



General Introduction to 2006 edition

(Abridged version - for the full version see [here](#) [1])

The spectacle of large crowds assembling, camping in the centre of capital cities and entering parliamentary and government buildings in order to demand greater democracy has become common on television screens in the last few years. But 'people power' is only one facet of the increasingly frequent use of predominantly nonviolent action round the world in campaigns for human rights, peace, social justice or the preservation of the environment.

One reason for bringing out a bibliography on nonviolent action now is to draw attention to the growing number of primarily nonviolent popular campaigns (some much better known in the west than others). The other is to provide an up-to-date guide for those interested in nonviolent action in general, or those who wish to study particular types of campaign or specific movements.

The bibliography is organized to indicate the historical evolution of nonviolent action, the different contexts in which it has been used and the varying types of campaign. Introductory comments elaborate on the reasons for classification, sketch in the background and political context of campaigns and also note some controversial issues.

1. Nonviolent Action: Definition and Scope

Popular resistance using nonviolent means, now often summed up in the phrase 'people power', was in the past sometimes labelled 'passive resistance'. The term 'passive resistance' may now be used to denote hidden resistance, such as go-slows, as opposed to more open nonviolent defiance.

The focus here is on protest and resistance, rather than on nonviolence as a philosophy, a social, economic and political theory or as a personal way of life. These wider issues often have relevance for nonviolent protest – the life, thought and nonviolent campaigns of Mahatma Gandhi exemplify this interconnectedness – and some of the references we cite explore these links. But a primary focus on nonviolence would result in a rather different bibliography.

This bibliography covers both nonviolent campaigns guided by a philosophy of nonviolence (though not all participants necessarily share this philosophy) and the larger number of pragmatic uses of nonviolent protest or resistance. The latter may involve minor sabotage, and some protesters may engage in spontaneous violence, for example in confrontations with the police. But if the primary emphasis is on use of nonviolent (though potentially coercive) methods, these campaigns are included here as significant examples of nonviolent action.

The alternative to nonviolent resistance, which can be adopted as a strategy by the weak against the strong, is guerrilla warfare. Many guerrilla campaigns include use of mass civilian protest, such as marches or strikes, to promote their goals, as the IRA did in Northern Ireland. Whilst there are interesting comparisons to be made between guerrilla and nonviolent struggle, the only campaigns covered in this bibliography are those which are predominantly nonviolent. However, major nonviolent campaigns which are followed by resort to guerrilla tactics, as in Kosovo in the 1990s, are included. So are campaigns devised on the basis of a nonviolent strategy but which over time become increasingly associated with violent confrontation – notably the Palestinian Intifada launched in 1987.

There is an impressive history of use of nonviolent methods in movements for civil and political rights in most parts of the world. In Britain this stretches from the tax refusal and protests in the early seventeenth century to the mass 'Wilkes and Liberty' protests of the late eighteenth century and to the Chartists in the nineteenth century. The movement for women's rights involved major protests in the early twentieth century. Demands for economic rights have been closely associated with the use of strikes and boycotts by the labour movement. Mass noncooperation and boycotts were also used as tactics in some nineteenth and early twentieth century movements for national independence, as in Hungary 1849-67 (after the defeat of an armed uprising), Finland 1899-1906 and Ireland in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (prior to and to some extent after the 1916 Easter Uprising). These national campaigns of tactical nonviolence against militarily superior occupying powers are often presented as examples of nonviolent resistance.



Nonviolent action as a deliberate political strategy received greater prominence with the impact of Gandhi's campaigns in South Africa from 1894-1914 (mass civil disobedience to protest against the discrimination against Indians was launched in 1906) and his role in the Indian independence movement from 1917 to 1947. Gandhi was influenced by earlier theorists and practitioners of nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience, such as Thoreau and, particularly, Tolstoy. But he developed a much more comprehensive and sophisticated philosophy of nonviolence and its political implications.

His campaigns also gave nonviolent methods much greater credibility, although many have argued that his success depended on the nature of his opponents. Debate about the potential for resisting a totally ruthless regime continues. But the possibility of using nonviolent resistance even against a totalitarian regime was demonstrated in parts of occupied Europe during World War II, especially in Norway and Denmark.

Despite the importance of the historical legacy of nonviolent action and developments in the first half of the twentieth century, this bibliography focuses almost entirely on campaigns launched since 1945. To include all the historical material would make this book unmanageably large and expensive. Historical case studies have also been well covered in earlier bibliographies. But for the guidance of those unfamiliar with the literature on nonviolent action, we have included an introductory section, which lists some classic works on nonviolent action and quite a few more recent studies, many of which do cite earlier historical examples and include bibliographical references. Some of this literature illustrates or examines the distinction between Gandhian satyagraha (sometimes translated as 'truth force'), in which moral elements are central, and more pragmatic political and strategic interpretations of nonviolence emphasized by Gene Sharp.

Secondly, it is impossible to ignore the absolutely central role played by Gandhi in developing the theory of nonviolent resistance and in influencing later campaigns. So, although Gandhi's major resistance campaigns occurred before 1945, we have included a sub-section of introductory literature on Gandhian thought and action.

One outcome of the increasing awareness of the potential of mass nonviolent action has been a growing literature on the possibility of nonviolent (or civilian) resistance as a basis for a defence policy. This literature covers examples of earlier campaigns, notably World War II resistance to Nazi Germany, and also introduces the strategic debate.

Although most earlier examples of nonviolent protest took place within nation states, there has been a growing tendency towards transnational action (exemplified in many recent social movements). Activists committed to nonviolence have also increasingly explored the possibility of organized intervention to express solidarity and offer aid and publicity to those struggling against draconian regimes or a particular threat. A number of comparative studies of different types of nonviolent intervention are included.

2. Nonviolent Methods: Achievements and Limits

Some campaigns of nonviolent resistance have had positive results – for example the use of people power in the Philippines in 1986. But others, like some violent campaigns, have failed to achieve their goals for a range of reasons. These 'failures' may however have featured significant examples of nonviolent action and are still instructive. Success is also often hard to define: campaigns may achieve immediate goals but fail to alter the wider context. The US Civil Rights Movement, for example, contributed to ending official segregation in the Deep South, but did not fundamentally change the economic and social discrimination suffered by African Americans. Even if campaigns can claim victory, it may be partially attributable to the wider political and economic context – as was true of the demonstrations of people power in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989. In general campaigns which count as successful have been better covered by the literature, but success is not a criterion for inclusion in this bibliography.

Campaigns which use nonviolent methods (especially if the great majority adopt them for purely tactical reasons) do not guarantee that a spirit of nonviolence will obtain once the cause is won. The decolonization of the Indian subcontinent, with the massacres arising out of partition to create a separate Muslim Pakistan, and the increasing corruption associated with Congress Party rule, illustrate this point dramatically. Gandhi's anguish in 1947-48 about the massacres, which he did his utmost to stop, and his doubts about future Congress Party rule, underline the problems of political victory not accompanied by wider social and attitudinal change.

Indeed, tactical nonviolence does not necessarily mean that the goals are 'nonviolent' in a broader sense. The



great majority of the campaigns covered have been undertaken by those suffering oppression, injustice or discrimination. But nonviolent methods can be, and have been, used by groups supporting what liberals and the left regard as illiberal or right wing causes – two obvious examples are the Protestant workers' strike in Northern Ireland to overthrow power sharing with Catholics, and the truckers' strike against nationalization which immobilized Chile under Allende before the military coup. Where large sections of the population engage in major protest it suggests that there are serious political questions to be addressed, though there may also be apparently irreconcilable conflicts of interests or ideology.

'People power' can also be seen as a challenge to constitutional legitimacy, and it becomes especially problematic if there are two ideologically divided 'peoples' within a state, as the mass opposing demonstrations in the Ukraine in 2004/2005 and in Lebanon in early 2005 suggested. On the other hand, popular action, despite risks that it will lead to violence, is infinitely preferable to an immediate resort to the gun. Popular protest may also reveal basic conflicts and popular discontents, which cannot always be suppressed or satisfactorily resolved by political deals at an elite level.

Some recent nonviolent campaigns have also raised questions about intervention by external governments and divided those on the left – for example the protests against election results (which demonstrators claim were rigged) in Georgia and the Ukraine have been seen as inspired by the USA, countering Russian influence on the existing governments. But few campaigns are wholly insulated from external influences – and opponents frequently allege external manipulation. So although it is important both for participants and observers to be aware of the interests and possible role of external states or parties, possible external intervention is not a sufficient reason to discount mass popular demonstrations. Although external government agencies may be able to fund and encourage protest, widespread involvement suggests genuine and deep popular grievances. There is an obvious contrast here with an elite military coup d'état. We have therefore included all examples which reasonably count as nonviolent direct action in this bibliography.

3. Other Aspects of Nonviolence and this Bibliography

Nonviolence as a principle suggests an important role for reconciliation between hostile groups. But sometimes there appears to be a conflict between demands for rights or social justice and the aim of overcoming antagonism between different racial, ethnic or religious groups, since resistance can (at least in the short term) intensify hatreds and result in violence. The civil rights campaigns by African Americans in the USA and Catholics in Northern Ireland prompted this kind of debate (Martin Luther King had to respond to many prominent critics), and illustrated how protest can lead to polarization. The titles listed under these campaigns do cover some of these debates. But forms of nonviolent protest can also be used to intervene between antagonistic communities, as the Peace People in Northern Ireland illustrate. Studies of nonviolent intervention quite often include both 'partisan' and 'nonpartisan' initiatives. Reconciliation therefore features in this bibliography where it is linked to nonviolent action.

One important facet of Gandhi's nonviolent campaigns was the development of a constructive programme – the creation of alternative economic, social and sometimes political institutions. Gandhi's emphasis suggested a conscious attempt to devise a nonviolent form of society free from inequality and coercion. But the logic of resistance quite often leads to a movement promoting alternative institutions. The Kosovan Albanian resistance to Serb domination and exclusion of Albanians from mainstream life in the 1980s-90s led to the creation of independent universities and forms of self-government. Moreover, some types of direct protest encourage constructive alternatives which may include an emphasis on democratic involvement: boycotts suggest the need for alternative goods or institutions; sit-in strikes can lead naturally to taking over a workplace and running it under workers' control; land occupations can lead to cooperative farming. Indeed, spontaneous mass resistance and revolutionary upsurges often prompt the creation of forms of direct democracy, as Hannah Arendt has argued eloquently in her 1963 book *On Revolution*. New movements such as feminism and the greens in the 1970s and the movement for global justice since 1999 often encourage radical experiments in democratic organization. These issues are raised in some of the general literature on nonviolent action and in studies of particular campaigns and movements included in this bibliography. But we have not attempted to cover the specialized literature on cooperatives, workers' control and direct democracy.



Links

[1] <https://civilresistance.info/bibliography/2006/genint>