

# 1 Core Principles for Effective Nonviolent Resistance

## 1.1 Why Nonviolence Works

Nonviolent campaigns succeed about 53% of the time; violent ones about 26% (Chenoweth & Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*). The mechanism: violence shrinks coalitions by raising the cost of participation and alienating potential supporters. Nonviolence expands them.

**The 3.5% threshold:** No campaign has failed once it achieved active, sustained participation from 3.5% of the population. Numbers matter, but so does *who* participates—diverse coalitions (age, class, geography, political affiliation) are more resilient and harder to dismiss.

## 1.2 How Power Works

Power is not a fixed quantity held by rulers. It flows upward from obedience. Rulers depend on ongoing consent and cooperation from institutions and groups—the “pillars of support” (military, police, civil service, media, business, religious institutions).

Effective resistance identifies these pillars and designs actions that *pull* people away from them—not push them deeper in. Repression backfires when the movement is seen as legitimate and the response as unjust. Maintain that asymmetry.

## 1.3 Strategic Principles

- **Start with vision:** A realistic, widely-shared picture of the society you want. Build it by listening across groups so diverse people can see themselves in it.
- **Four mechanisms of change:** conversion (changing minds), accommodation (making it easier to concede), coercion (making continued resistance untenable), disintegration (the system collapses). Know which you’re pursuing with which audience.
- **Strategic levels:** Grand strategy → campaigns → tactics → methods. Each level serves the one above it.

- **Tactical innovation:** Regimes adapt to familiar tactics. Novelty maintains momentum, attracts attention, and keeps opponents off-balance.

## 1.4 Organizing Principles

- **Participation diversity** matters as much as raw numbers. Movements that attract only one demographic are easier to marginalize.
- **Dilemma actions** force opponents into lose-lose choices: respond with repression (and lose legitimacy) or allow the action (and show weakness). Design for this.
- **Nonviolent discipline is non-negotiable.** A single act of violence by participants can justify mass repression and alienate supporters. This is the highest-leverage variable you control.
- **Plan for the day after.** Many movements that “won” failed to consolidate gains (Egypt 2011). Transition planning—what happens when the regime falls—is as important as the campaign itself.

## 1.5 Digital Age Considerations

- **Rapid mobilization, shallow commitment:** Social media can summon crowds quickly but often without the relationship-building that sustains movements through repression.
- **Surveillance changes everything:** Digital organizing is visible to opponents. Security culture must account for state surveillance capabilities.
- **Economic leverage is underrated:** Boycotts, divestment campaigns, supply chain pressure—these often matter more than street protest in affecting powerful actors.

## 1.6 Personal Synthesis

Nonviolent resistance is a solution to coordination failure. Moloch wins when everyone hates the system but no one can coordinate to change it. Movements provide the coordination mechanism—the shared vision, the commitment device, the focal point for collective action.

But movements don’t need consensus. They need *commitment*—people willing to act even when they disagree on details, willing to maintain discipline even

when provoked, willing to support decisions they didn't make. Disagree and commit, at scale.

The duality at the heart of this work: patience and urgency, discipline and creativity, strategic calculation and moral clarity. Hold both.

## 1.7 Connections

- [Will to Power](#) — Power as enablement vs. domination; movements multiply power through participation
- [Consensus](#) — Why movements need commitment, not agreement; disagree and commit at scale
- [Moloch](#) — Coordination failures that movements exist to solve

## 1.8 References

- Chenoweth & Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works* (2011)
- Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy* (1993)
- Popovic, *Blueprint for Revolution* (2015)
- Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas* (2017)