolent action is important precisely because it can be actively and assertively disruptive.

The study of nonviolent action and civil resistance differs from the study of social movements and revolution in its focus on strategy, techniques, and mechanisms of change rather than structural sources, political context, social bases, and mobilization. While the social movements literature tends to see nonviolent action as part of a continuum between conventional politics and armed struggle, those who focus on civil resistance see nonviolent action as distinct from either and as antithetical, rather than complementary to violent means ([Schock 2013](#)). Similarly, while much of the social movement literature focuses on structures and processes that give rise to and influence the outcomes of mass popular movements, scholars of nonviolent action tend to focus more on how nonviolent movements make strategic choices that influence the contexts in which they operate, and therefore how strategic planning can help a movement to overcome, exploit, or transform various conditions.

[McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly \(2001\)](#) identified nonviolent action as a form of “contentious interaction” on the same spectrum with (though obviously different from) other forms of contention, including terrorism. The contentious politics approach emphasizes the interactive and relational aspects of nonviolent action, including the relationship between nonviolent challengers, local opponents, government officials, the media, and external actors. Using past examples of popular nonviolent movements, [McAdam and Tarrow \(2000\)](#) concluded that a combination of strategic decision making, mass nonviolent action, elite defections, and external support lead to changes in power relationships between conflicting groups, which ultimately determines the outcome of the movement, noting how nonviolent struggle is a mode of political and social action at a higher level of definition than the acts of resisters driven by conscience, accounting for the power of diverse but naturally organizable social stakeholders in coalition with one another.

[Kurt Schock \(2005; 2015a; 2015b\)](#) directly engages both the social movements and nonviolent action bodies of literatures in order to examine areas of diversion and synthesis between the two. Schock analyzes the trajectories of six “unarmed insurrections” in non-democracies: the success of pro-democracy movements in South Africa (1983–90), the Philippines (1983–6), Nepal (1990), and Thailand (1991–2), as well as suppressed movements in China (1989) and Burma (1988). He takes a relational approach to nonviolent action, emphasizing the importance of resilience (“the capacity of contentious actors to continue to mobilize collective action despite the actions of opponents aimed at constraining or inhibiting their activities” ([2005:142](#))), leverage (“the ability of contentious actors to mobilize the withdrawal of support from opponents or invoke pressure against them through the networks upon which opponents depend for their power” ([2005:143](#))), and third-party intervention in the outcomes of nonviolent struggles. Schock's central conclusion is that the skills, strategies, and attributes of a nonviolent movement can potentially overcome adverse structural conditions:

The trajectories of unarmed insurrections are shaped by the extent to which interactions between challengers, the state, and third parties produce shifts in the balance of power. The probability that an unarmed insurrection will tip the balance of power in favor of the challengers is a function of its resilience and leverage. By remaining resilient in the face of repression and effecting the withdrawal of support from or pressure against the state through its dependence relations, the state's capacity to rule may be diminished, third-party support for the movement may be mobilized, and the coherence of the political or military elite may fracture, that is, the political context may be recast to one more favorable to the challenge. (Schock 2005:143)

Strategic Nonviolent Action

Sharp's monumental three-volume work *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (1973) integrated insights from earlier works on nonviolent struggles, which until then had been primarily influenced by pacifist thought, into a clear analytical framework that could be applied to past and contemporary cases of nonviolent struggle. While certain strategic aspects of nonviolent resistance had been examined in earlier writings, it was largely within the context of principled nonviolence. Sharp, by contrast, emphasized that a personal commitment to nonviolence was not necessary or even relevant to the efficacy of a nonviolent movement, placing the study of nonviolent action squarely into the field of strategic studies. This influential study included his foundational analyses of the nature of political power (vol. I), examination of 198 methods of nonviolent action (vol. II) with detailed examples of each (categorized under the headings of "protest and persuasion," "noncooperation" (ch. 4–7), and "intervention" (ch. 8)), and the dynamics of how and why it was effective as a means of forcing change (vol. III). The dynamics volume addresses such issues as laying the groundwork for nonviolent campaigns, such as resisting fear, the social sources of power changes, the needs of leadership, issues of openness and secrecy, and the role of investigation, negotiations, and consciousness raising (ch. 9); examples of oppression and means of withstanding it (ch. 10); the importance of maintaining solidarity and nonviolent discipline (ch. 11); the phenomenon of "political jiu-jitsu," in which violent repression against nonviolent movements can backfire against the opponent; how success can be achieved through conversion, accommodation, or nonviolent coercion (ch. 12); and the impact of the movement on the redistribution of power in society (ch. 13).

[Ackerman and Kruegler \(1994\)](#) were the first to offer strategic principles that explain the trajectories and outcomes of nonviolent movements. They examine six nonviolent struggles (the first Russian Revolution of 1904–6; the German resistance against the Franco–Belgian occupation of the Ruhr region in 1923; the Danish struggle against the Nazi occupation from 1940 to 1945; the Indian national independence movement in 1930–1; and the civic strike in El Salvador in 1944), and test their hypothesis that the chances of success for popular movements are enhanced if such movements adhere to 12 key strategic principles, which they placed into three categories:

Principles of Development:

- 1 formulating functional objectives;
- 2 developing organizational strength;
- 3 securing access to critical material resources;
- 4 cultivating external assistance; and

- 5 expanding the repertoire of sanctions.

Principles of Engagement:

- 6 attacking the opponents' strategy for consolidating control;
- 7. muting the impact of the opponents' violent weapons;
- 8 alienating opponents from expected bases of support; and
- 9 maintaining nonviolent discipline.

Principles of Conception:

- 10 assessing events and options in light of levels of strategic decision making (policy, planning, strategy, tactics, and logistics);
- 11 adjusting offensive and defensive operations according to the relative vulnerability of the protagonist; and
- 12 sustaining continuity between sanctions, mechanisms, and objectives to promote the mechanisms of change: conversion, accommodations, coercion, and disintegration.

Ackerman and Kruegler assert that the success or failure of nonviolent movements, as with many military campaigns, depends significantly on the movements' development of a wise strategy and appropriate tactics. Good strategy, these authors maintain, is based on the formulation of clear political goals followed by the development of specific campaigns and tactical maneuvers designed to achieve short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals.

Burrowes divides nonviolent strategies into the "nonviolent defensive" and the "nonviolent counteroffensive" (1996:247–71). The strategic aim of the defense is "to consolidate the power and will of the defending population to resist the aggression/repression." This includes mobilization of key social groups in the resisting society such as worker organizations, women's groups, religious bodies, and ethnic communities. The strategic aim of the counteroffensive is "to alter the will (commitment) of the opponent elite to conduct the aggression, and to undermine their power (capacity) to do so." This strategy has three main target groups: the opponent's troops, key social groups who support the status quo (either actively or passively), and key groups from the opponent's allies. According to this framework, strategic effectiveness in nonviolent struggles is based on actively strengthening the challenge group's center of gravity (developing a good defensive strategy) and actively weakening that of the adversary (devising a good counteroffensive strategy).

Heavily influenced by Clausewitz, Liddell Hart, and other military strategists, Sharp emphasizes that strategic planning is an essential element of successful nonviolent movements. Furthermore, he argues that the development of strategy and long-term goals before planning tactics is of critical importance and that an oft-repeated mistake made by leaders of popular struggles is that they emphasize tactics at the expense of long-term strategy:

Very often in social and political movements, the individuals and groups involved recognize that they need to plan how they are to act, but do so only on a very limited, short-term, or tactical, basis. They do not attempt to formulate a broader, longer-term, or strategic plan of action [...]. The result of such

failures is that the chances of success are drastically reduced, and at times eliminated. One's strength is dissipated. One's actions are ineffective. Sacrifices are wasted and one's cause is not well served. The failure to plan strategically is likely to result in the failure to achieve one's objectives. (Sharp 2003a:18–19)

Retired US Army colonel [Robert L. Helvey \(2004\)](#) makes the case that to maximize its effectiveness, civilian-based resistance should be based on a “strategic estimate” that identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the resisting population and the opponent. Drawing from military planning methodologies, Helvey lays out a schema of questions that should be answered by nonviolent movements as they engage in strategic planning, and includes a sample “strategic estimate” used in the Burmese 1989 nonviolent pro-democracy movement ([Helvey 2004](#)).

In what serves as both a strategic analysis and a manual for activists, [Moyer \(2001\)](#) outlines a “Movement Action Plan” that examines the role of nonviolent action in major American social movements, using examples of the struggle against nuclear power, the US civil rights movement, the US gay and lesbian rights movement, the campaign to raise awareness on breast cancer, and the struggle against the neoliberal model of globalization. Moyer also theorizes eight stages of nonviolent movement development, identifies strategic goals and challenges of each, and develops a typology of four “roles of social activism” that address different functions that activists can play in movements.

More recently, [Ackerman and Merriman \(2015\)](#) argue that three attributes and three trends are critical in the outcome of civil resistance movements, and that collectively these six factors are all within a movement's power to influence and therefore should be the subject of a movement's strategic analysis. The key attributes are a movement's:

- 1 Ability to unify people;
- 2 Operational planning capacity;
- 1 Capacity to sustain nonviolent discipline.

The key trends are:

- 1 Increasing civilian participation in civil resistance;
- 2 Diminishing impact of repression, and increasing backfire;
- 3 Increasing defections from a movement's adversary.

Gandhian Legacy and Early Works

While the practice of nonviolent action goes back many centuries, there was little written on the subject until the nineteenth century, when Henry David Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy, and others began writing essays stressing the importance of noncooperation with institutions based on violence ([Christoyannopoulos 2010](#)). However, Gandhi was largely responsible for the transformation of the study of nonviolence from individual acts of civil disobedience to strategic civil resistance in which large numbers could participate to force social, economic, and political change. Gandhi combined his knowledge of historical campaigns of collective defiance within the British Empire and elsewhere, with religious thought (primarily drawn from Hinduism, Jainism, and Christianity), and earlier literature on civil disobedience. He placed a much greater attention on strategy and tactics in campaigns of large-scale defiance ([Sharp 1973:I,82](#)), while

stressing nonviolent discipline through an explicit association between mass political action and personal nonviolence, emphasizing nonviolent discipline and the connection between means and ends, introducing the term *satyagraha*, meaning “soul force.”

Much has been written by and about Gandhi concerning his campaigns in South Africa and India as well as his ideas. While Gandhi wrote only two books, the articles, talks, and speeches in his *Collected Works* total 100 volumes. Many collections of Gandhi's remarks and writings on different topics have been made; a comprehensive volume was edited by [Prabhu and Rao \(1988\)](#) and a useful anthology of longer selections in historical sequence was edited by [Fischer \(1962\)](#). Krishnalal Shridharani, an activist who participated in the Salt March of 1930–1 and other Gandhian campaigns, wrote *War without Violence* ([1939](#)), describing the progressive stages that occur during a *satyagraha* campaign and provided a strategic framework for nonviolent struggle.

From the point of view of political theory, perhaps the most important volume on Gandhian nonviolence since his death in 1948 was written by [Bondurant \(1958\)](#), who analyzes case studies of five major campaigns, including the 1918 textile workers' dispute in Ahmedabad, the 1919 resistance to the Rowlatt Bills, and the 1930–1 Salt March. [Naess \(1974\)](#) and [Iyer \(2000\)](#) also produced valuable works that bridge political and general philosophical approaches to Gandhi's thought and action. An analysis of Gandhi's campaign against untouchability in the 1920s by [King \(2015\)](#) provides particularly important insights on the mechanisms of change in nonviolent civil resistance.

[Case \(1923\)](#) authored the pioneering *Non-Violent Coercion: A Study in Methods of Social Pressure*, which was followed by [Gregg \(1935\)](#), who emphasized Gandhi's approach and identified “moral jiu-jitsu” as the key to nonviolent action's impact. Gregg's book was widely read by advocates of nonviolence well into the 1960s, along with [Shridharani \(1939\)](#), who was quite influential in advancing the view of nonviolent struggle as a technique for political change. More recent works were produced by [Sharp \(1979\)](#), who analyzed Gandhi's political strategy, and [Dalton \(1993\)](#), which analyzed the two of his major successful campaigns and the evolution of his thinking and leadership.

By the 1960s, growing attention was being drawn to nonviolent action by the US civil rights movement. [Sibley \(1963\)](#) included essays on nonviolence and accounts of early nonviolent campaigns, as well as an extensive bibliography. [Bedau \(1969\)](#) added a diverse set of contributions, including some classic essays by Henry David Thoreau, Martin Luther King, Bertrand Russell, and others on resistance to war, racism, and social injustice, as well as critics of the use of civil disobedience and other acts of nonviolent resistance in liberal democracies.

The Pluralistic Model of Power and Nonviolent Action

Étienne de la Boétie, Henry David Thoreau, Leo Tolstoy, Mohandas Gandhi, Hannah Arendt, Max Weber, Krishnalal Shridharani, Martin Luther King, and many others have written about the importance of consent in political power and the role that nonviolent action can play in withdrawing consent from power holders. Thomas Schelling wrote:

The tyrant and his subjects are in somewhat symmetrical positions. They can deny him most of what he wants – they can, that is, if they have the disciplined organization to refuse collaboration. And he can deny them just about everything they want – he can deny it by using the force at his command [...] It is a

bargaining situation in which either side, if adequately disciplined and organized, can deny most of what the other wants; and it remains to see who wins. ([Schelling 1968](#):351–4)

It was Sharp, however, who extrapolated from this insight a theoretical structure and taxonomy for understanding and classifying different aspects of nonviolent action. At the core of Sharp's conception of nonviolent action is what he calls the “pluralistic model of power,” which posits that power comes from the obedience and cooperation of the people in society, and therefore if people shift their obedience and cooperation patterns, they can shift the power balance in society and overcome oppressive rule. (This is not to be confused with Robert Dahl's theory of “pluralism” about competing interest groups in liberal democracies.) Sharp elaborates on the pluralistic model by identifying six specific sources of power that people's obedience provides to rulers:

- 1 Authority, or legitimacy;
- 2 Human resources, the persons and groups that obey, cooperate with, or assist the rulers;
- 3 Skills and knowledge, needed by the regime and supplied by the cooperating persons and groups;
- 4 Intangible factors, psychological and ideological factors which may induce people to obey and assist the rulers;
- 5 Material resources, control or access to property, natural resources, financial resources, the economic system, and means of communication and transportation;
- 6 Sanctions, punishments, threatened or applied, to ensure the submission and cooperation that are needed for the regime to carry out its policies and to exist. ([Sharp 2003a](#):11–12)

Sharp's pluralistic model of power challenges a great deal of conventional thinking and assumptions in the social sciences. The relative success of so many nonviolent movements supports Sharp's claim that political power is ultimately “fragile because it depends on many groups for reinforcement” ([Sharp 1973](#):I,8). Furthermore, since the pluralistic model of power asserts that a ruler's power is determined by the degree of compliance of a ruler's subjects, it follows that even the most oppressive regimes are based on at least some level of consent. This indicates that revolutions/revolts can grow out of the disintegration of consent, and not necessarily from the act of armed struggle. In addition, since “nonviolent action cuts off sources of [regimes’] power rather than simply combating the final power products of these sources,” it confronts the sources of state power more directly ([Sharp 1973](#):III,454).

Critiques of the Pluralistic Model

Some scholars – while concurring with Sharp's findings on the effectiveness of nonviolent struggle in political transformation – argue that the pluralistic model of power relies too heavily on individual and voluntaristic behavior, thereby overlooking such factors as patriarchy, capitalism, or the impact of a given educational system ([Martin 1989](#); [Burrowes 1996](#)). [McGuinness \(1993\)](#) critiqued Sharp's notion of consent from a feminist perspective, arguing that you cannot really “consent” unless you have the power to choose a viable alternative. Similarly, [Bond \(1994\)](#) argues that true consent requires symmetric power relations. Drawing from de la Boétie's theory of power and tracing the evolution of collective action in modern history, [Bleiker \(2000\)](#) utilizes Foucault to make the case for a “slow transformation of values” rather than simply massive nonviolent action, using his analysis of the East German dissident

movement to critique Sharp's theory of consent. Similarly, [Atack \(2006; 2012\)](#) applies Gramsci's theory of hegemony and Foucault's analysis of "micro-power" in his critique of Sharp's framework and [Vinthagen \(2006\)](#) utilizes Foucault and Bourdieu to provide a similarly critical assessment. [Martin \(1989\)](#) proposes combining the consent theory of power with a structural analysis of local systems of power, arguing that a strategy of nonviolent action should target these structures and institutions as part of an overall strategy of weakening the support base of a regime.

[Dajani \(1994\)](#) argues that Sharp's theory of "withdrawal of consent" is unsatisfactory because it fails to analyze the structural roots of power in society. She writes:

Social power is deeply rooted in social relationships and patterns of social behavior that are institutionalized over time and are pervasive throughout society. Power is located in the social structures in which these patterns exist and are reproduced. In any given society, social class arrangements are the more likely manifestations of this distribution of power. Social classes intersect in turn with different ethnic, religious, and other sociocultural elements of a given society. People's "obedience" to rulers, therefore, is not so much an element of free personal choice that can be reversed at will, but a characteristic of the way society is organized. ([Dajani 1994:99–100](#))

However, Dajani does argue that if one is able to account for such factors as the structural and ideological sources of power and resources available to the opponent and the resistance, and the means available for changing power relationships, then nonviolent action can indeed be the powerful force that Sharp claims it is.

Methods and Tactics of Nonviolent Action

[Sharp \(1973\)](#) documented and catalogued 198 methods of nonviolent action, though in subsequent years this list has expanded greatly but without comparable documentation. He divided nonviolent methods into three broad categories:

- 1 Nonviolent protests and persuasion;
- 2 Noncooperation (economic, political, and social);
- 3 Nonviolent intervention.

Sharp wrote that acts of nonviolent protest and persuasion, such as protests, vigils, and petitions, are effective at communicating what a movement stands for and what it opposes, but by themselves they are often insufficient to cause an opponent to make concessions. Acts of noncooperation, such as strikes and boycotts, can be highly coercive if sufficient numbers of people engage in them, because they involve a direct shift in people's behavior, which disrupts the flow of power from the people to the ruler. Acts of nonviolent intervention, such as blockades and certain acts of civil disobedience, can often be effective even if relatively fewer people participate in them, but they are often the highest risk form of action because they directly challenge the movement's opponent ([Sharp 2005:44](#)).

Nonviolent methods and tactics have also been classified according to the density of people who participate in them. Drawing from the work of [Burrowes \(1996\)](#), who makes a useful distinction between "creative" and "disruptive" methods of nonviolent intervention, [Schock \(2005\)](#) notes the distinction between "methods of concentration" and "methods of dispersion."

Methods of concentration, in which a large number of people are concentrated in a public place [...] provide a movement with the opportunity to build solidarity, highlight grievances, indicate the extent of dissatisfaction, and, if the state responds with repression, expose the fact that the state is based on violence rather than legitimacy. However, in the face of sustained repression, challengers must be able to shift to methods of dispersion, in which cooperation is withdrawn, such as a strike or boycott. These methods do not provide the state with a tangible target for repression and may overextend the state's repressive capacities due to the lack of a specific target. Methods of both concentration and dispersal are useful for promoting political change, but their effectiveness depends on the context. (Schock 2005:51–2)

Tactical Innovation

Effectiveness in nonviolent struggles is largely contingent upon adaptability and strategic and tactical innovation. McAdam highlights this point when he describes the dialectical nature of nonviolent conflict in noting “insurgents and opponents seek, in chess-like fashion, to offset the moves of the other. How well each succeeds at this task crucially affects the pace and outcome of insurgency” (McAdam 1983:736).

Several works focus on the importance of tactical innovation and sequencing as a part of strategy in nonviolent struggle, including Johnson (2004), whose tactical map concept can be used to identify new tactical possibilities and points of leverage for nonviolent movements; McAdam (1983), who analyzed the role of tactical innovation as a precursor to the expansion of the US civil rights movement; and Plunkett and Summy (1980), who described the use of tactical innovation during the 1978–9 Queensland Civil Liberties Campaign.

A complementary strand of strategic thinking in the field focuses on how nonviolent movements can create “dilemma actions” that cause their opponents to lose power regardless of how they react to the nonviolent movement (Lahey 1987:103–6; Helvey 2004:74–5; Popovic et al. 2007:142–51; Sørensen and Martin 2014). Among these is the use of humor (Sørensen 2008; 2012).

Comparisons of Violent and Nonviolent Struggle

The strategic advantage of nonviolent action over armed struggle has been explored qualitatively and quantitatively.

Lahey (1970; 1987), Zunes (1994), Zunes, Kurtz, and Asher (1999), and others note how nonviolent action can divide a movement's opponents, since officials often disagree over how to effectively deal with nonviolent resistance as opposed to armed resistance. Since nonviolent movements may appear less threatening than armed movements, some officials and pro-government elites may be less concerned about the consequences of a compromise with a nonviolent insurgency, while soldiers and police officers sent to stop nonviolent resisters are much more likely to defect or disobey orders than when they are faced with violent opposition. Nonviolent movements refuse to engage their opponents on their opponent's terms, such as with military confrontation in which the state has all the advantages. Instead, nonviolent movements create an asymmetric conflict, by choosing what amounts to a different kind of weapons system that utilizes the movement's advantage in generating popular support and nonviolently mobilizing large numbers of people.

[Martin \(2006\)](#) examines the empirical record of the advantages of nonviolent struggle over violent struggle as well as institutional politics in advancing social change, finding nonviolent action compares favorably to both.

A number of authors have directly challenged proponents of armed struggle on strategic grounds. [Deming \(1971\)](#) made a case for revolutionary nonviolent action that challenged the case for violence put forward by Frantz Fanon in his critique of colonialism. [Lahey \(2001\)](#) and [Martin \(2008\)](#) have offered detailed critiques of more recent advocacy for violent resistance. More significantly, however, have been a number of recent quantitative comparisons.

In their examination of 67 transitions from authoritarianism between 1972 and 2005, [Karatnycky and Ackerman \(2005\)](#) find that nonviolent civic resistance was a “key factor” in driving 50 of the transitions, and that transitions driven by civic resistance led to more and greater increases in political rights and civil liberties than elite-driven transitions or transitions in which the political opposition engaged in violence. [Johnstad \(2010\)](#), using a more sophisticated model, confirmed and expanded upon these findings, also noting how transitions to democracy via civil resistance resulted in significantly stronger post-transition economic growth than did elite-guided transitions, and how transitions driven by armed resistance dramatically increased the chances of post-transition violent conflict.

The most serious empirical study comparing the effectiveness of violent and nonviolent struggle was conducted by [Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth \(2008\)](#), who compared 323 violent and nonviolent resistance campaigns from 1900 to 2006 in order to ascertain the record of violent versus nonviolent methods in achieving a resistance campaign's objectives. This was later expanded to a highly regarded book-length study, *Why Civil Resistance Works* ([Chenoweth and Stephan 2011](#)), which emphasizes the key variable of mass mobilization in determining the rate of success of a popular insurrection, which is generally much higher in nonviolent struggles. Their findings are further assessed ([Chenoweth and Stephan 2014](#)) in light of subsequent uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa. Their empirical research has brought unprecedented attention to the study of civil resistance, playing a significant role in bringing the subfield more into the mainstream of social science.

They found that “major nonviolent campaigns have achieved success 53 percent of the time, compared with 26 percent for violent resistance campaigns” ([Stephan and Chenoweth 2008](#):8). They account for this success rate differential with two reasons:

First, a campaign's commitment to nonviolent methods enhances its domestic and international legitimacy and encourages more broad-based participation in the resistance, which translates into increased pressure being brought to bear on the target [...]. Second, whereas governments easily justify violent counterattacks against armed insurgents, regime violence against nonviolent movements is more likely to backfire against the regime. ([Stephan and Chenoweth 2008](#):9)

Among the important advantages nonviolent campaigns have over violent campaigns, Stephan and Chenoweth have noted, have been the importance of tactical innovation and the crucial role of large-scale participation as well as comparisons with violence.

The Phenomena of Backfire and Security Force Defections

A major component of the relative success of nonviolent struggles to armed struggles concerns the phenomenon of “backfire” – which is also referred to in the literature as “the paradox of repression”

([Zunes, Kurtz, and Asher 1999](#)) and “political jiu-jitsu” ([Sharp 1973](#)) – in which state repression against nonviolent resisters serves to weaken support for the regime and convince important sectors of society to back the nonviolent resistance. Key research questions about backfire include how nonviolent movements can make repression backfire against their opponents and how nonviolent movements can shift the loyalties of the security forces carrying out the repression.

The most comprehensive study of the former question has been written by [Martin \(2007\)](#), in which he examines a number of case studies where the use of violence by those in positions of power ended up being counterproductive, particularly when the uses of violence were responded to nonviolently. The study also notes tactics used by perpetrators of violence to reduce popular reaction to violent repression, including cover-ups, devaluation, reinterpretation, the use of official channels, and combinations of intimidation and rewards.

On the matter of how movements produce loyalty shifts among security forces, [Binnendijk and Marovic \(2006\)](#) analyzed strategies used by nonviolent movements in Serbia in 2000 and Ukraine in 2004 to help induce security force defections. The importance of this factor is also noted in [Stephan and Chenoweth \(2008\)](#) and [Chenoweth and Stephan \(2011\)](#), in which they found that security force defections were more likely to occur during successful nonviolent campaigns than violent campaigns (they occurred in 52% of successful nonviolent campaigns versus 32% of successful violent campaigns), and that when security force defections do occur, they “more than quadruple the chances of [a] campaign[’s] success.”

[Nepstad \(2011\)](#), in a comparative study of three successful and three unsuccessful pro-democracy uprisings during the 1980s and 1990s, emphasizes the importance of winning over or neutralizing state security forces, along with maintaining nonviolent discipline and building unity within the movement. A related contribution of this research is in its emphasis on why analyzing regime counter-responses is so important to understanding the success or failure of an opposition movement.

[Sutton, Butcher, and Svensson \(2014\)](#) examine global data covering extreme violence used by governments against unarmed protests between 1989 to 2011, finding that a preexisting campaign infrastructure – particularly parallel media institutions – increases the likelihood of increased domestic mobilization and international repercussions following repression after repression.

Nonviolent Defense against Foreign Invasion, Occupation, Coups d’États, and Terrorism

While much of the literature has addressed nonviolent action from the perspective of protests against various government policies and insurrections against autocratic regimes, there have also been serious studies on the use of nonviolent methods for civil and national defense as well an emerging literature on the role of nonviolent action in reducing terrorism. During the Cold War, the prospect of mutual destruction encouraged new thinking about national defense among security scholars. Building on some early reflections by [Bertrand Russell \(1915\)](#) a century ago, Commander Sir Stephen King-Hall, Theodor Ebert, Adam Roberts, Gene Sharp, and Thomas Schelling have since explored the phenomenon of “civilian-based defense” (CBD), also known as “nonviolent defense,” “social defense,” and “defense by civil resistance.”

[King-Hall \(1958\)](#) was the first to present a comprehensive proposal for popular nonviolent resistance as an alternative to military defense, calling for a tough and pragmatic approach to nonviolent action. [Sharp \(1965\)](#) described civilian-based defense as the “political equivalent of war” and wrote

about how methods of collective noncooperation and disruptive nonviolent action could be employed as a functional alternative, or possibly as a complement, to traditional defense strategies for resisting external invasion and preventing coups. [Roberts \(1968\)](#) edited a volume that includes several case studies of civilian-based defense (German resistance in the Ruhr (1923), Norwegian and Danish Resistance against German occupation in World War II, and East German resistance against communist rule (1953)), and examines how noncooperation with an adversary's orders, popular defiance, attempts to encourage noncompliance amongst security forces and functionaries, the creation of parallel structures, and other forms of nonviolent action can contribute to national defense.

[Boserup and Mack \(1974\)](#) conducted a study commissioned by the Danish government to analyze the theory of nonviolent defense. It included a number of historical examples, and examined strategic and organizational issues, and speculated on the possibility of combining both nonviolent and military methods of defense. Two case studies of civilian-based resistance against foreign occupation are [Eglitis \(1993\)](#) and [Miniotaite \(2002\)](#), focusing on Latvia and Lithuania, respectively, and each of these studies draws lessons relevant to the broader topic of civilian-based defense. In a study of a much earlier case, [Huxley \(1990\)](#) documents in detail Finnish “passive resistance” against Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

[Sharp \(1985\)](#) made the case that civilian-based nonviolent deterrence and defense was a viable alternative to NATO's military approach in the face of potential aggression from the Warsaw Pact. A more detailed analysis by [Schmid \(1985\)](#) studied Soviet military interventions and nuclear threats during the previous 40 years and its implications for social defense, four Eastern European case studies of nonviolent resistance and what might have made them more successful, and possibilities of a more comprehensive defense system from a resource mobilization perspective. Sharp also wrote a general overview of civilian-based defense in which he advocates a process of “transarmament,” defined as “the process of changing over from a military system to a civilian-based defense system” (1990:67). In addition to defense against foreign invasion and occupation, [Sharp \(2003b\)](#) examined three cases – Germany (1920), France/Algeria (1961), and the Soviet Union (1991) – where nonviolent resistance successfully defeated coups d'état, and makes general recommendations for how civilians, civil society organizations, and governments can resist coups d'état. [Burrowes \(1996\)](#) has contributed some important theoretical analysis on the question of nonviolent defense.

Not surprisingly, the literature on asymmetric warfare and popular insurgencies is especially relevant to the study of nonviolent action. Schelling, in his foreword to [Ackerman and Kruegler \(1994\)](#), wrote that “strategy as influence” is as relevant to the study of nonviolent action as it is to the study of military capabilities, noting how nonviolent defense and various forms of collective non-cooperation could be used to put pressure on and exact concessions from an adversary (1994:xv). He challenged the conventional wisdom that military force and the application of military power is always the most decisive determinant of conflict outcomes, but instead argued that it is *how* these capabilities are employed in the application of military and non-military power that determines their level of effectiveness.

More recently, both short-term and long-term nonviolent responses to the threat of terrorism have been examined by [Hastings \(2004\)](#) and in an edited volume by [Summy and Ram \(2008\)](#). [Kaplan \(2013a; 2013b\)](#), in his studies on civilian protection mechanisms in Syria and Colombia, makes the case that mobilized civilians may be better positioned to challenge terrorism and other violations of international

humanitarian law by armed groups. Most recently, [Bartkowski \(2015b\)](#) has written about how civilian-based defense can contribute to countering modern hybrid warfare, using the ongoing cases of the annexation of the Crimea by Russia and the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Structure and Agency

An important emphasis in the study of nonviolent resistance which distinguishes it from the social movement literature is that of agency over structure ([Chenoweth and Lewis 2013](#); [Chenoweth and Uhlfelder 2015](#)). The importance of strategy and skills to transform structural conditions is emphasized by Ackerman:

The skills involved in waging nonviolent conflict – the ability to plan, mobilize and maintain civic pressure on unjust power – can overcome structural conditions heretofore considered insurmountable. Why? Because strategies of civil resistance are incremental and their effects cumulative. The versatile use of nonviolent tactics can unfreeze unfavorable conditions and so raise the temperature underneath autocrats. ([Ackerman 2007](#):8)

Supporting these arguments, [Marchant and Puddington \(2008\)](#) compared structural conditions in 64 democratic transitions between 1975–2006 in order to evaluate “whether one can identify underlying, preexisting conditions that favor the emergence, success, or failure of [...] civic movements” ([Marchant and Puddington 2008](#):2). They found that:

Neither the political nor environmental factors examined in the study had a statistically significant impact on the success or failures of civil resistance movements. Among the major implications of this finding is that civic movements are as likely to succeed in less developed, economically poor countries as in developed, affluent societies. The study also finds no significant evidence that ethnic or religious polarization has a major impact on the possibilities for the emergence of a cohesive civic opposition. Nor does regime type seem to have an important influence on the ability of civic movements to achieve broad support. ([2008](#):1)

The only structural condition that Marchant and Puddington found to impact civic movement emergence was regime concentration for power:

The one significant factor that does emerge is government centralization. The study suggests that high degrees of centralization correlate positively with the emergence of a robust civic movement with the potential to challenge regime authority. The reverse also appears to be true: the greater the degree of government decentralization, the less likely it is that a successful movement of civic mobilization will arise. ([2008](#):1)

[Chenoweth and Stephan's research \(2011\)](#) also examines structural factors as possible explanations for their findings. In evaluating whether civil resistance campaigns can emerge and succeed against authoritarian opponents, violently repressive opponents, and powerful states, they find that while some of these structural factors can influence movement outcomes (e.g., violent repression reduced a nonviolent campaign's probability of success by approximately 35 percent), none of these structural factors are predominantly determinative of nonviolent campaign outcomes, concluding that: “The evidence suggests that civil resistance is often successful regardless of environmental conditions that many people associate with the failure of nonviolent campaigns” ([2011](#):62).

Nonviolent Action and Dependency Relationships

The efficacy of nonviolent struggle can be partly dependent on the relationships between the parties. [Galtung \(1989:19\)](#) concluded that nonviolent action is more effective when there is a shorter social distance between the “oppressed” and the “oppressor.” According to Galtung’s “great chain of nonviolence” theory, when the social distance between the two sides is relatively short (e.g., between youthful protestors and Serbian security forces, between Israeli peace activists and Israeli soldiers, between pro-civil rights whites and white police in the American South), it is easier for resisters to influence their opponent’s behavior by making appeals to common interests, norms, and affinities. When the social distance is great (e.g., between black South Africans and Afrikaaner security forces, between Tibetans and Chinese soldiers, between Palestinians and Israeli troops), nonviolent action becomes more difficult because nonviolent resisters may be seen as foreign, sub-human, or simply “different.” Social distance can result from any number of factors including racism, exclusive nationalism, ethnic polarization, dehumanization, and a propaganda that vilifies the other. Galtung argues that nonviolent action can still be effective in cases of great social distance if there are human “links,” or intermediaries, that can communicate the grievances of the oppressed group in a meaningful way to the opponent(s).

Martin and Varney made a similar argument from the perspective of communications theory. “[Oppressed people] may be able to create sympathy among third parties who themselves have more influence with the oppressors. Sometimes the chain will be a long one, with several intermediaries along the way between the oppressed and the oppressor” ([2003:138](#)).

Galtung’s chain theory highlights the important role played by third parties and external actors in situations where nonviolent resistance by the “oppressed” population alone may be insufficient to bring about power shifts between the two sides. Working with and through third parties allows the resistance to create an indirect dependency relationship with the opponent.

Also emphasizing dependency relationships, [Burrowes \(1996:266\)](#) observes that the “Achilles Heel” of some regimes is their indirect dependency on key social groups inside their own society and that of their allies. [Summy \(1994:1\)](#) concludes that the existence of “dependency relationships” between the “oppressed” and “oppressor,” much more than the character of the opponent, is indicative of the level of effectiveness that nonviolent action can have in a given situation and that the success of a nonviolent movement may rest upon the establishment of a “dependency interest,” either directly or through third parties. Such relationships do not form automatically.

Exploiting dependency relationships and establishing leverage over the opponent is, at least in part, a function of the strategy developed by a nonviolent movement. [Stephan \(2006\)](#) notes how in certain cases of colonization and foreign occupation, a movement’s adversary draws its power predominantly from the adversary’s home population as opposed to the population of the territory it occupies, and examines how dependency relationships were created, or not created, in her analysis of the nonviolent struggles against foreign occupation in Kosovo, Palestine, and East Timor.

Democratization

The longstanding critique that nonviolent action can succeed only in liberal democratic systems has been increasingly challenged by a series of empirical studies in recent years. [Summy \(1994\)](#), among

others, has addressed the historical and potential power of nonviolent action against even the most ruthless regimes.

Schock observes how the historical record actually points to the conclusion that nonviolent action has frequently contributed to democratic transitions from authoritarian and dictatorial political systems:

In fact, nonviolent action has been effective in brutally repressive contexts, and it has been ineffective in open democratic polities. Repression, of course, constrains the ability of challengers to organize, communicate, mobilize, and engage in collective action, and magnifies the risk of participation in collective action. Nevertheless, repression is only one of many factors that influence the trajectories of campaigns of nonviolent action, not the sole determinant of their trajectories. (Schock 2003:10)

Reinforcing this conclusion, [Chenoweth and Stephan \(2011:66\)](#) find that “the vast majority of nonviolent campaigns have emerged in authoritarian regimes [...] where even peaceful opposition against the government may have fatal consequences,” and that “even when we control for the target regime type, nonviolent resistance remains significant in improving the odds of success [...]. Therefore, whether the opponent is democratic or nondemocratic seems to matter little with regard to the success of nonviolent campaigns.”

[Zunes \(1994\)](#) and [Zunes, Kurtz, and Asher \(1999\)](#) note the dramatic upsurge in nonviolent movements against authoritarian regimes and the corresponding decline of armed insurrections as those struggling against autocratic governments increasingly learned to appreciate the power of nonviolent action relative to the negative consequences of armed struggle. More recently, [Chenoweth \(2015:54\)](#) notes that “the 2010–2013 period has already seen the onset of more [nonviolent] campaigns than happened in the entire decades of the 1990s [...]”

Concurrent with the increasing incidence of civil resistance movements, a growing number of scholars and diplomats concerned with democratic transitions, such as [Larry Diamond \(2008\)](#) and [Mark Palmer \(2005\)](#), have recognized the relationship between bottom-up pro-democracy movements engaged in strategic nonviolent action and the establishment of durable democracy.

Beyond the historically proven effectiveness of nonviolent action against dictatorships, Sharp argues that nonviolent action also has an inherently democratizing influence on societies in which it is used:

Nonviolent struggle [...] appears to have different long-term effects on the distribution of power within the society than does violent struggle. The nonviolent technique does not have the centralizing effects of political violence. Instead, it seems that major application of organized nonviolent struggle increases the potential for greater popular control because this type of struggle contributes to increased diffusion of effective power throughout the society. People learn how to organize themselves and how to conduct resistance against identified opponents. Therefore, people are likely to develop greater freedom of action and, consequently, less dictatorship and greater democracy. (Sharp 2005:427–8)

Sharp's argument is buttressed by the findings of [Karatnycky and Ackerman \(2005\)](#), who note how transitions in which nonviolent action was a key factor led to more and greater increases in political rights and civil liberties than transitions in which the political opposition engaged in violence. In 64 percent (32 out of 50) of the cases in which nonviolent civic resistance was identified as a key factor driving the transition, the transitions led to political systems that had high levels of respect for political rights and civil liberties. In contrast, in the cases in which opposition groups used violence, only 20

percent (4 out of 20) led to governments with high levels of respect for political rights and civil liberties. Furthermore, civic resistance campaigns led to higher increases in freedom than top-down transitions driven only by elites, of which only approximately 14 percent (2 out of 14) resulted in high levels of political rights and civil liberties

Similarly, data compiled by [Chenoweth and Stephan \(2011\)](#) show that five years after a successful nonviolent campaign, the probability of a democratic outcome is 57 percent, versus 6 percent for successful violent campaigns. Furthermore, even five years after a failed nonviolent campaign, the probability of a democratic outcome is still 35 percent, versus 4 percent for a failed violent campaign. These findings point strongly to the conclusion that nonviolent civil resistance has an inherently powerful democratizing influence, as even failed campaigns can still increase the prospects for democratic transitions.

[Bartkowski \(2015a\)](#), among others, highlights the long-term impact of unarmed resistance in democratic transitions through the role of alternative institutions and small acts of resistance in nonviolent struggles. The link between democratization and transparency is addressed by [Beyerle \(2014\)](#) in her study of 12 successful nonviolent civic movements promoting progressive political, social, and economic change by countering corruption and exacting accountability from those in power.

Nonviolent Struggle and Radical Social Change

The study of nonviolent struggle includes not just reform movements in liberal democracies or liberal democratic struggle in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian contexts, but movements advocating more radical change as well. Analysis of the use of civil disobedience within parliamentary democracies was most notably put forward by [Rawls \(1971\)](#), while [Carter \(1973; 2005\)](#) has also published two major works on this topic, the latter of which examines a wide range of predominantly nonviolent campaigns in liberal democracies, including the growing resistance to abuses by multinational corporations and global neoliberalism, and addresses theoretical issues in reference to liberal debates about the use of civil disobedience.

The case for nonviolent revolution in Western industrialized societies has been put forward by [Lakey \(1987\)](#), who – following brief summaries of “civilian insurrections” – examines what he calls “stages in the development of a mass movement from the viewpoint of an activist” (xxiv). These stages include: cultural preparation, organization building, confrontation, mass political and economic noncooperation, and the development of parallel institutions. Lakey’s combination of principled nonviolence and strategic nonviolent action follows in the tradition of [Dellinger \(1970; 1975\)](#) and other radical pacifists that can be traced as far back as the 1930s to advocates of nonviolent resistance from an anarchist perspective such as [De Ligt \(1935\)](#).

[Ritter \(2015\)](#) uses a structural and context view on nonviolent revolution that challenges the recent focus in the literatures on strategic nonviolent action for promotion of liberal democracy. There has been a related renewal of interest in nonviolent resistance in challenging neoliberalism and capitalism ([Martin 2001](#)), as well as in anti-imperialist struggles ([Johansen, Martin, and Meyer 2012](#); [Zunes 2014](#)), while [Chabot and Vinthagen \(2007\)](#) apply the revolution studies framework of John Foran to nonviolent resistance.

Women and Civil Resistance

Women have for centuries been disposed by necessity and choice to engage in strategic nonviolent action. The patriarchal biases in the international studies field which have traditionally overemphasized the role of the state and military power relative to popular movements and civil resistance have also understated the role of women in nonviolent resistance, which is finally beginning to be addressed. Nonviolent action is not constrained by the gender and age restrictions that have characterized other forms of social and political struggle, thereby allowing for greater participation and leadership by women.

[Deming \(1971\)](#) was among the first to draw the link between feminism and nonviolent action, which was subsequently expanded in collections by [Pam McAllister \(1982; 1988; 1990\)](#) which explored both theoretical analyses and case studies, noting “most of what we commonly call ‘women’s history’ is actually the history of women’s role in the development of nonviolent action” (1988:6). The often understated role of women in civil resistance campaigns is also explored in [Codur and King \(2014\)](#) and [Cortright \(2009:ch. 8\)](#)

Globalization and Transnational Advocacy Networks

Transnational advocacy networks have been defined as “networks of activists, distinguishable largely by the centrality of principled ideas or values in motivating their formation” ([Keck and Sikkink 1998:1](#)). In the late twentieth century, and particularly since the end of the Cold War, transnational advocacy networks have functioned as force multipliers for both violent and nonviolent struggles. In writing about the latter, Keck and Sikkink observe:

Complex global networks carry and reframe ideas, insert them in policy debates, pressure for regime formation, and enforce existing international norms and rules, at the same time that they try to influence particular domestic political issues [...]. Transnational value-based advocacy is particularly useful where one state is relatively immune to direct local pressure and linked activists elsewhere have better access to their own governments and to international organizations. Linking local activists with media and activists abroad can then create a characteristic “boomerang” effect, which curves around local state indifference and repression to put foreign pressure on local policy elites. (1998:200)

The “boomerang effect” describes how nonviolent action can be effective in cases where the resisting population has little or no direct leverage over the opponent. The ability of local actors to internationalize their struggle by forming functional alliances with third parties that have more direct leverage over the opponent and its allies is key to the success of nonviolent struggles in these cases. This finding is also shared by [Stephan \(2006\)](#) in her research on the role of nonviolent action in self-determination struggles.

Clifford Bob offers a critical view of the role of transnational activism in nonviolent struggles, underscoring the problem of becoming over-reliant on external actors. Bob concluded that “marketing trumps justice” when it comes to determining which local movements achieve international attention and support, since for those challenging powerful opponents, “global civil society is not an open forum marked by altruism, but a harsh, Darwinian marketplace where legions of desperate groups vie for scarce attention, sympathy, and money” (2005:2). Bob’s study, which analyzes the indigenous Ogoni movement in Nigeria and the self-determination movement in Chiapas (among other places), highlights both the positive benefits and the great dangers involved when local groups seek to work with and through global NGOs. Increased publicity, greater access to resources, and protection for local activists

are a few of the advantages of linking up with global networks. However, distortion of the movement's principles and the loss of local legitimacy can result if a local challenge group focuses too much on winning external allies (2005:1). Bob's research highlights the importance of strategic framing, "branding," and nonmilitary forms of external support (such as awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize) to a local movement's ability to help them achieve international status.

And important edited volume by [Howard Clark \(2009\)](#) examines various forms of transnational support for resistance campaigns as well as possible problems and advantages. Among the issues are the ways in which some transnational advocacy networks have received criticism for effectively domineering local organizers and therefore having a disempowering impact on the struggles which they intend to support. The study asserts that the primary role for transnational solidarity is to strengthen the power of those resisting domination and oppression.

Support for Nonviolent Movements by Foreign Governments

Potentially more problematic than transnational advocacy network support is when foreign governments become actively involved in supporting nonviolent movements. [Zunes \(2008\)](#) observes how large bureaucratic governments accustomed to projecting political power through military force or elite diplomatic channels have little understanding or appreciation of nonviolent action or any other kind of mass popular struggle, much less have the ability to go into a foreign country and recruit or mobilize the large numbers of ordinary civilians necessary to build a movement capable of effectively challenging the established political leadership. Furthermore, [Zunes and Ibrahim \(2009\)](#) note that, given the history of US interventionism in developing countries, even limited American support can serve to hurt the credibility of a nonviolent movement challenging an authoritarian regime, particularly if the movement's legitimacy rests in part on its "anti-imperialist" credentials. Zunes and Ibrahim do, however, recognize certain specific areas in which external actors can play a positive role in supporting nonviolent movements, such as through capacity-building INGOs engaging in education and training.

[Ackerman and Glennon \(2007\)](#) address the legal questions regarding foreign support for nonviolent pro-democracy struggles, arguing for the legitimacy of foreign support on the grounds that a nation's sovereignty ultimately rests with the people, not a particular regime. [Wilson \(2015\)](#) presents a legal perspective for why there may be a right for external actors to provide some forms of assistance to civil resistance movements and why civil resistance movements may have a right to receive such support.

Overall, comparative studies by [Nepstad \(2011\)](#) and [Clark \(2009\)](#) find little evidence to show that actions by foreign powers have made a significant difference in the outcome of civil insurrections. [Chenoweth and Stephan \(2011:59\)](#) examine the impact of funding and diplomatic support from external states to nonviolent campaigns and find no correlation with the outcomes of nonviolent campaigns.

Nonviolent Third-Party Intervention

A relatively new focus of research has been the phenomenon of nonviolent third-party intervention, in which an outside group nonviolently intervenes in an ongoing conflict in either a partisan or nonpartisan manner.

One of the first major studies appeared in [Hare and Blumberg \(1977\)](#) and examined nonviolent intervention to prevent violent conflict, such as in the case of the response by the Gandhian peace brigade (*Shanti Sena*) to the 1969 Ahmedabad riots. [Weber \(1996\)](#) examines the Gandhian notion of

having a nonviolent force rather than an armed police or military to prevent communal violence and other threats to public order.

[Mahony and Eguren \(1997\)](#) have produced an authoritative study based on more recent cases of nonviolent third-party intervention. They examine the role of Peace Brigades International in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Sri Lanka in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Based upon interviews with those on the ground – including Guatemalan generals connected with right-wing death squads – the authors make a strong case for the deterrent role such interventions can play. [Moser-Puangsuwan and Weber's \(2000\)](#) edited volume analyzes different kinds of nonviolent interventions going back to the early twentieth century, providing accounts of a variety of transnational actors in providing assistance, protecting endangered individuals, witnessing human rights abuses, and promoting reconciliation and development. Other important contributions include [Clark \(2009\)](#), [Schweitzer \(2010\)](#), and [Dudouet \(2015b\)](#).

Power Asymmetries and Negotiations

[Nagler \(2004:108\)](#) has argued for a three-phase “escalation curve” of nonviolent conflict. This curve uses dehumanization as the parameter of intensity, plotted against time, and escalates in three stages whereby a person or group can first employ techniques of conflict resolution (mediation, etc.), but if they fail then escalate to concrete acts of nonviolent resistance which may, *in extremis*, even require the risk or actual laying down of one's life.

Ackerman and Kruegler write that negotiation and compromise “may or may not accompany conflicts prosecuted through nonviolent action, just as they may or may not accompany conflicts prosecuted through violent action” ([1994:5](#)). Although nonviolent direct action often accompanies (or is accompanied by) negotiations between representatives of the challenge group and its adversary, these authors nevertheless emphasize that “nonviolent action is a means for prosecuting conflict and should be distinguished from the means of conflict resolution.”

[Finnegan and Hackley \(2008\)](#) write about intersectionality and complementarity of the fields of negotiations and nonviolent action, pointing to how strategies of negotiations and nonviolent action can be synergistic when used in a conflict.

The problem posed by power asymmetries in resolving, or transforming, conflicts is addressed by Rubin and Salacuse, who write that, “without exaggeration, it can be said that the problem of negotiation under conditions of power inequality is one of the toughest problems currently confronting scholars in this area” ([1990:26](#)). These negotiations theorists and others have concluded that differences in power influence the trajectories and outcomes of negotiations, including whether or not they take place in the first place. At the same time, empirical studies reveal that so-called “weaker parties” are not as weak as one might think. Rubin and Salacuse presented 13 strategies that weaker powers have used against stronger powers in negotiations in order to transform power relationships.

Past cases of popular nonviolent struggle, such as the Indian Independence movement, nevertheless reveal that stronger opponents can use negotiations as a means to stall, and even to thwart, active nonviolent resistance. Ackerman and Kruegler found that so-called “benign” adversaries, who were skillful in the use of nonviolent sanctions, including negotiations, were more effective in the longer term than those who relied on brute force alone to put down nonviolent insurrections. “[The] so-called

'benign' adversaries who use their violent weapons sparingly and skillfully (even in conjunction with their own nonviolent sanctions) may be the more formidable foes" (1994:322). These authors found that military opponents generally do better using guile rather than military might. When the opponent is not forced to choose between repression and acquiescence and can keep steady pressure on the popular resistance, they generally outperform nonviolent movements. Military opponents have been shown to grant concessions only to take them back later. One of the most difficult tasks for nonviolent strategists, therefore, "is to maintain successes won through accommodation" (1994:325).

Galtung has written extensively about protracted conflicts characterized by gross structural imbalances between state and nonstate actors. In these types of asymmetric conflicts, conflict "resolution" is much less likely than conflict "transformation." Galtung calls for "nonviolent action that goes beyond peaceful dialogue in order to generate conflict so that the underlying injustice and exploitation become explicit" and states that a revolutionary transformation is needed that "requires the elimination or substantial modification of economic, social, and extreme disparities in levels of political privilege and opportunity" (1989:21).

A number of studies of nonviolent movements have stressed not just non-cooperation with unjust institutions but the creation of alternative institutions (Gandhi 1958; Lakey 1987) through what Gandhi referred to as a "Constructive Program." While less dramatic and non-confrontational when compared with other forms of nonviolent resistance, indeed partly because of these characteristics, a constructive program can have a significant and at times crucial insurrectionary potential – the classic example being the cottage spinning industry set up by Gandhi and his followers to break one aspect of the dependency on British manufactures that the Raj had artificially created. The establishment of alternative institutions in major nonviolent resistance campaigns is based not simply on Gandhian or other pacifist principles, but as a strategic means of undermining illegitimate rule and establishing the basis of self-reliance, as illustrated during the first Palestinian intifada which began in 1987. Rigby (1991; 2015) and King (2007) recount how, cut off from the normal infrastructure services of Israeli society and/or refusing to avail themselves of them – and largely cut off from one another – Palestinians established parallel institutions, services, and infrastructure, including running clandestine schools, caring for the children of imprisoned parents, and organizing autonomous collectives centered around growing vegetables, making clothing and other necessities, and providing medical support. Similarly, in his study of the resistance by Kosovar Albanians to Serbian rule prior to the rise of the armed insurgency, Clark (2000) examines the extensive parallel educational system and parallel government developed during the 1990s. This potential for broader social change, by which through nonviolence training and self-help organizations activists could experiment and develop new knowledge and skills for societal transformation, is explored by Lakey (1987) and Ebert (1983).

Civil Resistance and Armed Struggle

In maximalist struggles against dictatorships, colonial rule, and foreign military occupation, there is often a mixture of armed and unarmed resistance by the subjugated population. Recent additions to the literature have examined how they impact on one another, addressing such issues as the impact of radical flanks, violent components within largely nonviolent campaigns, nonviolent components within largely violent campaigns, and longitudinal transitions between violent and nonviolent strategies.

Bartkowski (2013), in an edited volume, examines 15 cases of national liberation movements – most of which are best known for the armed components of the resistance – which actually had significant, if

often overlooked, nonviolent components. In addition to examining the successes and failures of nonviolent strategy and tactics in these struggles, often concomitant with simultaneous guerrilla warfare, it examines the role of civil resistance in influencing the national identities and nascent state institutions and the reasons why this history has been so often ignored.

[Chenoweth and Schock \(2015\)](#) look at the unarmed resistance campaigns and the effects of simultaneous armed resistance on its chances of success. Challenging the notion that a “radical flank” can help the more moderate nonviolent forces, the study finds no independent and direct effect on the outcome of the struggle and does find an indirect negative effect of reducing popular participation, which is a key variable in the success of otherwise unarmed campaigns. They conclude that the political effects of violent flanks are unpredictable, and that nonviolent campaigns often succeed despite the presence of simultaneous armed campaigns, not because of them.

A collection edited by [Dudouet \(2015a\)](#) looks at eight cases (Western Sahara, West Papua, Palestine, South Africa, Mexico, Colombia, Egypt, and Nepal) where primarily armed movements made the transition to largely nonviolent methods. The study investigates the decision-making process, rationale, and determining factors which underlie the strategic shifts of armed movements from violent to nonviolent resistance, focusing in particular on the internal and relational factors which impact upon the decision-making process, including changes in leadership, a pragmatic reassessment of the goals and means of insurgency, the search for new allies at home and abroad, and the cross-border emulation of new repertoires of action.

Collections, Case Studies, and Databases

[Ackerman and DuVall \(2000\)](#) produced the most detailed narrative of twentieth-century nonviolent struggles by examining the 1905 Russian Revolution, Gandhi's campaign for Indian independence, the Solidarity movement in Poland, the Danish resistance to the Nazi occupation, Argentine and Chilean resistance to military dictatorship, the US civil rights struggle, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, the first Palestinian intifada, the struggle against the Marcos regime in the Philippines, and the struggle against communist rule in China, Eastern Europe, and Mongolia. [Roberts and Garton Ash's \(2009\)](#) edited volume includes detailed analysis of 19 cases of nonviolent movements examining the complex interrelationship between civil resistance and other dimensions of power, including whether civil resistance could potentially replace armed struggle completely or as a phenomenon that operates in conjunction with power politics. The cases include India (1917–47), the US civil rights movement (1945–70), Northern Ireland (1967–72), Czechoslovakia (1968–89), Portugal (1974–5), Iran (1977–9), Chile (1983–8), China (1989), Kosovo (1990–8), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Burma (2007). [Sharp \(2005\)](#) recounts 23 case studies of nonviolent movements in the twentieth century, including Russia (1905), Germany (1920), Northwest Frontier Province (India) (1930–4), Norway (1942), Berlin (1943), Guatemala (1944), France (1961), United Farm Workers labor campaign (US) (1965–70), Czechoslovakia (1968–9), Namibia (1971–2), Argentina (1977–83), South Africa (1984–7), Latvia (1991), Serbia (2000), and others.

[Zunes, Kurtz, and Asher's \(1999\)](#) edited volume includes case studies from Brazil, the Niger Delta, South Africa, Eastern Europe, Thailand, Burma, the Philippines, Palestine, as well as the American peace movement and the alternative movement in West Germany, and includes analysis of the growth of nonviolent movements globally. The one-volume encyclopedia of nonviolent action edited by [Powers](#)

[and Vogele \(1997\)](#) summarizes 104 key nonviolent action campaigns, examining the organizations and individuals in leadership as well as the methods of protest.

[Carter \(2012\)](#) analyzes unarmed insurrections in Iran in the late 1970s, Latin America and Asia in the 1980s, Africa from 1989 to 1992, in Eastern Europe in 1989, in former Soviet states after 2000, and the 2011 Arab uprisings, assessing how various global trends, such as international law and the growth of international governmental organizations, global civil society, and new media impact nonviolent movements.

In addition to a broad array of studies of pro-democracy movements in individual countries, there have been a number of recent comparative collections by region, including the anti-communist ([Kenney 2002](#)) and postcommunist ([Bunche and Wolchik 2011](#)) struggles in Eastern Europe, struggles in the Middle East ([Stephan 2009](#)), and Africa ([Press 2015](#)), as well as earlier works on Latin America ([Parkman 1990](#); [McManus and Schlabach 1991](#)).

The most recent and complete annotated bibliographies are [Carter, Clark, and Randle \(2006; 2013\)](#) and [McCarthy and Sharp \(1997\)](#). These contain case studies of nonviolent struggle categorized by geographical regions as well as by issue areas such as social and economic justice, the environment, civil rights, peace, labor, women's rights, student rights, and other categories which are too numerous to include in this compendium. The Carter, Clark, and Randle collection is being periodically updated and is available online.

An important recent development in the study of nonviolent action has been the emergence of data collections. These include two quantitative data collection projects at the University of Denver: the Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) Data Project, a multi-level data collection effort that catalogs major nonviolent and violent resistance campaigns around the globe since 1900, and the Major Episodes of Contention (MEC) collection, which takes into account a wider array of observable, continuous, coordinated, purposive mass events in pursuit of a political objective since 1945. Another significant project is the Global Nonviolent Action Database (GNAD) at Swarthmore College, which includes both data and short narratives of hundreds of completed nonviolent struggles cataloged by country, by issue, by action method used, and by year.

Future Directions: Research Topics

Compared with strategic studies in the military field, the field of strategic nonviolent action is relatively young and there is great need for further empirical research.

[Bartkowski's \(2013\)](#) book on nonviolent components of what have traditionally been seen as almost exclusively armed struggles is a reminder of the poor historiography which may require new qualitative studies of what actually happened in some struggles, along with reassessments of significance – especially where theory developed based on misperceptions.

One important topic includes the role of elite decision making, in terms of how the actions and decisions of elites are influenced or constrained by nonviolent movements. Other topics include how societies divided by ethnicity or other cleavages unify to form mass movements, and how movements in diverse societies can negotiate with allies to form coalitions.

There is also the phenomenon of communications and media. In this area there are questions regarding how movements create their own media, how communications can be used to create greater unity, and how communications can be used to bridge social distance between different groups. The role of “digital resistance,” specifically how nonviolent movements are using/leveraging new technology (internet, mobile phone, satellite, etc.) in their movements, is becoming increasingly important as well.

Of particular interest to scholars of international relations are questions related to how nonviolent movements struggle against various kinds of oppressive regimes, such as the challenges posed to nonviolent movements in rentier states where those in power are not predominantly dependent on their own population's obedience because of external support. New research into how nonviolent action can be used to struggle against corruption and for transparency within regimes is also needed.

There are also some important questions regarding capacity building and expanding political space in highly oppressive societies. In more open societies, there are questions regarding how nonviolent movements interact and build coalitions with traditional political elites, the role of nonviolent movements in traditional election campaigns, and how nonviolent action can be used in conjunction with other conventional civic, legal, or political activity.

Given the problems with military responses to terrorism, additional research into the role of nonviolent action in fighting and reducing terrorism is needed.

Some important legal questions need to be addressed, such as whether there is a right for people to rise up nonviolently when their fundamental human rights are being denied and, if so, what the limits of that right are and how such a right would be protected. Related questions involve whether external assistance to nonviolent movements constitutes a violation of sovereignty and whether governments have the right to embargo information about civilian-based resistance strategies from crossing their borders. This raises larger theoretical questions of whether sovereignty resides in a head of state or the people as a whole.

While the success of nonviolent movements against centralized states has been well documented, more problematic are circumstances where the repression is not centralized in the state apparatus. This would include situations where guerilla, paramilitary, criminal groups or death squads, with or without government acquiescence, can suppress nonviolent resistance groups. There have been some intriguing case studies of successful uses of strategic nonviolent action in such fragmented tyrannies in West Africa and in Colombia, but more systematic research is needed.

Other areas deserving greater research also include the use of civil resistance against other nonstate actors; the relationship between negotiations and nonviolent action; a further assessment on whether violent flanks hurt nonviolent movements; transitions from mass protests to conventional political processes; the sequencing of tactics; the role of counter-movements; and monitoring and evaluation of impact of knowledge on strategic nonviolent action.

SEE ALSO: [Globalization and Human Rights](#); [Insurgency and Counterinsurgency](#); [Nationalism as a Social Movement](#); [Transnational Social Movements](#); [Utilitarianism and International Ethics](#); [War, Conflict, and Human Rights](#).

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Online Resources

International Center on Nonviolent Conflict. At www.nonviolent-conflict.org, accessed May 2015. The website for the US-based International Center on Nonviolent Conflict includes: access to online articles; a catalog of books, DVDs, and other resources (including a simulation game); information about the organization; and an interactive world map with information on nonviolent struggles – both historical and current – in scores of countries around the world.

The Albert Einstein Institution. At www.aeinstein.org, accessed May 2015. The website for the Albert Einstein Institution, a nonprofit organization advancing the study and use of strategic nonviolent action in conflicts throughout the world, founded by Gene Sharp, offers a complete catalog of Sharp's voluminous writings – including extensive translations – and other published works, as well as information on conferences, consultations, and workshops.

A Force More Powerful. At www.aforcemorepowerful.org, accessed May 2015. An online catalog of books, DVDs, curricula guides, and a simulation game, including the award-winning PBS series by that name, as well as links to downloadable books, organizations, and websites concerned with nonviolent action, and other resources.

Canvasopedia. At www.canvasopedia.org/, accessed May 2015. This project of the Serbian-based Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies (CANVAS), founded by veterans of the Otpor pro-democracy movement, includes a nonviolent action dictionary and detailed sources of information on sources of power, the “pillars of support” of an autocratic regime, and methods of nonviolent action.

Civil Resistance Information. At www.civilresistance.info, accessed May 2015. An independent website designed to promote understanding of and research on civil resistance and nonviolent struggle; includes essays, books, and extensive annotated bibliographies, drawing from:

- 1. Carter, A., Clark, H., and Randle, M. (2006) *People Power and Protest since 1945: A Bibliography of Nonviolent Action*. London: Housmans. <http://civilresistance.info/bibliography>.
- 2. Carter, A., Clark, H., and Randle, M. (2013) *A Guide to Civil Resistance: A Bibliography of People Power and Nonviolent Protest*. London: Green Print. <http://civilresistance.info/bibliography>.

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