

1. How to build popular power

We cover some of the new data on successful social movements, characteristics of successful social movements, how to build a movement, when to negotiate and the effectiveness of violence versus nonviolence.

Slides:

Goals of lecture

After this lecture, you will be able to:

- Describe the characteristics of successful social movements
- Understand Grand Strategy and the Pillars of Power
- Outline the mechanisms of change
- Discuss violence vs nonviolence



Research on Social Movements

Contentious politics approach

- Political environment
- Organization and resources of resistance movement

Power depends on the consent of the civilian population, which can be withdrawn and transferred at any time

Source: Why Civil Resistance Works, Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011, Columbia.



Requirements of Power

- Authority
- Human Resources
- Skills and Knowledge
- Intangible Factors
- Material Resources
- Sanctions

Source: On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict, Robert Helvey, 2004, The Albert Einstein Institution.



Characteristics of successful social movements

- Mass movement
- Diverse
- National consensus
- 3.5% population mobilized
- Resilience



Participation is a Key Factor

- Physical barriers
- Informational barriers
- Moral barriers
- Commitment barriers
- Diversity

Impact of violence versus nonviolence on the above.

Source: Why Civil Resistance Works, Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011, Columbia.



Diversity and Solidarity

Divide and conquer strategy:

- Blame games.
- Greater status, resources or policies that help some people.
- Threats of the above being taken away.



Grand Strategy

Evaluate the effectiveness of our strategy and tactics

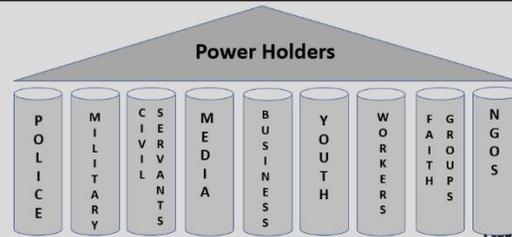
Impact on the movement:

1. Expand alliances
2. Increase internal cohesion
3. Deepen our resolve

Impact on power holders:

1. Shrink our adversaries' alliances
2. Decrease their internal cohesion
3. Weaken their resolve

Pillars of Power



Weakening Pillars of Power

Pull, don't push, people from the pillars to the movement.

Create win-win situations – dilemmas that provoke power holders to act contrary to widely-held values or beliefs.

Present a vision of a better society for all.

Reassure people from the pillars that they have a place in the better society.

National Consensus

Stages of building national consensus:

1. There is a problem.
2. The current system won't fix the problem.
3. Support for a new system to solve the problem

Mobilization

The magic number is 3.5%.

No government, whether dictator or democracy, has been able to withstand an active mobilization of 3.5% of the population.

Some have fallen with less.

Resilience

Respond to your opponent

- Flexibility
- Tactical innovation

Avoid movement fatigue

- Concentration and Dispersion
- Celebrate victories

Negotiating Demands

Some things are negotiable and others are not.

Results of negotiations are based on the power dynamic.

Powerholders may enter negotiations at a time when the opponents are weak and don't have power to enforce agreements or as a way to salvage some power. These are to be avoided.

Mechanisms of Change

Accommodation – demands are not threatening to power holders, may be willing to compromise to end the campaign.

Nonviolent coercion – the pillars of support for the power holders have eroded and they can no longer operate as they did. Although they remain in power, demands are met because they have no choice.

Disintegration – the pillars of support for the power holders have become unoperable and the power holders lose their ability to maintain control.

Violence and Nonviolence

Definitions of nonviolence vary.

What is perceived as violence depends on the power dynamic.

Fundamental issue is the impact of the action – does it grow or shrink the movement?



Violence versus Nonviolence

Nonviolent struggle is a much more complex and varied means of struggle than is violence. The struggle is fought by psychological, social, economic, and political weapons applied by the population and the institutions of the society.

All governments can rule only as long as they receive replenishment of the needed sources of their power. Political defiance, unlike violence, is uniquely suited to severing those sources of power.

– Gene Sharp, From Dictatorship to Democracy



David and Goliath

When underdogs acknowledge their weakness and chose an unconventional strategy, their winning percentage goes from 28.5 to 63.6. When underdogs choose not to play by Goliath's rules, they win.

Since nonviolent struggle and violence operate in fundamentally different ways, even limited resistance violence during a political defiance campaign will be counterproductive, for it will shift the struggle to one in which the power holders have an overwhelming advantage.

If violence is to occur, separate it from the political defiance movement in space, time, population and issue.



Relevant section from Robert Helvey's "On Strategic Nonviolent Struggle"

Power is held by "pillars of support" -- organizations inside and out of government that allow it to continue day-to-day operations. When those pillars are weakened sufficiently the structure collapses like a building when its support structure gives way or is weakened.

Pillars of support include:

- Police the omnipresent face of government that protects and serves the power structure, they serve the system and many will change sides when the system fails,
- Military trump card of status quo, do not live in local area and have less contact with people, they need to be convinced they will have a role after the revolt,
- Civil servants government cannot operate without them),
- Media can be controlled by review board, self-censorship and serve as a mouthpiece for government,
- Business community provide essential services for the people, in US provide money for campaigns. Goal is profit and they must see a role for themselves in the future.

- Youth Those in power do not want youth to become active as they are the normal vanguard for change. Youth need to see they will gain in the new world created by the revolt and see the limits of the current reality. Intellectual clarity of right vs. wrong is a key motivator.
- Workers are being weakened by destruction of unions, globalization and stagnant wages. Key workers for movements are those involved in transit of people and goods.
- Religious organizations Can bring a moral or ethical perspective to the movement (or government). They are well connected with funding sources and people. Involving them in the movement can bring other key pillars of power.
- Non-governmental organizations NGOs can provide services, e.g. in a crisis or storm provide care and necessities.
- Others include professional organizations, political parties, foreign sources of support (business, government etc.), small groups in communities from walking/running clubs to knitting circles, to community organizations and garden clubs, book clubs and sports clubs. Movements need to develop national consensus and active participation requiring penetrating throughout society.

Developing strategies that pull members of the pillars of power to the opposition should be planned early in a campaign. Movements do not want a 'fight to the finish' mentality to develop where pillars think they must fight to keep their power. Strategies should be designed with the goal of pulling people from the pillars into the movement.

Relevant sections from Gene Sharp's "From Dictatorship to Democracy":

NOTE: In this discussion, dictators are the corporate duopoly and democrats are the people working for a democratic society.

Merits and limitations of negotiations

Negotiations are a very useful tool in resolving certain types of issues in conflicts and should not be neglected or rejected when they are appropriate.

In some situations where no fundamental issues are at stake, and therefore a compromise is acceptable, negotiations can be an important means to settle a

conflict. A labor strike for higher wages is a good example of the appropriate role of negotiations in a conflict: a negotiated settlement may provide an increase somewhere between the sums originally proposed by each of the contending sides. Labor conflicts with legal trade unions are, however, quite different than the conflicts in which the continued existence of a cruel dictatorship or the establishment of political freedom are at stake.

When the issues at stake are fundamental, affecting religious principles, issues of human freedom, or the whole future development of the society, negotiations do not provide a way of reaching a mutually satisfactory solution. On some basic issues there should be no compromise. Only a shift in power relations in favor of the democrats can adequately safeguard the basic issues at stake. Such a shift will occur through struggle, not negotiations. This is not to say that negotiations ought never to be used. The point here is that negotiations are not a realistic way to remove a strong dictatorship in the absence of a powerful democratic opposition.

Negotiations, of course, may not be an option at all. Firmly entrenched dictators who feel secure in their position may refuse to negotiate with their democratic opponents. Or, when negotiations have been initiated, the democratic negotiators may disappear and never be heard from again.

Negotiated surrender?

Individuals and groups who oppose dictatorship and favor negotiations will often have good motives. Especially when a military struggle has continued for years against a brutal dictatorship without final victory, it is understandable that all the people of whatever political persuasion would want peace. Negotiations are especially likely to become an issue among democrats where the dictators have clear military superiority and the destruction and casualties among one's own people are no longer bearable. There will then be a strong temptation to explore any other route that might salvage some of the democrats' objectives while bringing an end to the cycle of violence and counter-violence.

The offer by a dictatorship of "peace" through negotiations with the democratic opposition is, of course, rather disingenuous. The violence could be ended immediately by the dictators themselves, if only they would stop waging war on their own people. They could at their own initiative without any bargaining restore respect for human dignity and rights, free political prisoners, end torture,

halt military operations, withdraw from the government, and apologize to the people.

When the dictatorship is strong but an irritating resistance exists, the dictators may wish to negotiate the opposition into surrender under the guise of making “peace.” The call to negotiate can sound appealing, but grave dangers can be lurking within the negotiating room.

On the other hand, when the opposition is exceptionally strong and the dictatorship is genuinely threatened, the dictators may seek negotiations in order to salvage as much of their control or wealth as possible. In neither case should the democrats help the dictators achieve their goals.

Democrats should be wary of the traps that may be deliberately built into a negotiation process by the dictators. The call for negotiations when basic issues of political liberties are involved may be an effort by the dictators to induce the democrats to surrender peacefully while the violence of the dictatorship continues. In those types of conflicts the only proper role of negotiations may occur at the end of a decisive struggle in which the power of the dictators has been effectively destroyed and they seek personal safe passage to an international airport.

Power and justice in negotiations

If this judgment sounds too harsh a commentary on negotiations, perhaps some of the romanticism associated with them needs to be moderated. Clear thinking is required as to how negotiations operate.

“Negotiation” does not mean that the two sides sit down together on a basis of equality and talk through and resolve the differences that produced the conflict between them. Two facts must be remembered. First, in negotiations it is not the relative justice of the conflicting views and objectives that determines the content of a negotiated agreement. Second, the content of a negotiated agreement is largely determined by the power capacity of each side.

Several difficult questions must be considered. What can each side do at a later date to gain its objectives if the other side fails to come to an agreement at the negotiating table? What can each side do after an agreement is reached if the

other side breaks its word and uses its available forces to seize its objectives despite the agreement?

A settlement is not reached in negotiations through an assessment of the rights and wrongs of the issues at stake. While those may be much discussed, the real results in negotiations come from an assessment of the absolute and relative power situations of the contending groups. What can the democrats do to ensure that their minimum claims cannot be denied? What can the dictators do to stay in control and neutralize the democrats? In other words, if an agreement comes, it is more likely the result of each side estimating how the power capacities of the two sides compare, and then calculating how an open struggle might end.

Attention must also be given to what each side is willing to give up in order to reach agreement. In successful negotiations there is compromise, a splitting of differences. Each side gets part of what it wants and gives up part of its objectives.

In the case of extreme dictatorships what are the pro-democracy forces to give up to the dictators? What objectives of the dictators are the pro-democracy forces to accept? Are the democrats to give to the dictators (whether a political party or a military cabal) a constitutionally-established permanent role in the future government? Where is the democracy in that? Even assuming that all goes well in negotiations, it is necessary to ask: What kind of peace will be the result? Will life then be better or worse than it would be if the democrats began or continued to struggle?

“Agreeable” dictators

Dictators may have a variety of motives and objectives underlying their domination: power, position, wealth, reshaping the society, and the like. One should remember that none of these will be served if they abandon their control positions. In the event of negotiations dictators will try to preserve their goals.

Whatever promises offered by dictators in any negotiated settlement, no one should ever forget that the dictators may promise anything to secure submission from their democratic opponents, and then brazenly violate those same agreements.

If the democrats agree to halt resistance in order to gain a reprieve from repression, they may be very disappointed. A halt to resistance rarely brings reduced repression. Once the restraining force of internal and international opposition has been removed, dictators may even make their oppression and violence more brutal than before. The collapse of popular resistance often removes the countervailing force that has limited the control and brutality of the dictatorship. The tyrants can then move ahead against whomever they wish. "For the tyrant has the power to inflict only that which we lack the strength to resist," wrote Krishnalal Shridharani.

Resistance, not negotiations, is essential for change in conflicts where fundamental issues are at stake. In nearly all cases, resistance must continue to drive dictators out of power. Success is most often determined not by negotiating a settlement but through the wise use of the most appropriate and powerful means of resistance available. It is our contention, to be explored later in more detail, that political defiance, or nonviolent struggle, is the most powerful means available to those struggling for freedom.

Necessary sources of political power

The principle is simple. Dictators require the assistance of the people they rule, without which they cannot secure and maintain the sources of political power. These sources of political power include:

- Authority, the belief among the people that the regime is legitimate, and that they have a moral duty to obey it;
- Human resources, the number and importance of the persons and groups which are obeying, cooperating, or providing assistance to the rulers;
- Skills and knowledge, needed by the regime to perform specific actions and supplied by the cooperating persons and groups;
- Intangible factors, psychological and ideological factors that may induce people to obey and assist the rulers;
- Material resources, the degree to which the rulers control or have access to property, natural resources, financial resources, the economic system, and means of communication and transportation; and

- Sanctions, punishments, threatened or applied, against the disobedient and noncooperative to ensure the submission and cooperation that are needed for the regime to exist and carry out its policies.

All of these sources, however, depend on acceptance of the regime, on the submission and obedience of the population, and on the cooperation of innumerable people and the many institutions of the society. These are not guaranteed.

Full cooperation, obedience, and support will increase the availability of the needed sources of power and, consequently, expand the power capacity of any government.

On the other hand, withdrawal of popular and institutional cooperation with aggressors and dictators diminishes, and may sever, the availability of the sources of power on which all rulers depend. Without availability of those sources, the rulers' power weakens and finally dissolves.

Naturally, dictators are sensitive to actions and ideas that threaten their capacity to do as they like. Dictators are therefore likely to threaten and punish those who disobey, strike, or fail to cooperate. However, that is not the end of the story. Repression, even brutalities, do not always produce a resumption of the necessary degree of submission and cooperation for the regime to function.

If, despite repression, the sources of power can be restricted or severed for enough time, the initial results may be uncertainty and confusion within the dictatorship. That is likely to be followed by a clear weakening of the power of the dictatorship. Over time, the withholding of the sources of power can produce the paralysis and impotence of the regime, and in severe cases, its disintegration. The dictators' power will die, slowly or rapidly, from political starvation.

The degree of liberty or tyranny in any government is, it follows, in large degree a reflection of the relative determination of the subjects to be free and their willingness and ability to resist efforts to enslave them.

[Interview](#) with Erica Chenoweth by Eric Stoner:

What are the key factors to success for nonviolent campaigns, and why you think those factors are so influential?

The key factor to success is the power that mass, broad-based participation provides for a movement. It turns out that, on average, nonviolent campaigns tend to attract far more participants than their violent counterparts. This allows nonviolent campaigns to create or exploit cracks within the regime's pillars of support (economic elites, business elites, security forces, state media and civilian bureaucrats). Such cracks are difficult to create without mass mobilization with unarmed civilians, who simultaneously demonstrate their commitment, their noncooperation with the existing order and their disinterest in physically harming those whom they oppose. In addition to imposing serious economic, political and social costs on those who resist the movement's demands, civil resistance is also a form of psychological warfare — and a rather effective one at that.

Are there any factors that you think activists often neglect that can damage or even doom their efforts?

Sometimes I think movements focus too much on doom and gloom — they spend too much time and energy reliving the injustices, the horrors, the pain they've endured. It gets heavy or serious. But doom and gloom doesn't energize an otherwise frightened or apathetic audience. There is clearly a time and place to revisit the core concerns of the movement and the population. But because success is so highly dependent on power in numbers, I think many movements would benefit from trying to keep the mood light, fun and humorous. It might pay to celebrate impending victory, rather than encouraging solemn or angry venting sessions.

The second thing I often notice is the sense that the movement will eventually win because it's "right," "just" or something like that. Unless campaigns find ways to mobilize mass participation, disrupt the normal order of things and deprive opponents of their means of maintaining the status quo, even the most righteous causes fall flat. Then people tend to get really bitter. But nonviolent resistance is about imposing costs, not just about the moral high ground.

Third, I think movements can over-rely on particular methods — like protests, rallies or occupations — that can exhaust participants or alienate the general population without effectively disrupting the opponent. At times, repeated protests make activists even more vulnerable to repression. Or mass demonstrations may disrupt the daily life of ordinary people far more than the opponent, thereby irritating potential supporters rather than truly imposing costs on the opponent. Either way, few generals win wars by using the same tactic at the same time of day every day. Movements that win generally mix up their tactics in some sort of sequence meant to maximize participation and disruption while minimizing exposure to repression and the collateral damage to ordinary folks.

Next, at every talk I give, there are always the skeptics who say that their situations are so different that nonviolent struggle cannot work. (Their unspoken implication is always one of two things: they need to use armed struggle or some mix of nonviolent and violent methods, or, more rarely, that the international community must act on their behalf to crush the opponent.) Now, it's natural for people to look for differences. I have been skeptical about the power of civil resistance myself. But over the past few years, I have come to realize that most civilian-based struggles have far more in common than they differ. And I think that for movements, it's a much more productive exercise to look for those similarities rather than differences, especially when it comes to strategy.

There are a number of key factors that are highly associated with the success of nonviolent campaigns, and Maria and I lay them out in our book. Most of them have less to do with what the opponent does, the kind of opponent or the kind of struggle, and have far more to do with the strategic choices the campaign makes. Although obviously context matters, most successful movements figure out ways to navigate local conditions in ways that allow them to challenge entrenched power regardless of its form.

Your study compares the effectiveness of nonviolent versus violent struggles for certain objectives (anti-regime, anti-occupation and succession). One of my big concerns lately relates to economic justice. It seems that often nonviolent movements succeed at ushering in more democratic governments, but fail to alter the balance of economic power in their countries. I'm thinking about India, the Philippines, South Africa and even the U.S., where the wealth and income

gap between whites and blacks has barely budged since the civil rights movement. Do you have any idea from your data about how effective nonviolent methods are when the goal relates to economic justice, or why progress on this front has apparently been so difficult?

I haven't studied the effects of nonviolent action on economic issues, such as inequality or other indicators. Part of the issue is data availability. Believe it or not, most governments don't keep very rigorous and reliable data on economic inequality! I plan to study this more in the future. However, there are many examples of national and international struggles that have brought local, national or international attention to issues of economic injustice — and many of them have even made progress. One can think of labor struggles such as the California Farm Workers Union led by Cesar Chavez, wage and labor struggles in Europe and Latin America, anti-corruption initiatives in Kenya, anti-free trade actions in Seattle in 1999 (and at subsequent meetings of the WTO), and anti-corporate actions in West Papua and the Niger Delta. I think Occupy has succeeded in bringing issues of economic inequality in the U.S. to the forefront of mainstream American politics — that's quite a feat in itself. And although total victory has not yet materialized, many small victories have certainly advanced these causes. One should not expect complete and immediate displacement of these systems, but should instead recognize when people have made real progress in areas that seemed hopeless and in situations in which they felt powerless.

What does the fact that dictatorships or authoritarian regimes have in many cases been replaced by more democratic governments that still face serious problems with inequality and poverty say about nonviolent struggle? And what can activists engaged in these campaigns do to make sure that the change that is brought about isn't merely superficial, but meaningful and durable?

Don't expect too much too fast. The kinds of changes we're talking about here require really long-term commitment, perhaps over generations. My colleague Stephen Zunes often says that liberal democracy is a necessary but insufficient prerequisite for addressing issues of inequality. I tend to agree with him. But even when an unarmed struggle is unable to achieve total victory, there are often major shifts that we shouldn't ignore, even though they fall short of some sort of utopian vision of the future.

Take Egypt as an example. There is a lot of bad news coming out of Egypt these days. What was at first a breathtaking victory quickly turned dire. But I remain hopeful for one major reason: Today, Egyptians speak freely about their views, their grievances and their remaining conflicts. They steadfastly continue to unearth abuses and demand just resolutions. In a place where only a decade ago, one could not speak openly against Mubarak's regime, even to friends, people have decided to not be afraid anymore. Whether or not they have the system of representation they want, or whether they have the just economy so many crave, Egyptians have broken the barrier of fear that kept them silent about their grievances for so many years. And that gives me hope.

It's sometimes argued that the only reason nonviolent campaigns are effective is because the opponent actually fears what would happen if the movement turned violent (or because of a violent fringe that makes the nonviolent movement look more moderate). How do you respond when you hear arguments like this?

Well, although it's an interesting theory, it has no systematic empirical support. Kurt Schock and I are doing a study that shows that so-called "radical flanks," when they are adopted or attach themselves to a nonviolent campaign, do not improve the campaigns' odds of success at all. In fact, such violent wings could hurt nonviolent campaigns because they tend to lower participation. Once participants see violent actions initiated by (or on behalf of) the movement, many of them stop participating.

Furthermore, as a general statement, I think that many states would prefer, strategically, to face armed movements rather than unarmed ones. Violent flanks allow the government to justify using repression — against unarmed protesters as well as armed ones. And in general, governments are going to win at that game, particularly if the repression drives even more participants away.

Suggested reading:

[From Dictatorship to Democracy](#) by Gene Sharp, The Albert Einstein Institution

[On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict](#), by Robert Helvey, The Albert Einstein Institution
– Read chapters 3 and 4.

[History Teaches That We have the Power to transform the Nation](#) by Kevin Zeese
and Margaret Flowers, 2013.

Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict by Erica
Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, 2012, Columbia University Press.