



Language

This sub-section includes a cross section of contemporary books and essays on nonviolent or civil resistance that seek to engage with themes of power, violence, revolution, and the potential for reconciliation or accommodation between opponents (rather than the strategy of nonviolent action or detailed case studies). A key focus of debate within the civil resistance literature is the 'consent theory of power' (the view that oppressive regimes can be effectively undermined by the oppressed withdrawing obedience) which has been central to the evolution of the literature, and in recent decades especially associated with Gene Sharp's work. A number of scholars have elaborated on why withdrawal of consent through non-cooperation is not always relevant. An alternative (although closely related) approach is to alter the will of an oppressor. Gandhi and those influenced by him have emphasized this element in seeking to 'convert' opponents through the mode of resistance and voluntary suffering (see Section A.2), but a more strategic emphasis on the importance of altering will can be found in Robert Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defense* (180, A.4.b), who draws on Clausewitz. Recent analysts of civil resistance have also drawn on scholarly theorizing of power – for example structuralism and post-structuralism (see a.1.iii).

Civil disobedience (a central form of nonviolent resistance) has repeatedly attracted debate, both in traditional and contemporary political theory – especially where protest movements challenge formally democratic or semi-democratic regimes. The terms of debate have continuously shifted, both within movements and in response to their actions.

Books and articles that focus in detail on the dynamics and strategy of nonviolent action, discuss reasons for 'success' or 'failure', and debate how to respond to key problems (such as ruthless repression, or the oppressor's lack of reliance on the consent of the oppressed) are listed in sub-section 1b. Some books inevitably overlap between 1a and 1b, for example most include some discussion of the concept of power. Some key references in 1b (or later sections) that discuss the concept of power relevant to nonviolent action are cross-referenced at the end of this section.

Attack, Iain, [Nonviolence in Political Theory](#) [1], Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2012, pp. 208

Scrutinises the theories behind nonviolence. Develops his earlier criticisms of consent theory, suggesting the relevance of Foucault's approach to 'micro-resistance' (See Attack, Iain, [Nonviolent Political Action and the Limits of Consent](#) [2] Theoria, 2006, pp. 87-97).

Bayer, Markus ; Bethke, Felix S. ; Lambach, Daniel, [Levelling the Political Playing Field: How Nonviolent Resistance Influences Power Relations after Democratic Transition](#) [3], Journal of Resistance Studies, Vol. 6, issue 1, 2020, pp. 103-133

This article examines the important question of how far nonviolent resistance promotes peaceful and democratic political outcomes after the overthrow of a dictatorial or authoritarian regime, as claimed in the nonviolence literature. The authors develop hypotheses about the likelihood of more egalitarian and peaceful relations at a governmental and party political level, and a greater political role for civil society, as a result of use of nonviolent resistance. These hypotheses are examined by comparing post-transition politics in Benin (an impressive example of successful nonviolent resistance) and Namibia (where in 1966 the South West African People's Organization began an armed struggle for independence from apartheid South Africa).

Bedau, Adam, [Civil Disobedience: Theory and Practice](#) [4], Indianapolis, Bobbs Merrill, 1969, pp. 282

Wide range of contributions on case for and against civil disobedience, including classic essays by Thoreau and



Martin Luther King, Bertrand Russell on civil disobedience against nuclear weapons, and Noam Chomsky and others on draft resistance to the Vietnam War. John Rawls' 'Justification for Civil Disobedience' is also included (see Rawls, [A Theory of Justice](#) [5] ([A. 1.a.iii. Social and Political Writings cited in Civil Resistance Literature](#) [6]) below).

Bleiker, Roland, [Popular Dissent. Human Agency and Global Politics](#) [7], Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 289

Theorizes transnational ('transversal') dissent, looking back to de La Boetie's Renaissance theory of power and tracing evolution of modern collective action. Draws on Foucault to explore a 'discursive' concept of power. Critiques Sharp's theory of power, illustrated by analysis of East German political and cultural dissent culminating in the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

Butler, Judith, [The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind](#) [8], London, verso , 2020, pp. 224 pb

Judith Butler, an eminent feminist theorist and philosopher, challenges interpretations of nonviolence as either passive, or based on an individualistic ethics. Instead she argues that nonviolence should be understood in a context of social interdependence and seen as a forceful form of political struggle. She also draws on Freud, Fanon, Foucault and Benjamin to explore how official interpretations of 'violence' tend to attribute it to the most subjugated and despised social groups, who in fact are subjected to many forms of violence throughout their lives. She argues, therefore, that nonviolence should be understood in the context of movements demanding social and political equality and fundamental societal change.

Carter, April, [Direct Action and Democracy Today](#) [9], Cambridge, Polity, 2005, pp. 298

Examines a range of justifications for nonviolent direct action and civil disobedience in liberal parliamentary states, and shows the shifts in debate both within protest movements and in response to them. Also discusses unarmed resistance to corporate exploitation and neoliberal economic policies in a global context.

Carter, April, [People Power and Political Change: Key Issues and Concepts](#) [10], London, Routledge, 2012, pp. 207

Focuses on unarmed national movements of resistance to imperial, dictatorial or semi-authoritarian rule in relation to the theories and experience of guerrilla warfare, revolution, concepts of power and links between people power and electoral processes. The discussion, which draws on a range of literatures (including theories of nonviolent action, political thought and democratization) is then set in a global context.

Chakrabarty, Bidyut, [Nonviolence: Challenges and Prospects](#) [11], Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 560

Brings together historical and contemporary approaches to nonviolent struggle and theoretical contributions as well as analyses of particular movements. Section 1 on theory includes writings by Thoreau, Tolstoy, Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Section 2 covers 'Nonviolence as a Political Strategy' and Section 3 'Nonviolence in Contemporary Movements' including a number of contributions on important recent movements in India: environmental campaigns against the Narmada dams and to preserve forests, Gandhian campaigns after Independence and the role of Jayaprakash Narayan, and the Anna Hazare Movement against corruption. A number of eminent contemporary Indian scholars have contributed.

Deming, Barbara, [Revolution and Equilibrium](#) [12], New York, Grossman, 1971, pp. 269

The title essay confronts the case for violence made by Frantz Fanon, in his critique of colonialism (see 1a.iii), and by many US militants in the later 1960s, and argues that radical nonviolent action can be an alternative. Other essays by this feminist nonviolent activist and writer cover a wide range of protests. (The title essay is also



available as a separate pamphlet from A.J. Muste Memorial Institute, New York.)

Galtung, Johan, [Peace by Peaceful Means](#) [13], Oslo, International Peace Research Institute, 1996, pp. 280

Peace studies pioneer aspires to lay 'theoretical foundation for peace research, peace education and peace action,' distinguishes between a static definition of peace as 'an absence of direct, structural, and cultural violence' and dynamic definition as 'the state of affairs that makes the nonviolent and creative handling of conflict possible'. More specific contributions on nonviolence are:

- 'On the Meaning of Nonviolence', Journal of Peace Research, No. 3 1965, distinguishing between negative and positive sanctions, and
- 'Principles of Nonviolent Action: The Great Chain of Nonviolence Hypothesis' in Nonviolence and Israel/Palestine, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Institute for Peace, 1989, p. 13-33.

The 'chain of nonviolence' concept addresses the problem of social and psychological distance between oppressors and oppressed, and has been taken up in the literature. For instance, Howard Clark's 'Afterword', pp. 214-218, in Clark, ed., People Power (below) briefly explores the concept.

Lipsitz, Lewis ; Kritzer, Herbert, [Unconventional Approaches to Conflict Resolution](#) [14], Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol. 19, issue 4, 1975, pp. 713-733

Gives examples of where 'consent' of the oppressed is not necessary to the ends and strategy of the oppressor.

Martin, Brian, [Gene Sharp's Theory of Power](#) [15], Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 26, issue 2, 1989, pp. 213-222

Examines whether a theory of power underlying nonviolent resistance should incorporate a structuralist (Marxist or feminist) interpretation, while noting the limits of structuralism for explaining active resistance.

May, Todd, [Nonviolent Resistance: A Philosophical Introduction](#) [16], Cambridge, Polity Press , 2014, pp. 200

May, a philosopher who has taken part in nonviolent resistance, explores both the dynamics of different types of nonviolent action O (such as moral ju-jitsu and nonviolent coercion) drawing on historical and contemporary campaigns. He then considers the values inherent in nonviolent action, such as respect for dignity, and discusses the role of nonviolent action today.

Reading, Anna ; Katriel, Tamar, [Cultural Memories of nonviolent Struggles: Powerful Times](#) [17], Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 260

This is an academic contribution to memory studies, but shows how preserving knowledge and stories of past movements affects present politics, and how nonviolent activists can learn from past campaigns. Examples examined include the suffragettes, Greenham Common, Polish Solidarity, US struggles against racism and Australian aboriginal campaigns. The authors also illustrate how one movement can influence others and stress the need to make archival and other sources (films, music, etc.) available.

Satha-Anand, Chaiwat, [Nonviolence and Islamic Imperatives](#) [18], Sparsnäs, Sweden, Irene Publishing, 2015, pp. 180

The author surveys the history of Islamic nonviolent movements and their contemporary role, including contextual analysis of sacred texts and examples of Islamic nonviolent action today, challenging false perceptions of violence in Islam.



Schell, Jonathan, [The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence and the Will of the People](#) [19], London, Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 2005, pp. 435

An argument by US intellectual on historical trends promoting nonviolence as a potential alternative to war. Part 2. 'Nonviolence', pp. 103-231, focuses in particular on Gandhi and dissent in Central Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s.

Translations: [Spanish](#) [20]

Sharp, Gene, [Social Power and Political Freedom](#) [21], Introduction by Senator Mark. O. Hatfield, Boston, MA, Porter Sargent, 1980

Sharp, whose 1973 three volume *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* is now a standard reference work on the theory and strategy of civil resistance has here brought together a collection of writings from over 20 years to address key themes relating to social power and popular empowerment. Other topics covered include several essays on civilian-based defence, reflections on the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa (written as a series of articles in 1963), civil disobedience in a democracy, and review essays of Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and *On Revolution*.

Sharp, Gene, [Sharp's Dictionary of Power and Struggle: Language of Civil Resistance in Conflicts](#) [22], New York, Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 345

Offers a set of definitions of the range of terms associated with (and relevant to) nonviolent action and mass unarmed resistance. Includes a brief introductory essay on power, and short summaries of the civil resistance in Serbia 2000 and Tunisia 2011.

Starhawk, ' ', [Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority and Mystery](#) [23], San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1988, pp. 384

Often cited exploration of issues from an eco-feminist perspective by activist drawing on experiences in 1980s peace movement affinity groups. Explores power along three axes – power-over, power-within and power-with, and provides materials on individual and group empowerment.

Stiehm, Judith, [Nonviolence is Two](#) [24], Sociological Inquiry, Vol. 38, issue 2, 1968, pp. 23-30

Discusses distinction between principled and pragmatic approaches to nonviolent protest.

Vinshagen, Stellan, [A Theory of Nonviolent Action: How Civil Resistance Works](#) [25], London, Zed Books, 2105, pp. 400

Vinshagen develops a new general theory of nonviolent action which embraces Gandhian concepts and commitments, but relates these to modern sociological theory (for example, Habermas's conception of rationality) and reinterprets them within a more contemporary ethos. Four key dimensions explored are: dialogue facilitation; 'power breaking': 'utopian enactment' - Gandhi's constructive programme; and nonviolent training. Theoretical analysis is illustrated by examples drawn from a range of movements such as US Civil Rights, Movimento Sem Terra and radical protests against nuclear weapons.

Weber, Thomas, [Nonviolence is Who? Gene Sharp and Gandhi](#) [26], Peace and Change, Vol. 28, issue 2, 2003, pp. 250-270

Develops issues raised by Stiehm's 'Nonviolence is Two', see above.

Zinn, Howard, [Disobedience and Democracy: Nine Fallacies on Law and Order](#) [27], New York, Vintage Books,



1968, pp. 168

and London, Pluto Press, 2003,

Well known radical historian and contributor to the literature on nonviolence and disobedience.

See also:

Stephen Zunes; Lester R. Kurtz; Sarah Beth Asher, [Nonviolent Social Movements: A Geographical Perspective](#) [28], ([A. 1.b. Strategic Theory, Dynamics, Methods and Movements](#) [29]), especially the chapter by Kenneth Boulding, 'Nonviolence and Power in the Twentieth Century'

Adam Roberts; Timothy Garton Ash, [Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present](#) [30], ([A. 1.b. Strategic Theory, Dynamics, Methods and Movements](#) [29]), especially Adam Roberts, 'Introduction'

Robert Burrowes, [The Strategy of Nonviolent Defense: A Gandhian Approach](#) [31], ([A. 4.b. Civil Resistance as a means of National Defence, and Lessons from World War II and Czechoslovakia 1968](#) [32])

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