Brian Martin
"The effectiveness of nonviolent action," chapter 3 of
Nonviolence Unbound
(Sparsnäs, Sweden: Irene Publishing, 2015),
available at http://www.bmartin.cc/pubs/15nvu/

3
The effectiveness of nonviolent action

Nonviolent action has been used on countless occasions. Just think of strikes by workers in support of better wages and conditions, protests against corruption, and dissidents speaking out against repressive governments. With so many cases, it might seem easy to figure out whether nonviolent action is effective, and furthermore whether it is more effective than violence, conventional political action or other options. Actually, though, assessing effectiveness is not as straightforward as it might seem.

Consider the case of a building site in which a worker is seriously hurt. The other workers stay on the site but refuse to continue with a particular task until safety is improved. Management promises to fix the problem and the workers return to the job. Nonviolent action — in the form of a refusal to work — seems to have been effective.

Examples like this are common and unremarkable. Nonviolent action in these sorts of cases is effective in achieving the goals of those taking action.

However, in some cases workers take action but are unsuccessful. The workers go on strike for higher pay but the owner refuses to budge, and brings in other workers — strike-breakers — to do the work. The striking workers lose their jobs. Does this mean nonviolent action is ineffective?

The obvious answer is that strikes are sometimes effective in achieving the goals of the strikers, but sometimes not. This is just like other types of action, such as talking to the owner (negotiation), using a formal labour disputes mechanism (conventional action), or threatening to kidnap the owner's family (violence). Each such method is sometimes successful and sometimes not. So what does it mean to say that nonviolent action is or isn't effective?

To say something is effective is to say that it does the job, achieving the goal. However, this never happens in the abstract. It might be effective to eat peas with a fork — namely, people can do it with ease — but skills are required.

The more complex and uncertain the task, and the more training, technology and skills required, the more it makes sense to compare methods of doing the job and choosing the one that works best. For a child, it's easier to eat peas with a spoon or with fingers. For a knee cartilage problem, maybe it would be better to postpone surgery and use physiotherapy instead, or investigate different surgeons, or get a second opinion before proceeding. Each of the options has costs and benefits, and there is no guarantee of success, only a probability.

The same applies to major uses of nonviolent action. It is not guaranteed to succeed, and it makes sense to compare it to alternatives such as doing nothing or using violence.

There's another complication. In many struggles, nonviolent action is one of the methods used — but others are used as well. Consider for example the struggle in East

Timor against the Indonesian military invasion and occupation between 1975 and 1999. The East Timorese resistance was initially primarily through armed struggle: a war against the Indonesian forces. Some key figures in exile, most prominently José Ramos-Horta, attempted to persuade foreign governments to take action against the occupation. The United Nations General Assembly passed a motion condemning the Indonesian government's annexation of East Timor. Finally, there were nonviolent protests, for example rallies, especially in the capital city, Dili. Following a change of government in Indonesia in 1998, the East Timorese were allowed to vote on independence. After they overwhelmingly voted yes, militias sponsored by the Indonesian government went on a destructive spree that was only stopped after UN military intervention.[1]

It's not easy to separate out the different methods of struggle and assess their effectiveness. Armed struggle in the decade after 1975 seemed to fail entirely: Indonesian troops were victorious and up to a third of the East Timorese population was killed or died of starvation. By comparison, the persistent diplomatic efforts of José Ramos-Horta and others in the East Timorese government

1 See, for example, Steve Cox and Peter Carey, *Generations of Resistance: East Timor* (London: Cassell, 1995); James Dunn, *East Timor: A Rough Passage to Independence,* 3rd ed. (Sydney: Longueville Books, 2003); Don Greenlees and Robert Garran, *Deliverance: The Inside Story of East Timor's Fight for Freedom* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2002); Constâncio Pinto and Matthew Jardine, *East Timor's Unfinished Struggle: Inside the Timorese Resistance* (Boston: South End Press, 1997).

in exile seemed on the surface to be more successful. Only one government — that of Australia — recognised the Indonesian government's formal annexation of East Timor: all others rejected this as illegal. Nevertheless, this diplomatic disapproval was not enough on its own to bring about East Timorese independence. But it is hard to disentangle the effects of the different methods used. Perhaps the armed struggle maintained the morale of the East Timorese, enabling nonviolent resistance by a new generation. Perhaps the seemingly fruitless diplomatic efforts helped sensitise foreign governments to the plight of the East Timorese, thereby making the 1999 UN intervention more likely.

All that can be said for sure is that in the East Timorese struggle for independence against the Indonesian invasion and occupation, various different methods were used, including armed struggle, nonviolent protest and diplomatic efforts. To this could be added many forms of conventional awareness-raising in countries around the world, especially by solidarity groups and sympathetic journalists and politicians, in Australia, Portugal and a few other places. Their efforts included leaflets, talks, meetings, discussions, media stories and solidarity protests.

In the East Timor case, like many others, separating out the role of nonviolent action is not easy. There is another factor that complicates the issue — but, curiously, also makes things clearer.

When a combination of methods is used in a struggle, one particular mode usually receives most of the attention. Consider a rally with 1000 participants, of whom 995 listen, sing and cheer. However, five of the participants

start fighting police, throwing punches and bricks, and are arrested. In media reports, it is almost certain that this rally will be portrayed as violent, with all the attention on the five violent individuals. The other 995 will be ignored. They might have been peaceful but, because the five upstaged them, they are considered to be part of a violent rally.

In 1987 in Palestine, there was a sudden collective uprising — called the intifada — by Palestinians against Israeli rule. This included a range of methods, including rallies, boycotts of Israeli products and businesses, home-based education systems (after the Israeli government shut down schools) — and throwing stones at Israeli troops. Of all the numerous methods used, only throwing stones involved physical violence; all the others could be called methods of nonviolent action. Some scholars have called this an "unarmed struggle," because the Palestinians used no weapons such as guns or bombs.[2] Furthermore, stone-throwing seldom hurt any Israelis — it was primarily a symbolic form of resistance. (In the second intifada, starting in 2000, Palestinians used missiles and suicide bombers, much more obviously violent means.) Is it reasonable to call this a nonviolent struggle, because nearly all the methods used did not involve physical violence? Many Israelis saw the first intifada as violent: they focused on the throwing of stones. In terms of the means for violence, it was quite an unequal struggle, given that Israeli troops had automatic rifles, explosives and tanks. Deciding whether the first intifada was nonviolent

2 Andrew Rigby, *Living the Intifada* (London: Pluto, 1991).

is not straightforward given the unequal media coverage to different forms of action.

In the 1990s, members of Whistleblowers Australia were concerned about the way employers sent whistleblowing workers to psychiatrists as a means of discrediting the workers and providing a pretext for firing them. Over a period of several months the group collected stories from whistleblowers, produced an information sheet, wrote letters, sent out newsletters — and, on one occasion, organised a small protest outside the agency where the dubious psychiatric assessments were made. Should this campaign be thought of as primarily using conventional means of raising awareness, or does the one rally mean the campaign was built around nonviolent action?

The rally was more visible than all the other efforts of the group, and also more dramatic, hence capturing attention. It was more memorable for most of those involved.

In many nonviolent actions, there is a lot of behind-the-scenes work.[3] To organise a rally, this might mean choosing a venue, arranging speakers, preparing flyers, putting out media releases and arranging for equipment such as loudspeaker systems. For large rallies, there can be an enormous amount of such logistical work, including arranging transport, training crowd monitors and dealing with media. The speakers at the rally receive most of the

3 Schweik Action Wollongong, "Behind the activism," 2010, http://www.bmartin.cc/others/SAW10.pdf

attention but usually others have done far more work, most of which is invisible.

The same amount of behind-the-scenes work is required for armed struggle. Think of cooks, accountants, maintenance workers, cleaners, communications specialists and others who are never near the front lines.

Thus, there are three important factors to consider when judging whether a campaign should be characterised as armed struggle, nonviolent action, conventional political action, community organising or something else. The first is that most struggles involve a variety of methods. The second is that there is nearly always a lot of behind-the-scenes work in major actions: what people see is the tip of an iceberg of effort. The third is that campaigns are commonly interpreted in terms of the most dramatic methods used. All these factors make it more difficult to assess the effectiveness of nonviolent action, because it is not something easily separated out from everything else that is going on.

I'm going to follow the standard way of classifying campaigns, which is to look at the most common method used as a front-line engagement with opponents. This means setting aside, for the purposes of classification, most of the behind-the-scenes work, which might be called organising, and focusing on what is most visible to opponents and observers. In violent action, often called armed struggle, there is a significant amount of force and violence used. In nonviolent action, also called civil resistance or people power, there is little or no violent action and significant amounts of protest, noncooperation and intervention. In conventional political action, there is

little or no violent or nonviolent action and significant amounts of lobbying, campaigning, electioneering, advertising and voting.

It is important to note that to call a campaign nonviolent refers only to the primary mode of the campaigners. The opponents — most commonly governments, including police or military troops acting on behalf of the government — may use violence, and often do. The campaigners might be beaten and arrested, so it seems to be a violent interaction. It is, but if all the violence is by the police, the campaign can legitimately be called nonviolent.

In some campaigns, activists intentionally remain nonviolent, whereas in others, it just so happens that activists do not use violence, even though they have no explicit commitment to nonviolence. Thus in practice nonviolent action can be a conscious choice made in advance or an almost inadvertent outcome arising out of the circumstances.

Examples

The question here: "Is nonviolent action effective?" Providing examples of nonviolent campaigns is one way to respond to this question. The ending of communist rule in East Germany in 1989 is one such example. There was no armed struggle. The main protest methods were rallies and emigration. East Germans previously could not leave the country without permission. However, the government of Hungary opened the border to West Germany, so East Germans could leave via Hungary — and many did. In late 1989, small rallies were held, and very soon they

became much larger. East German leaders decided not to use force, as the reliability of the troops was uncertain. In a matter of months, the leaders resigned. Thus the East German communist state, maintained by a powerful military apparatus and a pervasive police presence with extensive surveillance, did not survive a peaceful uprising.[4]

These sorts of examples are commonly used by proponents of nonviolent action. They show that nonviolent action *can be* successful. These examples usually involve:

- lots of nonviolent action, usually visible and dramatic
- little or no violence (or, alternatively, prior unsuccessful armed struggle)
- a powerful, ruthless opponent, sometimes backed by other powerful groups
- overthrow or collapse of the powerful opponent.

The East German example displays each of these features. The rallies against the regime were visible and dramatic (whereas emigration, also a method of resistance, is less often mentioned). There was no armed resistance. The East German state was powerful and ruthless — and it collapsed in a matter of a few months of anti-government protest.

4 Karl-Dieter Opp, Peter Voss and Christiane Gern, *Origins of a Spontaneous Revolution: East Germany, 1989* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

These four features of the East Germany case are regularly found in other examples because they highlight the strengths of nonviolent action and challenge usual assumptions about it. Having lots of nonviolent action is crucial in order to identify the example as centrally about nonviolent action. It is necessary that there be little or no violence, because otherwise the case might seem to show the success of *violent* action. The existence of a powerful, ruthless opponent is useful for challenging the common assumption that the only possible way to confront violence is with superior counter-violence. Finally, success of the campaign is needed to cement the message about the value of nonviolent action.

From the point of view of international relations scholars in the realist tradition, the collapse of East German communist regime says nothing at all about the power of nonviolent action, because they focus instead on structural conditions, such as the withdrawal of Soviet guarantees for the East German regime.[5] In much international relations scholarship, people's action is either invisible or an afterthought.

In this context, it is hardly surprising that the most frequently mentioned examples of nonviolent action are chosen in part because they counter assumptions about violence versus nonviolence. Some of these examples are:

- The US civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, in which blacks (with support from some whites) used boycotts, sit-ins, strikes and other methods to challenge the entrenched system of racial discrimination called segregation
- The Indian independence movement from the 1920s to the 1940s, in which rallies, marches, civil disobedience and numerous other methods were used to challenge British rule
- The Philippines popular protests against dictator Ferdinand Marcos, who was ousted in 1986
- The Serbian people's campaign against dictatorial president Slobodan Milošević, who was forced from office in 2000
- The South African people's campaign, with international support, to get rid of the system of white racial domination called apartheid, which finally succeeded in the early 1990s

5 Ralph Summy and Michael E. Salla (eds.), *Why the Cold War Ended: A Range of Interpretations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995).

Dozens of other examples could be mentioned, but these will do for the purpose of illustrating their typical features.

- The campaigns were largely nonviolent in the period before ultimate success, though some of them contained significant armed resistance, usually separate in location (as in the Philippines) or time (as in South Africa)
- The campaigns were successful. The effectiveness of nonviolent action is hardly likely to be shown through failed campaigns.
- The campaigns challenged powerful opponents. Overthrowing ruthless dictators is especially impressive.

- The stories told about these campaigns are usually short, leaving out much of the detail, complexity and contradictions. Short accounts are useful for getting the central message across, but may simplify and distort the events. (The same could be said about any short account of an historical event.)

It is certainly true that nonviolent campaigns can sometimes be unsuccessful, just as military campaigns or election campaigns are sometimes unsuccessful. A few of these failed campaigns are regularly mentioned.

- In 1989, there was a nonviolent uprising in Beijing, China, centred in Tiananmen Square, called the pro-democracy movement. It seemed like it might ignite a serious challenge to the government, but instead it was brutally crushed.
- The 1987–1993 intifada stimulated a so-called "peace process" but did not lead to autonomy for the Palestinians.
- In Burma, a nonviolent movement led by Aung San Suu Kyi challenged the government over a period of decades.

These unsuccessful movements seem to be regularly mentioned because they seem so courageous against an overwhelmingly powerful opponent. In the case of China, there was no armed resistance to the government, so nonviolent protest seemed like the best prospect for change. In Palestine, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation had previously relied on terrorist attacks to challenge Israeli rule, but completely failed. The intifada seemed to

pose a much greater threat, and generated much international sympathy and support. In Burma, the military government has been excessively brutal; the nonviolent opposition, occurring mainly in the cities, was seen as a far more promising form of resistance than the armed struggle occurring in rural areas.

In summary, there are good reasons why the same examples of nonviolent struggle are repeatedly told. Most of them are success stories, with a feel-good factor from oppressed groups winning against brutal opponents. The stories provide a challenge to the usual assumption that a ruthless government can always win against peaceful protesters. Finally, some stories become established as traditional favourites because they involve challenges that do not threaten the interests of currently dominant groups. The US civil rights movement is the prime example: because racial equality is now accepted policy (though far from a full reality), the success of the movement resonates with dominant liberal values. Media coverage contributes to the attention given to chosen stories such as the Philippines people-power movement and the US civil rights movement.

On the other hand, many major nonviolent campaigns are largely unknown, for example ones in Bolivia 1985, Ecuador 2005, Iceland 2008–9, Morocco 1999–2005 and Nepal 2010.[6] There are several possible reasons.

6 For other examples, see Maciej J. Bartkowski (ed.), *Recovering Nonviolent History: Civil Resistance in Liberation Struggles* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013).

- They have not been adequately documented.
- They have not been popularised.
- They led to an outcome unwelcome to dominant groups.
- They conflict with standard ways of thinking about politics.
- They are too ambiguous to provide a clear message.

For example, there are dozens of cases of the nonviolent overthrow of dictatorships in Africa and Latin America.[7] Few scholars have studied these cases, and these areas of the world are not often reported by the international media (except for a few countries such as South Africa, Egypt and Cuba).[8]

Many countries in South and Central America have been subject to US imperial control, through military interventions and corporate domination. Challenges to this control are hence less likely to be lauded in the US. Furthermore, the dominant story of resistance is armed struggle, on the model of Cuba and the Marxist-inspired approach of Ché Guevara, namely guerrilla struggle. This

7 See, for example, Patricia Parkman, *Insurrectionary Civic Strikes in Latin America 1931–1961* (Cambridge, MA: Albert Einstein Institution, 1990); Stephen Zunes, "Unarmed insurrections against authoritarian governments in the Third World: a new kind of revolution," *Third World Quarterly,* vol. 15, no. 3, 1994, pp. 403–426.

8 Many of the world's most deadly conflicts are ignored by the western media. See Virgil Hawkins, *Stealth Conflicts: How the World's Worst Violence Is Ignored* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008). Nonviolent struggles are usually even less visible.

means that Latin American scholars have neglected nonviolent struggles. Who, for example, has heard of the nonviolent overthrow of the dictatorial regime in El Salvador in 1944?[9]

The military coup in Chile in 1973 is widely known. It was against the democratically elected government of Salvadore Allende. The coup was seen in left circles as a prime example of US covert operations against left-wing foreign governments. However, relatively few people know about the people's challenge to the subsequent regime led by Augusto Pinochet. This was a nonviolent struggle against a ruthless ruler, and it was successful.[10] It failed to gain visibility for several reasons. US leaders would hardly want to hold it up as an example, because it would remind audiences of the US government role in installing Pinochet in the first place. In "progressive" circles, especially in Latin America where Marxism has been a standard framework, nonviolent struggle does not fit the usual model by which change occurs. Another obstacle to recognition was that the struggle occurred over several years. Unlike East Germany in 1989 or Egypt in 2011, there was no dramatic confrontation to transfix media attention.

9 Patricia Parkman, *Nonviolent Insurrection in El Salvador: The Fall of Maximiliano Hernández Martínez* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1988).

10 Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 279–302.

Then there is Iran. The Iranian revolution of 1978–1979 was a dramatic demonstration of the power of nonviolent action. The Shah of Iran at the time ruled the country as a classic dictator, ruthlessly repressing opposition, including with the use of torture by the feared secret police Savak. The regime was highly armed. It was supported by all relevant international players, including the governments of the United States, Soviet Union, Israel and other Middle East countries. In the face of this formidable opposition, the popular movement succeeded largely through nonviolent means, including rallies and strikes — and despite significant numbers of peaceful protesters being shot dead.

Although the Iranian revolution is a prime case of the success of nonviolent action against a highly repressive government, it is seldom raised as an example, for two main reasons. The first is that the Shah was a favourite among western governments. (He had been brought to power in 1954 through a CIA-supported coup against an elected government.) The second is that the revolution, rather than leading to greater freedom, was followed by a different sort of dictatorial regime, an Islamic government headed by Ayatollah Khomeini.

The Iranian revolution thus provides two important lessons, first that a nonviolent movement can succeed against a highly repressive regime and second that successful nonviolent campaigns are not guaranteed to lead to a better society. This is a challenging set of messages to get across, which may explain why the Iranian revolution is seldom used as an example — especially since the

Iranian government in subsequent years was demonised by the US, Israeli and other governments.

Rather than introduce such a challenging case study, it's easier to stick with stories with a simple plot and happy ending, like the US civil rights movement or the end of apartheid in South Africa. And what's wrong with that?

For the purposes of illustrating the potential power of nonviolent action, the classic examples are fine. They get the message across that there is such as thing as nonviolent action and that it can be effective against powerful opponents. They show that nonviolent action can succeed against opponents holding a far greater capacity to use violence.

However, sticking only to the classic examples can limit a greater understanding. The more complex and ambiguous cases, and failed struggles, are valuable for those who want to probe more deeply into the issues.

- Studying failed nonviolent campaigns can provide insights into what is needed for success.
- Studying successful nonviolent campaigns that led to poor outcomes can provide insights into what is needed for desirable social change.
- Studying ambiguous campaigns — in which the role of nonviolent action is hard to distinguish from other methods and activities — can give insights into the dynamics of multi-method struggles.
- Studying little known campaigns may reveal insights not so obvious from the more prominent ones.

Potentially, there is much to gain by studying campaigns that, so far, have received relatively little attention. It's quite possible that some of them could become classic examples.

Examples and case studies are the most common way in which people learn about nonviolent action. It is easier to comprehend specific cases and then generalise to the principles involved. Furthermore, for most people, examples are more interesting: they involve individuals, injustice, suffering, courage and drama. They arouse passions. In comparison, discussions of the abstract principles underlying nonviolent action are not so appealing. Nevertheless, that is next on the agenda here. To illustrate the principles, I'll toss in a few examples!

To answer the question of whether nonviolent action can be effective, examples are a good initial response. Then there is a follow-up question: what makes nonviolent action effective? If there are reasons or explanations, they can provide better understanding. Part of the argument over nonviolent action is about questions of why and how. This is a big topic, so I'll only touch briefly on some of the key factors.

Participation

Participation in action for change is important for success. In general, it seems reasonable to think that the more people who participate, the more likely success will be.

Imagine someone who wants to turn a vacant area of public land into a community garden. With just one individual, the prospects might seem slim. With dozens of

people, change is more likely. Imagine a crowd protesting at a meeting of local government officials or, taking direct action, turning the land into a garden. If those involved include politicians, town planners and police officers, prospects are even better.

Greater participation has several advantages. It shows that more people care about an issue, and sometimes can produce a bandwagon effect, winning over ever greater numbers until opponents feels outnumbered and give up. It provides a sense of mutual support, as those involved are encouraged by the fact that others are too. It provides greater resources to the movement. More people means more skills, more communication, more ideas — all of which are potentially valuable for further action.

Several methods of nonviolent action allow widespread participation, more than most other forms of action. Rallies, boycotts and some types of strikes are examples. A rally allows men, women, children, elderly and people with disabilities to participate. Anyone can join a boycott of a shop or a product.

In the face of severe repression, when joining a rally would risk injury, one method of safer protest is simultaneous pot-banging. At a specified time, say 6pm, everyone in an urban area opens their windows and makes a loud noise by banging pots and pans. This is a challenge to the authorities — and most people can join in.

It is usually pretty safe to join a boycott. This might involve not buying a particular product, not going to a particular shop, not depositing money in a particular bank, or not attending a government-sponsored march.

In public meetings, rallies and marches, people congregate together: these are called methods of concentration. Boycotts and pot-banging, in contrast, are methods of dispersion: people can join, but don't have to be in one place at the same time. Some research suggests that movements are stronger when they use methods of concentration *and* dispersion rather than relying on just one type.[11]

This possibility of participation by a broad cross-section of the population in rallies and boycotts can be compared to other methods of action. In armed struggle, most participants are young fit men: there are relatively fewer women, children, elderly and people with disabilities.

In elections, only a few individuals can run for office. Voting is restricted to adults. Furthermore, voting only occurs at specified occasions. A rally can be called at any time, but not an election.

There are two aspects to participation in nonviolent action. The first is that many methods *allow* more participation. The second is that many methods *encourage* more participation. The encouragement comes in part from the relative safety of methods such as boycotts and pot-banging, and in part from the excitement of joining in when lots of other people are involved.

11 Kurt Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

Methods and goals

Another important reason why nonviolent action can be effective is that it is more likely to win over others to the cause, including opponents and those who are uncommitted. The ones who are uncommitted, namely not on one side or the other, are sometimes called "third parties," in addition to the first two parties, who are the campaigners and their opponents.

Think of yourself, for the moment, as one of these third parties. There's a serious struggle going on — over climate change, animal rights, corruption, inequality, surveillance or whatever — but you haven't been involved, perhaps because you're too busy or you don't know enough about it. Maybe it's about some new technology called picotech that no one has ever explained to you properly.

If both sides in the struggle are using violence — they're shooting at each other, or planting bombs, or whatever — you might very well say you don't want to be involved and don't want to take a stand. You might reject both sides. Why would this be?

There's a perspective for understanding people's responses called "correspondent inference theory."[12] This sounds complicated, but the basic idea is simple. If you see a person using a particular type of method, you are likely to assume the goals of the person match the method.

12 For application of this theory to terrorism, see Max Abrahms, "Why terrorism does not work," *International Security,* vol. 31, no. 2, 2006, pp. 42–78.

If you see a person blowing up a building, you may assume their goal is destruction.

A prominent example is the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Many people assumed that the purpose of al-Qaeda terrorists was to kill Americans.[13] Few bothered to learn about bin Laden's stated goals, which included opposing the western military presence in Saudi Arabia and supporting Palestinians against Israeli government impositions.

Correspondent inference theory suggests that most observers assumed the 9/11 attacks were attacks on the US way of life. The stated goals of the attackers were obscured or dismissed.

Now imagine you're a member of the police guarding a building where there's a meeting of politicians. There's a crowd of protesters outside and it's your responsibility to make sure the politicians are safe. The protesters are obviously angry. They're shouting and chanting ugly slogans. Some are shaking their fists. Next, some of the protesters start throwing bricks at you. What do you think? You may think the aim of the protesters is to hurt you and probably to hurt the politicians. The fact that the actual aim of nearly all the protesters is to reject the economic policies being imposed by the politicians — or whatever they're doing — is lost. You're not likely to read a leaflet put out by the protesters and make your judgement based on your assessment of the views expressed there. You're too busy doing your job, or dodging bricks!

13 Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies, *Why Do People Hate America?* (Cambridge: Icon, 2002).

Correspondent inference theory has a simple lesson: the methods used can send a message that is stronger than the stated goals of the sender.[14] This means it's vital to choose appropriate methods.

Now imagine you're back on the police line, but the protesters aren't threatening at all. They're singing and dancing. Some of them are wearing clown suits. One of them comes up to you and offers a flower, and tries to strike up a conversation. What do you assume they're trying to do? Maybe they're just having a good time. It's likely you will be much more sympathetic to this group of protesters than the ones who were throwing bricks.

This points to one of the advantages of nonviolent action: compared to violence, it is much more likely to lead to shifts in loyalty by opponents and neutrals. In other words, those on the other side find it easier to change their allegiance. Some of the opponents, such as police, may decide to be neutrals; some of the neutrals may decide to join the movement.

This is especially dramatic when police or military forces are instructed to attack peaceful protesters but refuse to obey their orders. In 2000 in Serbia, the opposition movement Otpor forged connections with the police

14 For a similar conclusion about press coverage of protests — namely that a group's tactics influence coverage more than its goals — see Michael P. Boyle, Douglas M. McLeod and Cory L. Armstrong, "Adherence to the protest paradigm: the influence of protest goals and tactics on news coverage in U.S. and international newspapers," *International Journal of Press/Politics,* vol. 17, no. 2, 2012, pp. 127–144.

and military; although the ruler Slobodan Milošević wanted action taken against protesters, this did not happen. A similar dynamic occurred in the so-called orange revolution in the Ukraine in 2004.[15] In Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, there were mass protests against the repressive rulers; in each case, shortly after the military decided to stand aside and not act against the protesters, the dictators stood down from their positions.[16]

In most cases, police and military forces follow commands. That's what they are trained to do. But when they are instructed to attack citizens of their own country who are peacefully protesting, their loyalty can be divided: they know their orders, but some of them feel a greater loyalty to fellow citizens, especially ones who pose no physical threat to them.

Fraternising

Fraternising is when protesters try to win over troops on the other side, by talking to them, explaining their position

15 Anika Locke Binnendijk and Ivan Marovic, "Power and persuasion: nonviolent strategies to influence state security forces in Serbia (2000) and Ukraine (2004)," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies,* vol. 39, 2006, pp. 411–429.

16 On the importance of military defections when challenging repressive regimes, see generally Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Nonviolent Revolutions: Civil Resistance in the Late 20th Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For a much earlier treatment, see Katherine Chorley, *Armies and the Art of Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1943).

and inviting them to put down their weapons and refuse to attack the protesters, or even join them.

One of the arguments against nonviolent action is that it cannot succeed against opponents willing to use violence. This argument assumes that the "willingness to use violence" cannot be affected by what the protesters do. With the right choice of tactics, police and military personnel are more likely to refuse orders and more likely to defect. In other words, willingness to use violence can be influenced by the actions of protesters.

By remaining nonviolent, protesters pose no physical threat to opponents, thereby reducing their incentive to use violence. By careful choice of tactics and messages, protesters make their cause more appealing, increasing the chance of defections. By making themselves vulnerable — by protesting and putting themselves at risk of harm — protesters show themselves as human beings, as people who are like other people, and thereby harder to attack. By explaining what they are doing, and making personal contact — namely fraternisation — protesters can win over some police and soldiers. Through all these means, nonviolent activists can undermine the willingness of opponent troops to use violence, and thereby neutralise what is seen as the ultimate sanction by the regime, physical force.

In 1968, there was an invasion of Czechoslovakia. At the time, the country was a communist dictatorship and part of the Warsaw Pact, a military alliance dominated by the Soviet Union. Within Czechoslovakia, the government was moving towards a less repressive type of communist rule, commonly called "socialism with a human face."

This was threatening to the Soviet rulers, who launched an invasion on 21 August, with half a million Warsaw Pact soldiers entering Czechoslovakia.

The Czechoslovak military forces were oriented to defending against an attack from the west — from NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) — and not from their supposed allies. In the face of the Warsaw-Pact attack, Czechoslovak military leaders thought they would be able to resist for only a few days, and therefore did not resist at all: armed defence was futile.

Instead, there was a spontaneous popular resistance, entirely nonviolent.[17] There were protests and strikes. In the capital, Prague, people removed street signs and house numbers so the invaders would not be able to find their way around, in particular to track down targeted individuals. The radio station broadcast messages of resistance, counselling nonviolent tactics.

A key to the resistance was fraternisation. Czechoslovak people talked to the invading troops, trying to win them over. The troops had been told, falsely, that they were there to stop a capitalist takeover. The people told them: "No, we are socialists like you, and want to create our own socialist future."

17 H. Gordon Skilling, *Czechoslovakia's Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976); Joseph Wechsberg, *The Voices* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969); Philip Windsor and Adam Roberts, *Czechoslovakia 1968: Reform, Repression and Resistance* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969).

To get a sense of this, imagine a 20-year-old soldier, with a rifle and perhaps in a tank, under orders to invade, confronted not by enemy soldiers but instead by civilians — some of whom were 20-year-olds just like them, talking to them and explaining what was going on. As a result of this effort to win over the troops, many of them became "unreliable" — from the point of view of Soviet commanders — and were removed from the country.

As a result of Soviet domination for 20 years, many younger Czechoslovaks knew Russian and could talk to the Soviet soldiers. To avoid the threat to their troops of simple conversations, Soviet commanders brought in troops from the far east who did not speak Russian.

The Czechoslovak people's resistance, in its most active phase, lasted just a week: Czechoslovak leaders, taken to Moscow for talks, made unwise concessions that undermined the popular resistance. Nevertheless, it took eight months before a puppet regime, subservient to the Soviet leadership, was installed.

This example shows the immense power of fraternisation. What made it possible? The Czechoslovaks needed a persuasive argument and needed to believe in it — which they did. They needed opportunities to talk to the invading troops, in order to win them over. They needed to know the language of the troops. A key condition for success was that the resistance was entirely nonviolent. The Czechoslovak people were no physical threat to the troops. This made the troops more willing to listen. As suggested by correspondent inference theory, the methods used by the Czechoslovaks corresponded with their message: "We are not a threat."

Here, I've used an example from Czechoslovakia 1968 to illustrate an important part of what makes nonviolent action effective: it is more likely than violence to win over opponents and third parties, in particular by undermining the loyalty of troops. This example does not prove anything on its own. It only illustrates the general argument. Furthermore, the example can be contested, with different analysts putting different weight on the factors involved in the events. It is not a straightforward case of "fraternisation was effective" but rather a complex story that can be interpreted as showing the importance of fraternisation and, more generally, of the effectiveness of nonviolent action in winning over opponents. The value of the example is in vividly illustrating an abstract point about undermining loyalty.

You might think I'm making a big deal about loyalty — and I am! In the face of a ruthless opponent, willing to hurt people to maintain power, it is absolutely essential to neutralise or win over some of the opponent's supporters, especially police, military and security forces. One way of neutralising them is to kill or disable them, or frighten them into fleeing or surrendering. Another is to take away their weapons. And then there is winning them over or encouraging them to withdraw.

Armed struggle can neutralise opponent forces through direct use of force, but when the opponent has superior numbers, technology, resources and training, direct engagement is a losing proposition. Furthermore, armed struggle has the serious disadvantage of causing greater commitment and unity among the opponent: when

troops are under attack, they will support each other to resist and fight back.

Using guerrilla methods — occasional attacks on weak outposts or vulnerable points, without direct military engagement — is a way of waging what is called "asymmetric struggle." The struggle is highly unequal in terms of numbers, weapons and resources, so the guerrillas avoid meeting enemy forces on their own terms.

Nonviolent action is a different way of waging asymmetric struggle. The activists do not use any military methods and hence do not engage with the opposition on its strongest point. Instead, they target the hearts and minds of the opponent.

Violence can backfire

This sounds very well. But what if the nonviolent protesters are met with deadly force. Surely they will lose! This leads to one of the most important points: using violence against peaceful protesters can be counterproductive. When it is seen as unfair, it can backfire.

Imagine two men standing together, having a conversation, without raising their voices. You and others are nearby watching and listening, because it's an important conversation. Then one of the men suddenly hits the other in the face, knocking him to the ground. Even worse, he pulls out a gun and shoots the man in the stomach.

Most people would react with horror or anger. They see the physical attack as unfair, unless there has been some provocation. If the two men had been shouting and

started pushing each other, then a punch might be seen as an escalation, but perhaps justified. However, when there has been no provocation or escalation, a physical attack is seen as wrong. This is true legally: it's a type of assault. But even without invoking the law, most people will see it as wrong.

Barrington Moore, Jr., a prominent social historian, analysed the reaction of people in different cultures to various behaviours, and concluded that every culture has a sense of injustice.[18] One of those injustices is using violence against others who are not using violence. So it can be predicted that when police or military troops use force against peaceful protesters, many participants and observers will see this as unfair. The result is that the protesters may gain increased support. Some of the protesters themselves, and their allies, may be so outraged that they become more highly committed to the cause. Those who are neutrals may decide to support the protesters or oppose the attackers. Even some of those on the side of the attackers may break ranks, withdrawing support or even joining the other side.

Richard Gregg, from the US, went to India and observed Gandhi's campaigns in the 1920s and 1930s. He called this phenomenon "moral jiu-jitsu." This is an analogy to the sport of jiu-jitsu, in which a key technique is to turn the force and momentum of the opponent against them. Gregg saw this sort of thing when Indian police attacked peaceful protesters: the more brutal and blatant

18 Barrington Moore, Jr., *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

their violence, the more popular sentiment turned in favour of the protesters.

The classic example occurred during the salt satyagraha, a nonviolent campaign in 1930. Gandhi had the inspired idea of protesting against the British salt monopoly. The British rulers controlled the production of salt and taxed it. In the context of British colonial rule at the time, which involved all sorts of exploitation and abuse, the issue of salt was not particularly important. Gandhi realised, though, that everyone was affected by the salt tax: it was an obvious injustice that everyone experienced and could readily understand.

Gandhi and his team designed a dramatic campaign. Starting inland, they marched for 24 days towards the sea town of Dandi, with the stated intention of committing civil disobedience against the salt laws. Along the way, Gandhi gave talks in local areas, gaining more support. News of the march was reported nationally, causing a build-up of excitement about this bold challenge to the British rulers.[19]

Reaching the ocean at Dandi, Gandhi and others in the march scooped up muddy seawater and proceeded to make salt from it — and were arrested. This itself was a dramatic moment. After Gandhi was arrested, leadership of the campaign fell to others. They planned another type of civil disobedience: they would try to approach the saltworks at Dharasana.

19 Thomas Weber, *On the Salt March: The Historiography of Gandhi's March to Dandi* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 1997).

Imagine this scenario. Indian activists, called satyagrahis, dressed in white, calmly walked forward towards the saltworks. They were met by police — also Indian, in the pay of the British rulers — who, using batons called lathis, brutally beat the activists, who fell to the ground, injured and bloody. Others rushed to the scene to carry the protesters away to a hospital. After protesters were beaten and taken away, others calmly walked forward for a continuation of the protest.

At a superficial level, violence succeeded: the police stopped the satyagrahis from reaching the saltworks. At a wider level, it turned out to be highly counterproductive. One of the witnesses to the saltworks confrontation was Webb Miller, a journalist for United Press. He wrote moving accounts of the courage and suffering of the satyagrahis. When Miller's reports were published internationally, they triggered an outpouring of support for the Indian independence cause, especially in Britain and the US. Hundreds of thousands of copies of his stories were reproduced and distributed by supporters. (This was huge for its time. This was before the Internet, indeed before television. Print journalism was highly influential on its own.)

If we imagine the protesters and police in a contest with jiu-jitsu moves, the police attacked and the protesters seemed to suffer a grievous blow, but the police ended up being hurt far worse. Of course it wasn't the police themselves, but the British colonial rulers whose cause suffered a major blow. Meanwhile, within India, the salt satyagrapha generated a huge upsurge of commitment and solidarity for the independence cause.

Gregg assumed that the jiu-jitsu process occurred at the psychological level, and that the police doing the beatings would be thrown off balance emotionally by having to hurt non-resisting protesters.[20] Gandhian scholar Tom Weber, writing 60 years later, showed this was incorrect.[21] The police were not, apparently, upset or deterred. Some of them became angry at the satyagrahis for not resisting, and hit them even harder. The jiu-jitsu process operated at a larger level, causing shifts in loyalty and commitment among Indians across the country and among populations in Britain, the US and elsewhere.

Nonviolence scholar Gene Sharp recognised the limitations of Gregg's analysis and relabelled the process, calling it "political jiu-jitsu."[22] The word "political" here refers to wider effects on the distribution of power, and incorporates political, economic and social dimensions.

The important message is that attacks on peaceful protesters can be counterproductive for the attacker by stimulating greater support among the group supported by the protesters (what Sharp calls the "grievance group"), among third parties and even among some of those opposed to the protesters. From the immediate point of view of the protesters, it certainly seems like they are

20 Richard B. Gregg, *The Power of Nonviolence* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966). The book was originally published in 1934.

21 Thomas Weber, "'The marchers simply walked forward until struck down': nonviolent suffering and conversion," *Peace & Change,* vol. 18, July 1993, pp. 267–289.

22 Sharp, *Politics of Nonviolent Action,* 657–703.

losing. The satyagrahis were being brutally beaten and carried off to hospital, some with serious injuries; a few died. This is the close-up picture, and it looks like violence is victorious. The bigger picture is the struggle for loyalties, and it is here where the protesters can have success: the fact that they are suffering a brutal attack can become the trigger for an upsurge in support for their cause.

It may seem surprising that political jiu-jitsu, which can have such a powerful effect, is so little recognised. Part of the problem is visual. People can see the physical effects of violence — the blood, the injuries and the crumpled bodies. This is vivid and gives the impression that those who are hurt are the losers in the struggle. The jiu-jitsu effects of the encounter, namely the shifts in loyalty, are not so obvious. There might be more protesters later, but there is a time delay, and often the cause-and-effect sequence is not all that obvious.

It continues to be difficult for protesters to see the big picture. Many activists want to succeed in their immediate objective, for example stopping a logging operation, interrupting a meeting of global leaders or preventing transport of nuclear waste. They focus on this objective, which, to be sure, can be important, but lose sight of the potential wider impacts of their actions.

This happened in the salt satyagraha. The immediate objectives were to make salt and to get to the saltworks, but whether these were achieved was largely irrelevant, because the primary impact of the action was on the consciousness of people in India and beyond. For this, the key was the symbolic act of challenging British law and

British rule. The challenge was principled and crystal clear. It was civil disobedience, with many satyagrahis arrested and imprisoned, or brutally beaten. The immediate goals of making salt from the sea or trespassing on the saltworks were incidental.

In some campaigns, the immediate objective is more important in a practical way, rather than mainly symbolic. Nevertheless, it is usually possible to distinguish the immediate objective from the long term goal, and important not to forget the goal.

Backfire tactics

For the beatings at Dharasana to be counterproductive for the British, it was important that the satyagrahis remained nonviolent. If they had started fighting or throwing stones, it would have turned the confrontation into a fight. In such a context, the police use of force would have been seen, by many more people, as justified. There would have been little or no jiu-jitsu effect.

Sharp, in describing the phenomenon of political jiu-jitsu, says the protesters must remain nonviolent. In presenting a set of stages of nonviolent campaigns, he emphasises the importance of "nonviolent discipline," which means remaining nonviolent in the face of provocation. If all the satyagrahis had been provoked by the police brutality and fought back, their effectiveness would have been weakened. The satyagrahis needed to believe in what they were doing and how they were going about it.

Nonviolent discipline can come from strong beliefs; it can also be built through training. Soldiers train, so why not protesters? There is a long tradition of nonviolence training. Campaigners in the US civil rights movement, preparing for sit-ins at restaurants in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1960, anticipated being insulted and physically assaulted — and practised not talking or fighting back. Nonviolence training is now a standard part of many actions in the peace, environmental and other social movements.

If beating peaceful protesters can be so effective for a protest movement, and so damaging to the police and government, then why would police and governments ever do it? Wouldn't they realise they are helping the protesters?

In many cases they do, and they adopt different tactics. At Dharasana, they could have let the protesters walk to the fence surrounding the saltworks. They could have arrested the satyagrahis rather than beating them. However, these alternatives sometimes are not so good. If the police let the protesters achieve their immediate objective, the protesters might continue on. Where might it stop? Authorities often feel like they have to "hold the line," namely prevent the protesters from achieving their immediate objective, otherwise the protesters will be emboldened and push for something more.

The Dharasana beatings became one of the most well-known events in the Indian independence struggle. They featured in the 1982 film *Gandhi* as a dramatic confrontation.

Other instances of political jiu-jitsu include the shooting of protesters by Russian troops in 1905, the

shooting of black protesters by police in 1960 in Sharpeville, South Africa, and the shooting of protesters by troops in 1991 in Dili, East Timor, and the arrest and shooting of protesters on the Freedom Flotilla to Gaza by Israeli commandoes in 2010. In these and other examples, the protesters suffered — many lost their lives — in the short term, but their cause was greatly advanced by the wider perception of injustice.[23]

From this list, you might gain the impression that political jiu-jitsu, to be effective, requires protesters to be killed. Luckily, this is not the case. Although some protesters may be killed in nonviolent struggle, this is usually far fewer than in armed struggle. The instances listed are well known in part because of loss of life. In Dharasana, only a few satyagrahis died. Political jiu-jitsu occurred because of the stark contrast between the disciplined nonviolence of the satyagrahis and the brutality of the police. Another instance of political jiu-jitsu was the arrest of protesters at lunch counters at Greensboro, North Carolina in 1960. No one was killed, but the injustice was clear to many across the United States and beyond: the protesters were completely nonviolent and were asking for fairness in treatment, yet were insulted and arrested.

Given the power of the political jiu-jitsu effect, why isn't it more widely known? One reason is that most activists know of plenty of cases in which peaceful protesters have been beaten and arrested, but there was no

23 On the Sharpeville and Dili cases, see Brian Martin, *Justice Ignited: The Dynamics of Backfire* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

upsurge of support for the cause. In fact, the historical cases of political jiu-jitsu seem to be the exception rather than the rule. How can this be explained?

The answer is that the jiu-jitsu effect doesn't happen automatically. Two conditions need to be satisfied: people need to know what has happened and they need to see it as unfair. This may seem obvious enough, but imagine that in India in 1930 the police had beaten the satyagrahis but there had been no independent witnesses. The impact would have been smaller. This is not news to police, governments and others responsible for attacks on peaceful protesters. There are five main ways they can reduce outrage from their actions.

- Cover up the action.
- Devalue the targets.
- Reinterpret what happened through lying, minimising, blaming and framing.
- Use official channels to give an appearance of justice.
- Intimidate and reward people involved.

All these methods were used at Dharasana. Journalist Webb Miller observed the beatings and wrote eloquent stories about them, but it wasn't straightforward for him to submit his stories for publication: the British attempted to block their transmission, thereby covering up the events. The British considered themselves superior to Indians, an example of devaluation. The British claimed that no police violence was involved and that the satyagrahis were faking their injuries, examples of reinterpretation by lying. The arrests of Gandhi and other independence leaders

were ratified by the courts, which served as official channels that gave an appearance of justice without the substance. The beatings and arrests served as forms of intimidation, discouraging others from joining.

The British thus used all five of the methods to reduce outrage from their actions — though in this case they were unsuccessful. However, in many other instances these methods are effective, preventing a jiu-jitsu effect from occurring. Protesters are familiar with this.

At a rally, police can hurt protesters, for example with pepper spray or pain compliance holds, in ways that do not show visible damage. Police sometimes rub pepper spray into protesters' eyes. This causes extreme pain but is not visible like beatings and blood. (In 2011, a police officer was filmed casually using pepper spray against Occupy movement protesters sitting peacefully in Davis, California. The video went viral, causing outrage internationally. It was a clear example of when the two conditions for the jiu-jitsu effect were satisfied: information about the spraying was communicated to audiences, who saw it as unjust.)

Officials and opponents often devalue protesters by calling them rabble, rent-a-crowd, hooligans, misguided, terrorists and other terms of abuse and dismissal. They sometimes release information to discredit particular individuals or organisations.

When police use violence against peaceful protesters, the police and their allies sometimes claim there was no police violence (reinterpretation by lying) or that no one was hurt (reinterpretation by minimising). If the awareness of police violence is undeniable, officials may claim that

only a few rogue police were involved (reinterpretation by blaming). They may say that police were defending themselves from a threatening crowd (reinterpretation by framing the action from the police point of view).

Sometimes protesters make formal complaints about police violence to government officials or to courts. These official processes give the appearance of providing justice but very seldom do so.

Police sometimes threaten protesters, overtly or subtly, with reprisals if they try to expose or challenge the police violence. Reprisals are especially severe against any members of the police who break ranks and criticise behaviour by other police. On the other hand, police who make special efforts to protect their fellow police — the ones who hurt protesters — may be rewarded by continued work, good favour and promotions.

How do these five types of methods work to reduce outrage?

Cover-up prevents people finding out about what really happened. If you don't know about something, you can't be upset about it.

Devaluation means encouraging people to think of the target as low status, as less worthy, as lacking value, as evil. If someone is perceived as low status, then when something harmful is done to them, it doesn't seem so bad. When a prominent and respected doctor is murdered, people are outraged. When someone with low status, such as a paedophile or serial killer, is murdered, it doesn't seem so bad — indeed, some people will be pleased.

Reinterpretation is a process of explaining something as different from what it seems to be on the surface. It

might seem like lots of protesters are being beaten, unfairly. Reinterpretation aims to change this perception. It can include official statements that actually there wasn't any police violence or that little harm was done or that police were just doing their duty. Reinterpretation is a process of contesting the explanation of what happened. It sometimes involves lies and distortions. It is most effective when it encourages people to see the events through the eyes of the perpetrators, who have justified the events from their perspective.

Official channels include grievance procedures, courts, expert panels and commissions of inquiry. They are formal processes, involving officials who are supposed to follow procedures. Most people believe, to some extent, in the fairness of official channels, for example that courts dispense justice. If there has been an obvious case of injustice, causing public outrage, one way to reduce outrage is to refer the matter to some official channel. Sometimes protesters do this themselves, for example making complaints to the government about police brutality or suing in court for false arrest. The problem is that official channels are seldom very effective when dealing with powerful perpetrators like police or governments. In any case, they dampen outrage: they are slow, dependent on experts (such as lawyers) and focus on procedural details (such as legal technicalities). The result is that outrage declines while the official processes proceed. In a world with rapid communication, speed and delay are ever more important in the dynamics of public outrage.

It can seem counter-intuitive to say that official channels serve the powerful. Many citizens, when faced

with injustice, want above all some formal vindication: they want authorities to say perpetrators did the wrong thing and apologise. With official channels, this hardly ever happens. In many cases, the perpetrators are exonerated or get off with minor penalties. In other cases, a few individuals are blamed, but these are usually lower-level operatives, not policy-makers.

Usually, official channels are only used by powerful groups when the problem is very serious, for example when protesters have been killed and there is huge negative publicity. When this happens, expect an official inquiry to be set up. Notice whether it is an internal inquiry, limiting the likelihood of a finding adverse to the perpetrators. Look for narrow terms of reference, to reduce the damage of an adverse finding. Finally, look to see how many people follow the full course of the inquiry, maintaining interest throughout. The drawn-out, technical details are often so off-putting as to discourage all but a few tenacious supporters. The result is that, for most people, the issue becomes less urgent. The official channels thus have served to dampen outrage over injustice. Note that this can occur even though all those involved in the relevant agencies — lawyers, judges, agency staff and members of expert panels — are concerned and conscientious. The effect of official channels is largely a product of the processes involved, which move an issue from one of public concern to an in-house, narrow, procedural matter to be addressed by formal rules.

Intimidation can prevent the expression of outrage. People might be angry but if they are afraid of being hurt

or losing their jobs, they are less likely to express their concerns. Rewards function the same way. People might be upset but if financial compensation is a possibility, they are less likely to express their concerns. Intimidation and rewards can change people's behaviour but may not change their views.

Let's return to the phenomenon of political jiu-jitsu and examine the implications of outrage-reducing methods. Many people, when they witness or hear about what seems to be a gross injustice, are concerned, upset, disgusted or outraged. Some of them may want to do something about it. The use of violence against peaceful protesters can trigger this reaction — to many people, it seems wrong. This reaction is of the great advantages of nonviolent action in the face of an opponent able to use much greater violence: the opponent cannot exercise its superior force without the risk of triggering massive outrage. The use of violence can backfire against its perpetrators.

However, those who use violence are not helpless in this sort of situation. They can act to reduce the outrage, using the methods of cover-up, devaluation, reinterpretation, official channels, intimidation and rewards. Perpetrators commonly use these methods intuitively. No one taught them how to reduce outrage. Furthermore, they do not think of themselves as wrongdoers consciously trying to get away with an evil act. Instead, most of them

believe they are justified in their actions or serving a higher purpose.[24]

Sharp's political jiu-jitsu thus is not as easy or automatic as his examples seem to suggest. He cited jiu-jitsu effects in Russia in 1905, India in 1930, South Africa in 1960 and elsewhere. These are all important cases, but they are the exceptions. Sharp argued that a key precondition for political jiu-jitsu was maintaining nonviolent discipline. If protesters use violence, then violence used against them seems more justified. So remaining nonviolent is important in preventing violence by opponents or triggering outrage if they use violence. But there is more to it: protesters can use five sorts of methods to *increase* outrage, each of them countering one of the five ways perpetrators reduce outrage.

- Expose what happened.
- Validate the target.
- Interpret the event as an injustice.
- Mobilise support, and avoid or discredit official channels.
- Resist intimidation and rewards.

Several or all of these methods were used in famous backfires. In the salt satyagraha, journalist Webb Miller exposed, to international audiences, what happened, getting around attempted censorship. His stories presented the satyagrahis as heroic rather than devious, and told of the beatings in such a graphic fashion as to evoke sympathy in the readers, who could sense the injustice involved. Within India, the salt satyagraha was used as a mobilising process, with supporters across the country engaging in salt-making as civil disobedience. In doing this, they were resisting intimidation, especially the threat of arrest and imprisonment: tens of thousands were jailed. Outside India, the campaign stimulated great support for the independence struggle. Outsiders had little need to resist intimidation. Internationally, the key was that supporters added their voices to the struggle rather than relying on governments.

For violence by police or troops to backfire, protesters need to remain nonviolent. They also need to anticipate the tactics of their opponents — from cover-up to intimidation — and plan how to counter these tactics.

24 Roy F. Baumeister, *Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty* (New York: Freeman, 1997).

Other factors in effectiveness

To talk of the effectiveness of nonviolent action is to assume what the goal is. This is normally taken as the success of a campaign in achieving its stated goals. However, there's a problem here, in that different participants might have different ideas about what the goals really are. As noted earlier, some focus on the immediate engagement whereas others look more strategically at the encounter as part of a longer and bigger struggle.

For Gandhi in the salt satyagraha, making salt was a symbolic challenge to British rule, not a goal in itself. The usual thinking about the campaigns in India is that the goal was independence. However, Gandhi didn't see independence as all that important, because he had even

wider goals, including the elimination of social inequality (such as subordination of women and lower castes) and the promotion of village democracy with principles such as bread labour. Gandhi had a vision that challenged the dominant political and economic systems of the state and capitalism.

Not all that many activists share Gandhi's vision, nor is there any requirement for them to do so. The point here is that nonviolent action can be seen as a road to a different sort of society, and there can be more to it than the immediate objectives of an action or even the stated goals of a movement. In this context, it is worth looking at some of the features of nonviolent action that are beneficial in ways separate from campaign goals.

Compared to armed struggle, using nonviolent action is unlikely to lead to large numbers of deaths and injuries. The reason is straightforward: when faced by peaceful protesters, opponents are less likely to use as much violence. In armed struggle, the opponent fights back, and casualties are likely; in nonviolent struggle, there is less provocation to use violence and, when opponents use violence, it can backfire on them.

There are some telling examples. The Indian independence struggle, which involved mainly nonviolent methods, led to perhaps several thousand immediate deaths. Compare this to civil war leading to the communist revolution in China, in which millions died.

Sometimes it is said that in India, the struggle was easy because the British were soft-hearted colonialists, not predisposed to being ruthless. This may sound plausible on the surface, ignoring repressive measures taken in

India. It is revealing to make a comparison with another British colony: Kenya, where there was armed resistance to British rule, called the Mau Mau rebellion. In response, the British used extremely harsh measures, including ruthless military attacks, executions, torture and setting up concentration camps.[25]

Admittedly, the situation in Kenya was different from India in some important ways. In Kenya, there was a significant population of British settlers, who had a strong commitment to maintaining colonial rule, compared to India where British settlement was minimal. On the other hand, British economic interests in India, a vastly larger country than Kenya, were far greater.

Arguably, the different responses of British rulers in India and Kenya were due to different methods used by independence campaigners. When the British used force in India, as against salt satyagrahis, it provoked greater opposition. However, the British could use extreme force in Kenya with hardly any public backlash, because it was against the Mau Mau who themselves used considerable violence.

Many other examples could be cited. The point here is that relying on nonviolent methods in a campaign is likely to lead to a lower toll in injuries and deaths. This is not relevant to effectiveness in a strict sense, but it is

25 David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (New York: Norton, 2005); Robert B. Edgerton, *Mau Mau: An African Crucible* (New York: Free Press, 1989); Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005).

surely a benefit for those who might otherwise have died. Compared to armed struggle, it is plausible that nonviolent methods are more effective because the process of change causes less suffering. This is to assume that effectiveness is measured through human impacts both in ultimate outcomes and on the road to achieving them.

There is no iron rule that says nonviolent action leads to fewer deaths and injuries than armed struggle. In a provocative article titled "Heavy casualties and nonviolent defense," nonviolence researcher Gene Keyes examined the possibility that defence by nonviolent means could lead to ever mounting human costs.[26] Imagine a population prepared to sacrifice their lives to stop a takeover by a ruthless invader. The death toll could mount, apparently without limit.

A massive human cost to nonviolent resisters is certainly possible in theory, but seems unlikely in practice, going by historical examples. One of the main reasons is that protesters can use a variety of techniques, some of which are low risk, such as boycotts and banging pots and pans. Few campaigners want to be martyrs, so the prospect that millions of people would walk to a protest line and be prepared to be shot is remote.

Using nonviolent methods to defend a society from attack has been compared with guerrilla warfare: defence by civil resistance is the nonviolent analogue to a guerrilla

26 Gene Keyes, "Heavy casualties and nonviolent defense," *Philosophy and Social Action*, vol. 17, nos. 3-4, July-December 1991, pp. 75–88.

struggle.[27] Guerrilla forces usually avoid a head-on clash with the enemy, which has superior firepower, instead using hit-and-run tactics. In this way, guerrillas cause maximum damage with limited risk. Nonviolent campaigners typically use a similar approach: they engage the opponent on its weakest rather than its strongest terrain.

The difference is that a military force, with its trained troops and superior weaponry, has little hesitation in attacking guerrillas, sometimes causing many civilian casualties along the way. Attacking peaceful protesters is another matter. Military training does not prepare soldiers to do this easily, and there is a risk of backfire if they do.

Hence, it is reasonable to say that achieving change through nonviolent action is likely to involve fewer deaths and injuries than armed struggle. This is an element of effectiveness if change is taken to include both the process of change and ultimate outcomes. It is important to remember that some struggles last for decades. Think of the struggle against apartheid in South Africa or the struggle for independence in Vietnam.

It is also worth remembering that some struggles are unsuccessful. Major efforts may be taken over years or decades, but the goals of the campaigners are not achieved. Examples are the guerrilla struggles in Malaya (1948–1960) and Lithuania (1944–1952). In such cases of failure, it is surely worth counting up the casualties.

27 Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack, *War without Weapons: Non-violence in National Defence* (London: Frances Pinter, 1974).

Nonviolent action has the advantage of a lower human cost.

Another argument for nonviolent action, compared to violence, is that it is less likely to lead to centralisation of power. This is not about effectiveness in immediately winning against opponents, but is about effectiveness in creating a more egalitarian, less oppressive society.

Armed struggle lends itself to a command system. In armies around the world, hierarchy and command are central elements. Soldiers are trained to obey those at higher ranks. The penalties for disobedience are severe: in wartime, soldiers who refuse orders may be imprisoned or even executed.

Modern militaries are becoming more sophisticated in their use of psychology, recognising that loyalty is primarily to fellow soldiers and that fighting effectiveness can come from suitable training rather than arbitrary brutality.[28] Nevertheless, command and obedience remain fundamental.

Guerrilla forces are sometimes organised in a more decentralised fashion, with autonomy for separate groups, but there is still usually a system of leadership. The reason is that the risks of disunity are severe. In the face of an enemy willing to kill, it is vital that control be maintained. Secrecy and coordination are vital for military planning. If a soldier or a group of soldiers attacks too soon, or even lets off a stray shot, it can wreck the element of surprise

28 See, for example, Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995).

and make the entire force vulnerable. The system of hierarchy and command is an adaptive response to the nature of armed struggle.

Armed struggle can certainly be used against systems of domination, namely against repressive states. The risk is that in the aftermath of a victory, the new government will adopt the command and control system used in the armed struggle. In other words, the method of struggle will lend its characteristics to the way the society is ruled: military leadership in the struggle may lead to military-style leadership subsequently. This has been the outcome in some prominent cases when armed struggle has succeeded against corrupt and oppressive regimes, such as in Algeria, China, Cuba and Vietnam.

This process — sometimes called militarisation of the revolution — is not inevitable. It is a tendency. If one of the goals of the struggle is a freer society, this tendency should be avoided or resisted.

Nonviolent struggle has the opposite tendency. Few nonviolent struggles use a command-and-control system, with a few leaders determining actions and imposing discipline on the activists. Participation in nonviolent action is almost always voluntary. Some people might feel pressure to join, but it is social pressure: there is no danger of being imprisoned or shot for disobedience.

Actions taken depend on participants being willing to join. If there's a rally, people can join or not. Likewise if there's a boycott or banging of pots and pans. If some people decide to organise a different sort of action, they can. (Whether it is an effective choice is another question.)

Because participants have choice and autonomy, relationships are more by mutual agreement than by command. This lays the foundation for a post-struggle society based on citizen participation rather than centralised control.

Following this line of argument, it is plausible to hypothesise that the longer a struggle takes, the more the method of struggle is likely to influence the form of the post-struggle society. A lengthy armed struggle is more likely to lead to militarisation and a lengthy nonviolent struggle to a less repressive outcome. Several prominent cases seem to fit this pattern.

- China and Vietnam: lengthy armed struggle, centralised post-revolution government
- India and South Africa, lengthy nonviolent struggle, representative post-independence government

Short struggles, such as Iran 1978–1979, China 1989 and Egypt 2011, gave less opportunity for the mode of struggle to influence the outcome. However, these are only suggestive examples. This hypothesis about long-versus-short struggles remains to be tested.

A more general argument in favour of nonviolence is that the means are compatible with the ends. The means are what people do to achieve a goal, and the ends are the goals. Activists — at least those challenging repressive governments, inequality, oppression, exploitation and other injustices — normally want a society that is freer, more equal, less corrupt and fairer. This inevitably means a society with less violence: far fewer beatings and killings, preferably none. For the means to be compatible

with the ends, beatings, killings and torture should not be used to try to achieve this sort of society.

There are a few pacifists whose the goal is a society without any form of conflict, in which people live in harmony. For them, methods like strikes, boycotts and sit-ins are coercive and not desirable. If they subscribe to the idea of making means compatible with ends, they would support only methods of persuasion and not support methods of noncooperation and intervention.

Nonviolent activists — those willing to use strikes, boycotts and other methods that potentially coerce opponents, though without physical violence — don't often talk about their ideal society, except that it will be less oppressive. If we take seriously the idea of the means being compatible with the ends, then the ideal society for nonviolent activists is one in which there continues to be conflict, perhaps quite serious conflict, that is waged without physical violence.

There is an analogy here with organised religion. In earlier times, some religions sought to impose their views on others, including by force. Heresy was treated as a crime, with the penalty being excommunication from the community, or even death. Wars were fought over religious belief, for example the Crusades.

Today, in much of the world, most religions co-exist peacefully. Belief is considered to be a choice. There are efforts to invite or encourage others to join. Within churches, heresy can still exist, and those deemed outside the boundaries of acceptable religious belief can be challenged. Those deemed to be heretics can resist through

a range of methods. The point is that nearly all this struggle occurs without physical violence.

It is possible to imagine a world in which politics has been pacified in the same way as religion. There might be strong differences of opinion about free speech, economic arrangements, cultural traditions, land use, treatment of minorities and much else — but without the use of organised violence, in particular without armies and militarised police forces. This is a vision of a world with plenty of conflict, in which conflicts are pursued using argument, evidence, community organising, policies — but without systematic use of force.

This is certainly a utopian vision, but a useful one. Most people, in most of the things they do, never use physical force in public. Social life is quite possible without violence. The challenge is to find alternatives for the uses of violence in the world today. The promise of nonviolent action is to model a violence-free world in the process of moving towards it.

This concludes a brief survey of plausible reasons for the effectiveness of nonviolent action. A key factor is potential participation of many people across diverse sectors of the population. Nonviolent action is not as threatening to opponents as violence, and has a greater capacity to win over third parties and cause defections from the ranks of opponents. Nonviolent action has the advantage of usually leading to fewer casualties.

Beyond the immediate pragmatic considerations of winning a struggle, nonviolent action seems promising for achieving longer-term goals of leading to a freer society. Participation in nonviolent action is more likely to foster

the sorts of human interactions that enable a peaceful, respectful society. Nonviolent action as a method of struggle has the advantage of incorporating the ends within the means.

So far I've looked at campaigns using nonviolent action that illustrate its potential effectiveness and at arguments about why it is likely to be more effective than violence. There is a third, and most important, element in the case for nonviolent action: empirical studies.

Empirical evidence

Undoubtedly the most important study is reported in *Why Civil Resistance Works* by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan.[29] They provide a statistical analysis that undermines claims for armed struggle and, incidentally, the assumptions of most social movement researchers. (In the context of their study, civil resistance means the same as nonviolent action.) The foundation for their analysis is a database of 323 campaigns, between 1900 and 2006, of resistance to regimes or occupations, or in support of secession. Many of the struggles mentioned earlier, such as the Indian independence struggle and the Iranian revolution, are included. Others in the database are the 1944 October revolution in Guatemala, the 1955 Naga rebellion in India, the 1960–1975 Pathet Lao campaign in Cambodia and the 1974 carnation revolution in Portugal. The database has all sorts of information, such as loca-

29 Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

tions, key protagonists, lengths of campaigns, maximum numbers of participants, methods used and outcomes.

For Chenoweth and Stephan's core argument, the key bits of information are the methods used (either primarily armed struggle or primarily civil resistance) and the success or failure of the campaign. Deciding whether a campaign is successful is sometimes difficult: maybe only some of the goals of the challengers were achieved; maybe the goals changed along the way. This is only one of many difficulties faced in quantifying the elements of resistance struggles. The authors describe their careful process for validating the information in the database, including checking judgements about campaigns with experts on the countries and events involved.

With such a database, it is possible to test various hypotheses. Their most significant and striking finding is that nonviolent anti-regime campaigns are far more likely to succeed than violent campaigns.

A sceptic might claim the nonviolent campaigns were against softer targets. Chenoweth and Stephan tested this: one of the elements in the database is how repressive the regime is. The answer: the strength of the regime makes very little difference to the success of the resistance. This is remarkable. It means civil resistance can win against even the most repressive regimes, and furthermore has a much greater chance of success than armed resistance.

What happened to the idea, widely used by social movement scholars, that movements succeed because political opportunities are favourable? Chenoweth and Stephan have replaced it with a quite different conclusion: the keys to success are the methods and strategies adopted

by the challengers. Conditions such as the level of government repression don't make very much difference to outcomes. This means that success depends far more on what activists do than ever realised by more than a handful of scholars, political commentators or governments.

The statistics in the book are supplemented with many illustrations, including four detailed case studies: the 1977–1979 Iranian revolution, the first Palestinian intifada (1987–1993), the 1983–1986 people power movement in the Philippines, and the 1988–1990 Burmese uprising. These vivid stories give flesh to and help validate generalisations from the statistical findings.

If Chenoweth and Stephan are right, many social movement scholars should reconsider their frameworks and focus on agency, namely what activists choose to do. Why haven't more scholars done this before?[30] One answer is that it means relinquishing some of their authority to experienced activists.

What are the lessons for activists? The first and foremost is that armed struggle is not a promising option. It is less likely to succeed and, when it does, it is more likely to lead to a society lower in freedom and more likely to lapse into civil war. Mixing armed struggle and civil resistance is not such a good idea either. The best option, statistically speaking, is to forego any armed resistance and rely entirely on nonviolent methods.

30 Some have, for example James M. Jasper, *Getting Your Way: Strategic Dilemmas in the Real World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

Chenoweth and Stephan argue that the key to the effectiveness of nonviolent action is greater participation. Most of those who join an armed struggle are young fit men, a relatively small sector of the population. Methods of civil resistance include sit-ins and public protests, which allow involvement by a greater proportion of the population. The maximum number of participants, as a proportion of the population, is highly correlated with success of the campaign — and large numbers of participants are more likely to be achieved with a nonviolent campaign.

Participation is crucial, in part, due to spin-off effects. More participants, especially when they include a wide cross-section of the population, means the resistance builds links to more people, with the likelihood of causing shifts in the loyalty of security forces, which are absolutely vital to success. This process can happen in both violent and nonviolent struggles, but high participation is more likely in nonviolent struggles because there are fewer barriers to involvement. The case studies, each of which involves a primary nonviolent struggle in which there was a parallel armed struggle, show this vividly.

Why Civil Resistance Works is an academic work published by a university press. It contains statistical data, explanation and justification of database construction, careful analysis of contrary hypotheses, and much else. Unlike some scholarly writing, it is clearly written, logically organised and provides helpful summaries. Nevertheless, it is unlikely to become bedtime reading for activists. What then are the takeaway messages? Here is my list.

- Civil resistance works. A well-organised unarmed campaign against a repressive government is much more likely to succeed than a well-organised armed campaign. The message from nonviolent activists to those who advocate armed struggle should be "show us some good evidence that your approach works better, because the best study so far shows civil resistance has better prospects."
- When civil resistance works, the outcomes are likely to be better. Use nonviolent methods if you want a nonviolent society; use armed struggle if you want a militarised successor regime.
- The key is participation. The more people involved in a campaign, and the more diverse the participants, the more likely is success. Beyond this general conclusion, I think it is a plausible extrapolation from the data for activists to say, "let's choose actions that will involve the most people from different sectors of society."
- Winning over the security apparatus is crucial. Changing the loyalty of those who maintain order should be a central goal.
- Plan, innovate and strategise. The evidence shows that the methods used by challengers are crucial to success. In other words, how a campaign proceeds depends sensitively on the actions by the players, so it is vital to be creative, respond wisely to opponent movements and be able to survive repression.

Regimes strategise too, so there is no set of steps that guarantees success: campaigns need to innovate against

opponent strategies. Struggle against injustice is like a game: to win, it has to be played well. This is why diverse participation is important, because it brings in people with different skills, ideas and contacts. Running a campaign from a central headquarters, with a fixed ideology and set of standard moves, is not a promising approach. Having widespread participation and encouraging experimentation and diversity is.

The more people who understand the dynamics of nonviolent action and learn to think strategically, the more likely a campaign is to develop the staying power, strategic innovation and resilience to succeed. *Why Civil Resistance Works* is not an activist manual, but its findings should be used by anyone writing one.

Nonviolence researchers and advocates have been arguing for decades that nonviolent action can be more effective than violence in the short and long term, but have often faced scepticism. There have been two main sources of this scepticism. The first is the common belief that violence, when used without restraint, will always be victorious over opponents who do not use violence. This belief is widespread among the general public and also among scholars. It is so deeply held that mainstream scholars have never sought to test it. This belief is also standard among Marxist-Leninists. As Mao famously stated, "Power grows out of the barrel of a gun." Gandhi was dismissed as ineffectual in the face of "real power," namely unrestrained violence.

Mainstream scholars have another reason to dismiss nonviolent action. Most of them, in studying challenges to repressive regimes, have focused on conditions that enable

or hinder success, using frameworks such as resource mobilisation and political opportunity structures. Scholars have not systematically compared different methods of struggle. As a result, researchers have not provided much guidance for activists.[31] After all, if the key is political opportunities, and the prospects are not very good right now, then the methods used by challengers should not make that much difference.

Conclusion

The theme in this chapter is the effectiveness of nonviolent action. According to the best available empirical evidence, nonviolent action is more effective than armed struggle in struggles against repressive governments. However, despite this superiority, nonviolent approaches are largely invisible in histories and political accounts. Furthermore, most people continue to believe, despite the evidence, that violence, if strong enough, will always be victorious over nonviolent opposition. This suggests that there is potentially much to learn from nonviolent struggles that can be applied to other domains, because analogues to nonviolence in those domains might also be largely invisible and not believed.

How can nonviolent action be effective against violent opponents? A key part of the answer is to look at participation and loyalties. When struggles are largely

31 See, for example, David Croteau, William Hoynes and Charlotte Ryan (eds.), *Rhyming Hope and History: Activists, Academics, and Social Movement Scholarship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

nonviolent, they enable more people to be involved at lower risk, and they reduce the threat to opponents, thereby shifting loyalties more easily. In a direct engagement, violence can defeat nonviolent protesters, but potentially at the expense of causing public outrage and leading to greater long-term support for the protesters. This is the phenomenon of backfire.

However, it is not easy to assess the effectiveness of nonviolent action because many campaigns include a variety of methods, including some violence as well as various conventional methods of political action. Because of these complexities, in many struggles there is little empirical, quantitative evidence for the effectiveness of nonviolent action.

Nevertheless, there are important reasons to prefer nonviolent action to violent methods. Casualties are likely to be lower: human suffering is reduced. Because of greater participation, the outcomes of successful struggles are more likely to be participatory too: in anti-regime campaigns, the risk of a new authoritarian government is reduced.

Nonviolent action does not work on its own: it requires planning, preparation, skill, communication and shrewd strategising. Military forces do an immense amount of preparation and training, yet are not guaranteed to succeed. The same applies to nonviolent struggles. However, nonviolent activists seldom have very many resources, at least compared to governments. That nonviolent movements can sometimes succeed, despite these disadvantages, shows the potential power of this mode of struggle.