In Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan’s book, Why Civil Resistance Works, the authors delve into what barriers participants might face when considering whether to join in on a movement. These four barriers—physical, informational, moral, and commitment—can have a major influence on who participates in a movement and could even be what prevents someone from joining. Ultimately, the pair claim that nonviolent movements have advantages when it comes to overcoming these barriers than violent movements. The movement against the Marcos Regime in the Philippines was one that utilized both non-violent and violent tactics in order to oust Marcos. Considering these two types of tactics, this analysis will shed light on the barriers to participation in the movement and prove that nonviolent movements have a lower entry threshold than violent ones as well as increased participation.

Physical activity is required when it comes to being active within a movement. The movement against Marcos was no exception. Both the nonviolent and violent tactics required the participants to be mobile and incredibly so at that. The violent tactics, which included bombings, driving cars into buildings, and armed resistance among other things, mandated participants to be not only physically able to carry out these acts but also knowledgeable enough to carry them out well enough to not lose their lives as well. This meant that the types of people who usually participated in the violent acts were males, around the late teens into their early thirties, that have a military and/or university background. This is a very strict requirement for those who participate in violent tactics, and it meant that there were very few participants. Compared to that, the most physically strenuous activities to participate in for nonviolent tactics were the ones that required walking like the mass demonstration at Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA) or handing out food and water to people during this demonstration. There were also other nonviolent tactics like prayer gatherings, assemblies, and coordinated media. This meant that the physical requirements for the nonviolent tactics were significantly lower and as we saw illustrated during the demonstration at the EDSA, people from all walks of life could participate.

Another barrier that differed between the nonviolent and violent tactics was the information barrier. While the spread of the media as well as the message that they could send out was controlled by Marcos under martial law, there was an undeniable limit to the amount of information that could be transmitted by the violent organizations. Because the violent organizations were notoriously wanted criminals in the eyes of Marcos, they had to use underground newspaper fabrications and radio broadcasts in order to get their message out. These had to be much smaller scale than those of say the church as they had to stay hidden. Their use of violence meant that Marcos also had justification to use force against these underground facilities. With religion being a big part of the culture in the Philippines, Marcos couldn’t carelessly use force to shut down their publications as it would have severe consequences. This meant that Marcos had to rely on limiting the information spread by the church after it had already gone out. As expected, there were still many people who could hear or read the church’s message before Marcos got to it. Under martial law, Marcos could reach the scope of the whole population with his message. What Marcos would do is whenever a violent organization would carry out an act such as a bombing, he would spread the message that the act was done by communists. Because of this, the violent organizations were labeled as communists while the nonviolent ones, with the approval of the church, were seen as righteous. The violent organizations tried their hardest to get their message out there, however, Marcos’ hold over them was too much. The nonviolent organizations especially the church could overcome this relatively easily as Marcos’ focus was on the more extreme groups.

The moral obligation that the nonviolent and violent organizations hold is completely different as well. While the intent of the organizations that used violent tactics was not to kill, they had to be willing enough to continue, knowing that there was always that chance. Not only that but innocent lives could also be taken as a result of their actions. Violent tactics require a tremendously high mental resilience to be able to keep thinking that the actions you are taking are the correct ones and that any casualty will be worth the end result. Any tactic that required the use of violence had this risk. Bombings could kill someone, driving a car into a building could kill someone, armed resistance could kill someone, etc. Nonviolent tactics had no such risk and thus no barrier. There was no possibility of anyone other than yourself dying as a result of their actions. If anything, this meant there was the opposite of a moral barrier, that there was only a commitment barrier to nonviolent tactics.

A popular nonviolent tactic during the movement was the use of human barricades. This is where people would link arms and put themselves in the middle of armed conflicts in order to prevent them from firing upon each other. This was a very successful tactic; however, it ran the risk of being killed. However, a message being spread around at the time was that there was no Filipino who wanted to kill a fellow Filipino. This brought about hope and ultimately, the willingness to put themselves in the firing line as they knew that they were facing friends, family, and the like. People believed in this message wholeheartedly and as a result, could dance and laugh in front of snipers who were taking shots at them. On the other hand, when resorting to violent tactics, there was no guarantee that Marcos’ military personnel were not shooting to kill. There was a much higher likelihood of being killed, injured, or arrested in violent organizations.

In conclusion, the People Power Revolution and the movement to remove Marcos had much lower barriers to participation when using nonviolent tactics. However, what is interesting to note is that the nonviolent organizations did not specifically make it their goal to lower the entry threshold. It was the fact that the violent tactics had such strict requirements and much higher barriers that when an option to choose nonviolence came about, it was widely accepted. As such nonviolent tactics were not only able to lower the barriers to participation but also increase the amount of participation overall.