

The **Citizen's** Handbook

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How to Get Rid of a Dictator

List updated, original from Gene Sharpe, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, Part Two, *The Methods of Nonviolent Action*. See also

[What Urban Taught Trump about Seizing Power](#)

[The Dictator's Playbook](#)

[What Works for Social Movements](#)

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This is a summary of what citizens can do to dislodge an oppressive dictator. It focuses entirely on nonviolent action, because the state almost always has overwhelming superiority when it comes to the use of force. Violent opposition most often leads to prolonged stalemate or prolonged civil war.

The objective of nonviolent action is to undermine those in power, while winning over the general population. The most resistant groups are those who benefit from and support a dictatorship, such as the police, the military, and various elites. As long as these groups continue their support, an oppressive regime can remain in control. But once the middle class and elites defect, and the military and police refuse to use force to suppress opposition, a dictator is finished.

Any group wishing to overthrow a dictator must continually search for ways to encourage people to actively oppose the regime. They must also maintain steady pressure through continuous nonviolent actions. And they need be inventive, rather than settle for the usual placard waving marches. Both dictatorships and democracies have adopted methods for accommodating marches and protests, and view them as a handy way to let people blow off steam with little or no disruption to the business of the state.

Gene Sharpe is widely regarded as an expert on nonviolent action. He was a valued advisor to Otpor!, the leaderless student group that used funny, entertaining actions to get rid of nasty Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic. Sharpe says that the forces of opposition must exert continuous pressure and employ a variety of tactics. Here is his list.

Formal statements

1. Public speeches
2. Letters of opposition or support
3. Declarations by organizations and institutions
4. Signed public statements
5. Declarations of indictment and intention
6. Group or mass petitions

Communications with a wider audience

7. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
8. Banners, posters, and displays
9. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
10. Newspapers and journals
11. Social media, video sharing, podcasts, blogs, email,
12. Radio, and television

13. Rewriting the lyrics of popular songs
14. Sky-writing and earth-writing

Group representations

15. Deputations
16. Mock awards
17. Group lobbying
18. Picketing
19. Flash mobs
20. Mock elections

Symbolic public acts

22. Display of flags and symbolic colours
23. Wearing of symbols
24. Prayer and worship
25. Delivering symbolic objects
26. Protest disrobings
27. Destruction of own property
28. Symbolic lights
29. Displays of portraits
30. Paint as protest
31. New signs and names
32. Symbolic sounds
33. Symbolic reclamations
34. Rude gestures

Pressures on individuals

35. "Haunting" officials
36. Taunting officials
37. Creating an online Rogues Gallery
38. Fraternization
39. Vigils

Drama and music

40. Humorous skits and pranks
41. Performance of plays and music
42. Singing

Processions

43. Marches

- 44. Parades
- 45. Religious processions
- 46. Pilgrimages
- 47. Motorcades

Honouring the dead

- 48. Political mourning
- 49. Mock funerals
- 50. Demonstrative funerals
- 51. Homage at burial places

Public assemblies

- 52. Assemblies of protest or support
- 53. Protest meetings
- 54. Camouflaged meetings of protest
- 55. Teach-ins

Withdrawal and renunciation

- 56. Walk-outs
- 57. Silence
- 58. Renouncing honours
- 59. Turning one's back

SOCIAL NONCOOPERATION

Ostracism of persons

- 60. Social boycott
- 61. Selective social boycott
- 62. Lysistratic non-action
- 63. Excommunication
- 64. Interdict

Noncooperation with social events, customs, and institutions

- 65. Suspension of social and sports activities
- 66. Boycott of social affairs
- 67. Student strike
- 68. Social disobedience
- 69. Withdrawal from social institutions

Withdrawal from the social system

- 70. Stay-at-home
- 71. Total personal noncooperation
- 72. Flight of workers
- 73. Sanctuary
- 74. Collective disappearance
- 75. Protest emigration (*hijrat*)

ECONOMIC NONCOOPERATION: (1) ECONOMIC BOYCOTTS**Action by consumers**

- 76. Consumers' boycott
- 77. Non-consumption of boycotted goods
- 78. Policy of austerity
- 79. Rent withholding
- 80. Refusal to rent
- 81. National consumers' boycott
- 82. International consumers' boycott

Action by workers and producers

- 83. Workmen's boycott
- 84. Producers' boycott

Action by middlemen

- 85. Suppliers' and handlers' boycott

Action by owners and management

- 86. Traders' boycott
- 87. Refusal to let or sell property
- 88. Lockout
- 90. Refusal of industrial assistance
- 91. Merchants' "general strike"

Action by holders of financial resources

- 92. Withdrawal of bank deposits
- 93. Refusal to pay fees, dues, and assessments
- 94. Refusal to pay debts or interest
- 95. Severance of funds and credit
- 96. Revenue refusal
- 97. Refusal of a government's money

Action by governments

- 98. Domestic embargo
- 99. Blacklisting of traders
- 100. International sellers' embargo
- 101. International buyers' embargo
- 102. International trade embargo

ECONOMIC NONCOOPERATION: (2) THE STRIKE**Symbolic strikes**

- 103. Protest strike
- 104. Quickie walkout (lightning strike)

Agricultural strikes

- 105. Peasant strike
- 106. Farm workers' strike

Strikes by special groups

- 107. Refusal of impressed labor
- 108. Prisoners' strike
- 109. Craft strike
- 110. Professional strike

Ordinary industrial strikes

- 111. Establishment strike
- 112. Industry strike
- 113. Sympathetic strike

Restricted strikes

- 114. Detailed strike
- 115. Bumper strike
- 116. Slowdown strike
- 117. Working-to-rule strike
- 118. Reporting "sick" (sick-in)
- 119. Strike by resignation
- 120. Limited strike
- 121. Selective strike

Multi-industry strikes

- 122. Generalized strike
- 123. General strike

Combinations of strikes and economic closures

- 124. Hartal
- 125. Economic shutdown

POLITICAL NONCOOPERATION

Rejection of authority

- 126. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
- 127. Refusal of public support
- 128. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Citizens' noncooperation with government

- 129. Boycott of legislative bodies
- 130. Boycott of elections
- 131. Boycott of government employment and positions
- 132. Boycott of government departments, agencies and other bodies
- 133. Withdrawal from government educational institutions
- 134. Boycott of government-supported organizations
- 135. Refusal of assistance to enforcement agents
- 136. Removal of own signs and placemarks
- 137. Refusal to accept appointed officials
- 138. Refusal to dissolve existing institutions

Citizens' alternatives to obedience

- 139. Reluctant and slow compliance
- 140. Nonobedience in absence of direct supervision
- 141. Popular nonobedience
- 142. Disguised disobedience
- 143. Refusal of an assemblage or meeting to disperse
- 144. Sitdown
- 145. Noncooperation with conscription and deportation
- 146. Hiding, escape and false identities
- 147. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws

Action by government personnel

- 148. Selective refusal of assistance by government aides
- 149. Blocking of lines of command and information
- 150. Stalling and obstruction
- 151. General administrative noncooperation

- 152. Judicial noncooperation
- 153. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcers
- 154. Mutiny

Domestic governmental action

- 155. Quasi-legal evasions and delays
- 156. Noncooperation by constituent governmental units

International governmental action

- 157. Changes in diplomatic and other representation
- 158. Delay and cancellation of diplomatic events
- 159. Withholding of diplomatic recognition
- 160. Severance of diplomatic relations
- 161. Withdrawal from international organizations
- 162. Refusal of membership in international bodies
- 163. Expulsion from international organizations

NONVIOLENT INTERVENTION

Psychological intervention

- 164. Self-exposure to the elements
- 165. The fast
- 166. Fast of moral pressure
- 167. Hunger strike
- 168. Satyagrahic fast
- 169. Reverse trial
- 170. Nonviolent harassment

Physical intervention

- 171. Sit-in
- 172. Stand-in
- 173. Ride-in
- 174. Wade-in
- 175. Mill-in
- 176. Pray-in
- 177. Nonviolent raids
- 178. Nonviolent air raids
- 179. Nonviolent invasion
- 180. Nonviolent interjection

- 181. Nonviolent obstruction
- 182. Nonviolent occupation

Social intervention

- 183. Establishing new social patterns
- 184. Overloading of facilities
- 185. Stall-in
- 186. Speak-in
- 187. Guerrilla theater
- 188. Alternative social institutions
- 189. Alternative communication system

Economic intervention

- 190. Reverse strike
- 191. Stay-in strike
- 192. Nonviolent land seizure
- 193. Defiance of blockades
- 194. Politically motivated counterfeiting
- 195. Preclusive purchasing
- 196. Seizure of assets
- 197. Dumping
- 198. Selective patronage
- 199. Alternative markets
- 200. Alternative transportation systems
- 201. Alternative economic institutions

Political intervention

- 202. Overloading of administrative systems
- 203. Disclosing identities of secret agents
- 204. Seeking imprisonment
- 205. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws
- 206. Work-on without collaboration
- 207. Dual sovereignty and parallel government

See also *Blueprint of Revolution*, by Srdja Popovic, published in 2015 by Spiegel and Grau.

Popovic was central figure in Otpor!; he is now the director of the Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies (CANVAS).

Probably the best book on dictators is *Spin Dictators: The Changing Face of Tyranny in the 21st Century* by Daniel Treisman and Sergei Guriev, published in 2023.

See also [Networked Campaigns \(pdf\)](#)
[Gandhi's Methods](#)

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