

Civil Disobedience and Nonviolent Direct Action Protest in America

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Abstract

From the start, we must call-out flawed, abusive, law enforcement processes/activities when they violate our Constitutional rights. Indeed, we must definitely protest government authorities when they murder innocent civilians or nonviolent protesters. Thus, civil disobedience should shape everyone's understanding of the issues at hand. To be sure, government or law enforcement authorities must be forewarned and held accountable for their unconstitutional actions. Unfortunately, abusive government officials seem never to see eye-to-eye when it comes to civil disobedience, as they "stick to their guns," so to speak on the issue of denying people their right to peacefully protest as stipulated in the constitution: this includes using the force of arms. Furthermore, the insidious behavior and actions against nonviolent protesters shouldn't be tolerated. Moreover, orchestrators of civil disobedience shouldn't be afraid of standing up for what is right, rather than giving into a violent, tyrannical government. Hence, the actions of nonviolent protesters must speak louder than words, while fighting wisely for the freedom to protest by also using the tactics of civil disobedience, which must be employed with discipline, self-reliance, and a sense of purpose — and righteous activism. In this way, we will be able to grasp a clear picture of what should happen in the political mix.

Keywords: Direct action, conventional behavior, protesters, law enforcement, satyagraha, passive resistance, strategy, injustice

Introduction: The Right to Disobey

From the outset, *civil disobedience* can be defined as “a deliberate but nonviolent act of law-breaking to call attention to a particular set of laws of questionable [government] legitimacy or morality” (“Civil Disobedience,” 1999, p. 239). *Civil disobedience* also allows for us to get to the bottom of *any* political issue that arises because of unjust laws and policies. Hence, *civil disobedience* is the foundation for social and political resistance, while defying all odds to support and advance the civil rights of people. This is to say that we have the right to be upset about the unfairness and illegality of government policies. According to professors David V. Edwards and Alessandra Lippucci (1998):

When individuals and groups commit acts of *civil disobedience* — that is when [they] intentionally break the law to call public attention to a law or policy they believe to be unjust — they expect to be caught and punished. Indeed, being carried off to jail is a way to attract media attention and public support (p. 210).

Civil disobedience, therefore, is more serious than we might realize or imagine. Indeed, can we say that *civil disobedience* should always be used or applied by protesters when there is *tyrannical rule* — that is, when there is an “oppressive government that employs the cruel and unjust use of power and authority” (Lowi et al., 2023, p. 56). After all, *tyranny* flies in the face of democracy and constitutional republics. To be sure, those who have the power to tyrannize the masses are the true villains. Think of white supremacists who control law enforcement entities (in the past and now) and have undermined our nation since its inception. Of course, *civil disobedience* feels especially timely in light of what is going on in the United States today, with a Republican administration, and crooked law enforcement, which continues to use the “divide-and-conquer” technique/scheme among minority communities, to muddy the political waters, while abusing the constitutional rights of *all* American citizens. In this regard, law enforcement officials even see nonviolent protesters or activists as being *sanctimonious*, and uncompromising when it comes to the law. Moreover, law enforcement authorities seem always to feel that *they* are somehow under attack when people protest the government — and their *wrongdoings*. Is this because they absolutely expect people to obey *curse*d laws without question, even when they are abusive and wrong? According to journalist Ken Silverstein (2026), “In the United States today, [such] patterns are visible: law enforcement wielding authority as a tool of political intimidation, independent media under assault, elections questioned and delegitimized, and political opponents” and the people are “treated as enemies rather than citizens” (p. 3), particularly with nonviolent protesters. Therefore, it is right to criticize our respective governments, which is contrary to what law enforcement might want. Furthermore, law officials must be put on notice (and prosecuted) when illegally try to arrest and punish those who disagree with them.

Nonviolent Protesting and Law Enforcement

Unfortunately, it seems like making people/citizens further feel uncomfortable and *scared* is the MO (*modus operandi*) of *corrupt* law enforcement officials in America. Of course, such actions/activities are *irksome*, especially when the state and national governments — and law enforcement individuals — continue to divide us along race, gender-lines, religion, ideology, and/or ethnicity. In this respect, law enforcement authorities must be challenge at all costs by the people. In other words, “those who enforce our laws in a free and diverse society must be lawful.” More importantly, officials in the justice system must perform their civic duties with a responsibility to American citizens. To be sure, law enforcement officials are supposed to be “guardians of our Constitution, entrusted with extraordinary authority because they are supposed to operate openly, under laws, [and] accountable to the people they serve” (Couper, 2026, p. 6) (Note 1). Therefore, when law enforcement officials make “serious errors” in judgment with illegal policies and *unjust laws*, they must be called out and resisted.

It should also pointed out that *civil disobedience* is not an *aberration* or abstraction, because it is the tool used by nonviolent protesters to resist and fight back when government injustices occur. Additionally, it should be noted that the *misdeeds* of law enforcement officials can quickly become a *nightmare* for protesters who challenge the *status quo* and resist the heavy-handedness of those who don’t care about them. Of course, some law enforcement officials *wrongly* believe that the freedom to protest is *unacceptable*, even though it is allowed by our 1st amendment to the Constitution. Clearly, some law enforcement authorities deliberately conflate nonviolent protest with their right to abuse or attack those who resist unjust and illegal laws. To wit, it is as if they (protesters) don’t have the right to challenge or protest government *authoritarianism*. To be certain, *civil disobedience* is not some kind of political “retribution plan” or a deliberate attack on government, even if such government entities are *unlawful*. Moreover, *civil disobedience* is also a way of rejecting unfair, disgusting, discriminatory laws that some in power try to *normalize*. Equally important, as Frédéric Gros (2020), who is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Paris XII and the Institute of Political Studies, Paris, succinctly argues:

Civil disobedience refers to the coordinated movement of a [large] group, as opposed to individual contestation. It presupposes the organization of a collective structure by well-defined rules of resistance, and a common credo with a precise political objective — most often, the abrogation of a law or decree deemed scandalous, unjust or intolerable (p. 126) (Note 2).

As Gros infers, it is not unreasonable to *call-out* governments that abuse their power or *criminally* misuse their authority. Resistant strategy, therefore, is clear: People should not turn a *blind eye* to the *transgressions* of law enforcement, because “we-the-people” must have *oversight* over those that dispense the law, and go against the foundational values of our society. Additionally, we shouldn’t ignore the power dynamics of *civil disobedience*, which challenge the powers that be.

Although some see *civil disobedience* as a recipe for deeper conflict, disaster, or a warning sign, if you will, “Historically... resisting injustice” is “a key component of nonviolent direct action” (Gleibermann, 2026, p. 50). Furthermore, it is becoming increasingly clear that *civil disobedience* is the way to move forward in a democracy; however, “under an authoritarian government that wages violence and feeds on chaos to sustain power, confrontational protest has become far more *risky*” (Gleibermann, 2026, p. 50) (Note 3). Moreover, nothing can be more important to the cause of freedom than resistance. In this regard, as the philosopher John Stuart Mill (2007) writes in his famous work *Utilitarianism*: “Some maintain that no law, however bad, ought to be disobeyed by an individual citizen; that his opposition to it, if shown at all, should only be shown in endeavoring to get it altered by competent authority” (pp. 37-38) (Note 4). But if bad governments and laws can’t be changed by established authority, what exactly must we do, particularly if law enforcement undermines the rights of people/citizens with degrading, *unjust* policies? Question: Can such government authorities undercut “the rule of law” as it concerns the people who resist? As Mill (2007) goes on to cogently write:

Other persons... hold the directly contrary opinion, that any law, judged to be bad, may blamelessly be disobeyed, even though it be not judged to be unjust but only inexpedient; while others would confine the license of disobedience to the case of unjust laws; but again, some say, that all laws which are inexpedient are unjust; since every law imposes some restriction on the natural liberty of mankind, which restriction is an injustice, unless legitimated by tending to their good. Among these diversities of opinion, it seems to be universally admitted that there may be unjust laws; and that law, consequently, is not the ultimate criterion of justice, but may give to one person a benefit, or impose on another an *evil*, which justice condemns (p. 38).

All in all, law enforcement officials do not like to be exposed to public scrutiny, particularly when it comes to their violence against the citizens of a nation. Consequently, it is not a mystery that law enforcement and unstable, authoritarian governments try to repress protesters, no matter the cause or situation. Therefore, nonviolent protesters must immediately embrace the idea of *civil disobedience*. Indeed, nonviolent protesters must voice their *outrage*, and stand-up to law enforcement authorities that break the law, while trying to protect the illegality of their actions. In a way, *civil disobedience* can also be considered “focus-thinking” when it comes to the rebelliousness and resistance of people/protesters. Meaning, nonviolent *insurgency* is akin to nonviolent protest, which is a form of *civil disobedience*. So, is this unconventional behavior? Some might argue that *civil disobedience* can also be a kind of *benign* activity involving conventional behavior. After all, operatives of *civil disobedience* can create maximum disruption of law enforcement operations and their sometimes abusive behavior. To be fair, it is not as if civil disobedient warriors don’t care about the law, because they most certainly do care about *good* laws and policies. In truth, *civil disobedience* or nonviolent protesters provide the *guardrails* needed to challenge unlawful authority, while providing fierce criticism of law enforcement when they unapologetically attack protesters, and consequently *pervert* civil rights and justice. After all, as Republican Governor of Nevada, Joe Lombardo stated: “Protecting citizens to assemble safely and peaceably is — and must remain — a top priority for officials at every level of government and for even law enforcement [agencies] throughout the land” (Torres-Cortez, 2026, p. 1B). To be sure, refusing to cooperate with federal enforcement activities and their *promiscuous* use of power is something that should never be embraced.

In a nutshell, proponents of *civil disobedience* must redouble “their effort to restrict and challenge” the unlawful tactics of U.S. law enforcement (Chen, 2026, p. 9) (Note 5). This is also to say that we must *never* allow for the corrosion of “the rule of law.” As far as nonviolent protesters are concerned, journalists Mark VanCleave and Tim Sullivan (2026) are right when they wrote: “It’s common for people to *boo*, taunt and blow orange whistles when they spot heavily armed agents passing through in unmarked vehicles or walking the streets, all part of a grassroots effort to warn [a specific] neighborhood and remind the government that [we are] watching” (p. 5A). Such actions can be described as *unorthodox* forms of protest and *civil disobedience*. Not incidentally, some actions of law enforcement officials seem always to be *unjust* and adversarial. In this case — or on the surface — *civil disobedience* is also a form of *dissent*, which is a “refusal to conform to the rules, [obey,] and follow unjust laws, and the “beliefs of an established” authority, like with [corrupt] law enforcement” (“Dissent,” 1983, p. 320), in our society. Also, according to Emeritus McKenzie Professor of Government at Florida State University, Thomas R. Dye (2007), “Civil disobedience is the nonviolent violation of laws that [some] people believe to be unjust,” and unlawful.

Which is to say that “Civil disobedience denies that *legitimacy*, or rightfulness, of a [given] law and implies that a higher moral authority [should take] precedence over unjust laws.” Equally important, *civil disobedience* “is frequently a political tactic” used by Black Americans and “other minorities” (p. 8) (Note 6), when faced with injustice and apparent *blunt force*. In this respect, nonviolent protesters must use what they have learned from previous or past activists, like Dr. Martin L. King, Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks, who stared down death when confronted by *naysayers* and the racist law authorities of their day, because they believed that *unjust* laws shouldn’t be followed — that is, without question or reservation. Unquestionably, as Philip Zimbardo (2008), who is a professor emeritus of psychology at Stanford University writes: “the consequences of adopting a dehumanized conception of selected others is the unthinkable thing that [law enforcement entities] are willing to do to them [or minorities] once they are officially declared different and undesirable” (p. 313), backed with *unadulterated* violence. This means that there is no guarantee that *civil disobedience* or *passive resistance* will work every time; but it should be attempted, nonetheless, especially when fighting the forces of *evil*, like an out of control, abusive government and a corrupt law enforcement operation that makes unlawful arrests of its citizens.

Evil vs. Passive Resistance

In terms of *civil disobedience* and facing (political) *evil* by an illegitimate government authority, author Harry A. Wilmer (2001) tells us:

Evil is the central problem of our times. The iniquitous roster of evil all around us is an unending list of dark powers that are proliferating: racism, genocide, monstrous crimes, drug gang wars, merciless and random slaughter of innocent civilians, gas bombing of cities, pestilence, famine and war, governmental policies of racial cruelty, death squads, violent or insidious suppression of human rights, forms of slavery, abuse of children, bestial military action against civilians, callousness to the homeless, the AIDs victims and the poor, abuse of the elderly, sexism, rape, wanton murder, cults, terrorism, torture, [and] the unremitting aftermath of past holy and unholy wars [and] heinous cruelty and hated... (pp. 2-3).

As intended, *civil disobedience* is an urgent, political strategy of *resiliency* as it relates to nonviolent protest. It is also a *pragmatic* — call-to-action — solution for fighting back against the political realities and evils of an established government. In this vein, Professor Matthew R. Kerbel (2024) defines *civil disobedience* as “A peaceful means of protest whereby individuals draw attention to laws they consider unjust by disobeying them and being arrested for their actions” (p. 414). For some, such (necessary,) unlawful actions are *incomprehensible*, particularly in today’s political landscape banning people from protesting, which, as mentioned, is *unlawful* or contrary to the law. Kerbel (2024) goes on to write: “The actions undertaken by Dr. [Martin L.] King and other prominent leaders on behalf of civil rights were nonviolent forms of civil disobedience, along with [the contrary actions] of Rosa Parks disobeying what she believed to be an illegitimate law” (p. 414), when Black Americans were being unlawfully shepherd to the back of city buses in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955. So, objecting strongly against unfair [state] laws at this time was *unconventional* and *unconstitutional*. It should especially *gall* all of us that the government of the United States failed to protect and provide *equality* because of racist, *status quo*, edicts, and white supremacy. Hence, the uniqueness of *civil disobedience* is grounded in common sense, even if it was/is disruptive. Equally, *civil disobedience* is not an unsubstantiated concept or theory, nor is it a seemingly *arbitrary* approach to awful, unconstitutional laws. Essentially, “Only laws regarded as unjust are broken, and they are broken openly, without hatred [cruelty], violence” or prejudice. To be sure, “Punishment is actively sought [by nonviolent protesters] rather than avoided, since punishment will further emphasize the injustice of [certain] laws” (Dye, 2007, p. 8). Therefore, *civil disobedience* allows for fighting or protesting without unnecessary violence. In this way, *civil disobedience* is also politically purposeful. More broadly, as the late historian Howard Zinn (2013) explains, the nonviolent violation of laws leaves “two thoughts” in mind:

That one of the moral principles guiding the advocate of civil disobedience is [our] belief that a nonviolent world is one of the ends, and that nonviolence is more desirable than violence as a means; 2. That in the inevitable tension accompanying the transition from a violent world to a nonviolent one, the choice of means will almost never be pure, and will involve such complexities that the simple distinction between violence and nonviolence does not suffice as a guide (pp. 39-40).

Nevertheless, it is still important that we challenge the *wrong-doings* of law enforcement officials, no matter the circumstances. The most immediate goal or objective of nonviolent *civil disobedience* “is to stir the conscience of an apathetic [or dismissive] majority and to win support for measures that will eliminate [cursed] injustices” (Dye, 2007, p. 8). And perhaps we can change/alter or *shift* the collective mindset of the dominant majority when it concerns the failure of them recognizing the civil rights of nonviolent protesters. To say the least, we must also make sure that the majority understands that *civil disobedience* is not *overreacting* or illegal. Thus, we must keep in mind that nonviolent protest is something that we *all* should embrace as citizens. Without doubt, as Dr. Martin L. King argued: “nonviolent direct action” or righteous disobedience is “a vital aspect of democratic politics.” In other words, “the political purpose of civil disobedience is to call attention,” or to bear witness to “the existence of injustice” (Dye, 2007, p. 8), inequality, prejudices, and institutional discrimination by law enforcement organizations. In a sense, there is an undefeatable spirit with nonviolent protesters — now and in our past. More important, *civil disobedience* is often used as a form of “nonviolent direct action without hatred or violence” (Dye, 2007, p. 8), as mentioned. By and large, if *civil disobedience* is a form of peaceful protest, it “is protected by the First Amendment and generally recognized as a legitimate and important form of political activity” (Ginsberg et al., 2023, p. 277). Nonetheless, “the vast majority of Americans today reject rioting or other violence for political ends” (Ginsberg et al., 2023, p. 278), no matter the specific circumstances. However, should we consider a protester as an *insurrectionist*, who might favor rebellion? Not necessarily, because protests, as already mentioned, can be constructive and peaceful. For example, “During the height of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, hundreds of thousands of Americans took part in peaceful protests to demand social and political rights for Black people” (Ginsberg et al., 2023, p. 278) (Note 7). Accordingly, when people don’t comply with *unjust* laws, are they justified? Clearly, the explicit connection between *insurrectionists* and nonviolent protesters are not apparent. Or there are no *parallels*, because nonviolent participation is the key when it comes to *civil disobedience*. To this end, governments must respect a broad *cross-section* of political, citizen protesters and agitators. Notwithstanding, nonviolent protesters shouldn’t have to fight law enforcement agents because of who they are; nor should law enforcement officials try to dictate how and when people can peacefully protest — by rules (they installed or put in place) that are unconstitutional — and *interfere* with orchestrated protest marches/demonstrations, like with the civil rights movement. According to Joseph F. Healey (2003), who is a Professor of Sociology at Christopher Newport University, the “central strategy of the [civil rights] movement involved *nonviolent direct action*, a method by which the system of *de jure* segregation was confronted head-on, not in the courtroom or in the state legislature, but in the street.” This important, engaging, political tactic was especially used in the *Deep South*, where “The [civil rights] movement’s principles of nonviolence were adopted from the tenets of Christianity and from the teachings of Mohandas Gandhi, Henry David Thoreau” (p. 229) and the philosophy of nonviolent protest incorporated/used by Dr. Martin L. King, as discussed.

Civil Rights and Civil Disobedience

It should be noted that nonviolent protesters during the civil rights movement accomplished remarkable things, like changing a systematically racist government. Some, however, believed that *civil disobedience* and nonviolent protest hurt more than helped. Nevertheless, by contrast, *civil disobedience* is different from *insurrection*, because it (insurrection) is “a violent attack on government;” or it can be defined as “the act of revolting against civic authority or an established government” (Ginsberg et al., 2023, p. 277), like the United States of America. As way of an example, we should note that on January 6, 2021, rioters, mostly white men, “attached the U.S. Capitol building,” to illegally overthrow and/or delay the U.S. government’s procedural obligation and constitutional process to certify the 2020 presidential election. In other words, these rioters tried (hard and violently) “to prevent the counting of the electoral college votes from 50 states and stop [Joseph] Biden from becoming [the U.S.] president” (Ginsberg et al., 2023, p. 277) (Note 8). In essence, the *insurrectionist* rise against the recognized federal government was a serious crime against U.S. authority. Also, it should be pointed out that there was *nothing* patriotic about what these disorderly rioters did to undermine the federal government, Congress, and U.S. democracy.

To be certain, and unlike insurrection, *civil disobedience* is about nonviolent protest and political activism, *jeremiad* with boisterous dissent. Broadly speaking, how exactly does civil disorder relate to *civil disobedience* and nonviolence? Question: Is *civil disobedience* a form of reckless behavior that threatens a nation and lives of its people? Absolutely not. Nonetheless, “Participants [risk] their jobs and even their lives” in terms of breaking the law nonviolently, in order “to protest a law one considers unjust and draw attention to one’s cause.” As professors John J. Coleman, Kenneth M. Goldstein, and William G. Howell (2011) write: “This practice used nonviolent tactics such as marches and demonstrations to sway public opinion and pressure public officials;” and this strategy or tactic gives “future [nonviolent] participants the sense that direct political action [or civil disobedience] could succeed” (p. 233) (Note 9). Not surprisingly, fighting against nonviolent protesters — by law enforcement officials — can be a pain or more than a political *inconvenienced*.

More important, it should be clearly understood that “Some protests are aimed at stopping [unfair and illegal] government action, such as when people lie down in front of a bulldozer to stop the building of a new [invasive] highway,” or starting “sit-ins like during Black student sit-ins of the 1960s.” As discussed earlier in this paper, “A secondary goal” of nonviolent protest “is to gain media attention with the idea of publicizing the group’s goals and perhaps gaining new members [or protesters/resisters] or financial support” (Bianco & Canon, 2009, p. 330) for their focused and blunt activities. Suffice it to say, *civil disobedience* is quite extraordinary, particularly in an extreme, political environment. But very peripherally, unconventional behavior and participation, or “Acts of uncivil disobedience — [like] rioting, arson, assassination, bombing, and other forms of terrorism [and violence] — are aimed at subverting the political order,” by any means necessary. And unsurprisingly, “Because most people view such acts as dangerous and unjustified, uncivil disobedience is generally less effective politically than civil disobedience” (Edwards & Lippucci, 1998, p. 211) (Note 10). In so many words, *civil disobedience* is not a “smokescreen” to hide criminality. However, there are “other forms of *uncivil disobedience* [that] may go undetected or unpunished,” like fake phishing, malware, scamming, and *cyberbullying* on the internet and *vandalism*, as well as “bribery of public officials, shoplifting or other theft by those who claim” they are “striking a blow against capitalism...” (Edwards & Lippucci, 1998, p. 210). Moreover, we must ask: How can we fight back against those who don’t abide by the law equally, especially when it comes to different ethnic groups and how they protest? Of course, *all* American citizens “must be free to organize for political purposes. Obviously, individuals can be more effective if they join with others in a [political] party, a pressure group, a protest movement, or a demonstration” (Magleby, Light, & Nemacheck, 2014, p. 29) (Note 11). In this respect, *civil disobedience* is not separate from reality, particularly with egregious government overreach. And frankly, the preposterous alternative by law enforcement (for citizens) to simply give-in (and submit) to authority is outrageous, because corrupt, unjust government laws must always be challenged, no matter what. This is what resistance philosophy is all about. Take for example, the nonviolent advocacy of Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. According to Professor of History at Dartmouth College, Darrin M. McMahon (2023):

In [Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.’s] handling, civil disobedience and the philosophy of nonviolence were forged, as they were in Gandhi’s *satyagraha*, as weapons in the first against injustice, means to effectively resist. Nor were those weapons “passive.” On the contrary, their soul-force was a new kind of strength that propelled its possessors into the fray, readying them to endure violence and suffering themselves, whether inflicted by firehose or fists, bullets, truncheons, or snarling dogs (p. 365) (Note 12).

The Philosophy of Resistance

Civil disobedience is also a passive way of speaking your mind, because we *cannot* forget our constitutional rights of freedom, resistance, and to peacefully assemble. Thus, it seems disingenuous when law enforcement authorities criticize nonviolent protesters who are well-within their first amendment rights — to protest. In this regard, *civil disobedience* is not merely an idea, as it can cross boundaries in politics. Furthermore, nonviolent protesters can stand in the breach, so to speak, as a force against unlawful, government laws and policies that try to stifle nonviolent protest. As Roger Berkowitz (2024), a professor of Politics, Philosophy, and Human Rights at Bard College, argues: “There are some laws [that] we disagree with and find offensive, but there are others so unjust that our continued obedience to our government implicates us in their wrong” (p. xi). The key to evaluate or judge nonviolent protesters through the lens of *civil disobedience* and in terms of “the rule of law” might bring enough political *panache* to fight against government lawlessness, which is always nothing short of awful.

Of course, the “rule of law” means “government... based on a body of laws [supposedly] applied equally and by just procedures, as opposed to arbitrary rule by an elite group whose whims decide policy or resolve disputes” (Magleby et al., 2014, p. 29) (Note 13), like whether nonviolent protesters have *any* rights whatsoever. Equally, how can citizens or nonviolent protesters fight back against the needless and aggressive law enforcement entities or officials who themselves break the law by their thugocracy or thuggery. More importantly, citizens or nonviolent protesters shouldn’t have to worry about being arrested and put in police custody without a warrant or probable cause as outlined in the fourth amendment to the U.S. Constitution. So, is *civil disobedience* a way of leveling the playing field against unjust government actions? Perhaps. As the late political philosopher Hannah Arendt (2024) wrote: “Disobedience to the law, civil and criminal, has become a mass phenomenon in recent years, not only in America, but also in a great many other parts of the world. The defiance of established authority, religious and secular, social and political, as a worldwide phenomenon may well one day be accounted the outstanding event of the last decade” (p. 57), and maybe the next century. This is important to understand, because retaliatory measures or attacks by law enforcement officials never really work, particularly when they refuse some citizens their existence and the right to protest. Meanwhile, *obsequious*, conservative politicians *usurp* the U.S. Constitution, and sometimes even their official responsibilities by ignoring the reality of nonviolent protest. Practically speaking, as Henry David Thoreau (1993) wrote: “All men recognize the right of revolution that is, the right to refuse allegiance to and to resist the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable” (p. 3) (Note 14). To be specific, unacceptable laws by government must be challenged at *all costs*, without the fear of breaking rules or laws that are oppressive and unlawful, which ultimately can make for dangerous situations. Take for example our current “Justice Department’s attempt to indict a group of [Democratic] lawmakers who... urged U.S. military to resist illegal orders” (“Dems defend,” 2026, p. 2A) (Note 15) from a rogue U.S. president. Such civil disobedient rhetoric is *patriotism* at its finest.

Conclusion

Paradoxically, law enforcement officials often violate the “rule of law,” because they know that they can get away with it, including denying citizens their constitutional freedoms and right to peacefully protest their government without interference. This is to say that *lawlessness* by some governments across the nation is legend. In the end, like with Thoreau musing, Professor of History at Yale University, Timothy Snyder (2024) writes: “An individual is free... when the government is out of the way” (p. xiii) (Note 16). Nonetheless, government is necessary — to control the behavior of people. More significantly, fighting for freedom to protest in a nonviolent way, by using the techniques of *civil disobedience*, is often the appropriate thing to do. Which is to say that it is the foremost way to fight against *bad government*, corrupt law authority, and the *powers-that-be*. Indeed, resisting *unjust laws* is the best alternative. Also, is it right to fight against political traditions if they don’t protect or consider people (or nonviolent protesters) in equitable ways? Or should we obey the rules of a political game, no matter what? This question is why *resistance* is so important and sometimes necessary. Moreover, when law enforcement officials attack nonviolent protesters, who are practicing their first amendment rights, cannot be justified. Equally important, there is a *parallel* here between *civil disobedience* and nonviolent direct action protest, but these techniques are not related to *insurrection* or “disorderly conduct, which might likely “lead to a disturbance of the public peace or that offends public decency.” This includes “the use of obscene language in public, fighting in a public place, blocking public ways, and making threats” (“Disorderly Conduct,” 2000, p. 472) (Note 17). To be clear, disorderly conduct must *never* be equated to *civil disobedience* or nonviolent protest, as indistinguishable, because such peaceful methods/practices, notwithstanding, are not the same. Nonetheless, some see the technique of *civil disobedience* as reckless political stunts, designed to distract people when it comes to American justice and dishonoring or besmirching law enforcement officials — by protesting. But *civil disobedience* is not a call for *lawlessness* or violent protest, because it is allowed by our Constitutional Republic. Consequently, this does not mean that nonviolent protesters should be necessarily ignored, because orchestrators of *civil disobedience* embrace — even behind the scenes — nonviolent action, rather than engendering tension, conflict, and violence — that is, they (orchestrators) sometimes exercise their freedom in troubling ways; but nonviolent protest is sometimes necessary and entirely humane, relatable, and not *speculative*. Underlying this *resistance philosophy* is it touches Black Americans and other people of color in unconventional ways. Indeed, it should be noted that “some researchers contend that Black consciousness has heightened both African Americans’ distrust of the political system and their sense of individual efficacy, generating more political participation by poor Blacks than by poor whites” (Janda et al., 2022, p. 177). Today, the American people and citizens of the world must hear the protest stories of *all* human beings who are attacked by abusive governments. Janda et al. (2022) goes on to write:

Although direct political action and the politics of confrontation can work, using them requires a special kind of commitment. Studies show that direct action appeals most to those who both distrust the political system and have a strong sense of political efficacy — the feeling that they can do something to affect political decisions. Whether this combination of attitudes produces behavior that challenges the system depends on the extent of organized group activity (p. 177) (Note 18).

So, is nonviolent protest (and *civil disobedience*) a way to express feelings against unlawful authority? Probably. In the final analysis, we (or protesters) must promote accountability of law enforcement officials. Accordingly, nonviolent protesters must focus on the positive aspect of fighting back against an *authoritarian* government. Also, *Civil disobedience* can meaningfully address longstanding, criminal *inequalities*. After all, this strategy of *passive resistance* was really put to the test during the American civil rights movement, as mentioned. This is to say that Black Americans and other minorities were/are disproportionately affected by *unjust*, discriminatory laws, and policies in the United States, not because their needs are/were different than the (white) dominant group, but a person's race or ethnic group, unfortunately, makes things more complex and unfair in terms of *merciless* law enforcement — like being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Along with different marches and demonstrations, nonviolent protesters must always be aware of their particular surroundings, while taking precautions to protect themselves against the forces of *evil*. To wit, “inequalities and injustice [in the past] were severe but organizing and encouraging mass participation in the face of entrenched and powerful opponents was not [or hasn't been] easy” (Coleman et al., 2011, p. 233). Of course, with *civil disobedience*, there are not always positive or inevitable political outcomes. However, this does not mean that “resistance work” for protesters is finished.

Finally, we (or nonviolent protesters) should have an obligation to protest or stand firm against law enforcement officials/authorities that go against the first and fourth amendments to the Constitution — or when these individuals severely neglect or abuse the civil rights of respective citizens. In so many words, nonviolent protesters *should* challenge harsh, authoritarian governments, at every turn, if possible, in *nonviolent* ways, while understanding the integrity of the constitutional system itself.

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Notes

- Note 1. Law enforcement must also protect the inherent human dignity of people, while recognizing their agency and worth.
- Note 2. Gros goes on to write: "Civil disobedience, on the other hand, assume a collective action that strikes at the heart of the social contract, giving rise, on the occasion of a common challenge, to the project of 'making society' over and above institutions that are above all bent on perpetuating themselves and continuing the comfort of an elite." See the same reference and page number.
- Note 3. It should be understood that "No single act guarantees success, but together they ensure that our collective rights are defended and not eroded by the few." See Silverstein, K. (2026, February 10). When liberty starts to show cracks. *Las Vegas Sun* (p. 3).
- Note 4. Unfortunately, with "politicized law enforcement, demanding the courts acquiesce, and pardons for political violence," specific "communities see the effect — federal agents acting nearly with impunity and local leaders pushed to call for investigations." See Silverstein, K. (2026, February 10). When liberty starts to show cracks. *Las Vegas Sun* (p. 3).
- Note 5. Accordingly, when law enforcement attack peaceful protesters, "It reflects deliberate [government] policy choice that favor visibility over accountability and force over legitimacy." See ICE's militarized crackdown in Minnesota corrodes the rule of law. (2026, January 21). *Las Vegas Sun*, The Minnesota Star Tribune (p. 2).
- Note 6. It should be understood that dominant groups or "Majorities can more easily change laws through conventional political activity." See the same reference and page number.
- Note 7. It should be noted that *civil rights* are "the rights of a citizen, especially the rights guaranteed to all citizens of the United States, regardless of race, color," or religion. See Civil Rights. (1983). In *Scott, Foresman Advanced Dictionary* (p. 204). Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company.
- Note 8. Unfortunately, "The January 6 insurrection left five people dead, 140 police officers injured, and more than 800 rioters [were] charged with federal crimes." See the same reference and page number.
- Note 9. Note that civil disobedience has always been a way to challenge a racist and discriminatory system at the local, state, and national levels.

Note 10. It should be pointed out that “Unlike those engaged in civil disobedience, those who commit subversive illegal acts attempt to escape punishment.” See the same reference and page number.

Note 11. To be abundantly clear, “The right to oppose the government, to form opposition parties, a chance to defeat incumbents is a defining characteristic of a [viable] democracy.” See the same reference and page number.

Note 12. *Satyagraha*, or nonviolent protest, or passive resistance “involves refusing to submit to or cooperate with anything perceived as wrong, while adhering to the principle of nonviolence in order to maintain the tranquility of mind required for insight and understanding. The principle played a significant role in the U.S. civil rights movement led by M. L. King.” See Satyagraha. (2000). In *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Encyclopedia* (p. 1431). Mass: Merriam-Webster Inc. Because of his embrace of passive resistance and nonviolent protest, Dr. King helped shepherd this approach and became a powerful voice as the face of the civil rights movement. Dr. King “echoed Gahndhi, who spoke of satyagraha, the uncompromising insistence on truth, a doctrine that mixed politics and religion.” King went on to state that Black Americans “of the earth, the poor and oppressed... would lead the way, meeting violent force with soul force, exerting the influence of love, wearing down hatred.” See Eig, J. (2023). *King: A Life*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p. 209.

Note 13. Civil disobedience, therefore, can be a potent guardrail, as mentioned, against a broken criminal justice system.

Note 14. We must keep in mind that Thoreau’s “advocacy of civil disobedience as a means for the individual to protest those actions of [a] government that he [considered] unjust has had a wide-ranging impact” on democratic nations, particularly when it comes to passive resistance, like with “the nonviolent civil rights movement led by [Dr.] Martin Luther King in the United States.” See Thoreau, Henry David. (1975). In *The New Columbia Encyclopedia* (p. 2738). New York: Columbia University Press.

Note 15. Fortunately, “a Washington grand jury declined to indict six democratic lawmakers... over a 90-second video that drew fierce backlash” from the White House and republicans. See the same reference and page number.

Note 16. Being against *civil disobedience* means having unaccepted views and opinions about breaking the so-called *rule-of-law*, especially in terms of social and political behavior. Unfortunately, conservative Republicans often refrain that protesters today are paid by billionaire George Soros. What nonsense.

Note 17. Nonviolent protest (or nonviolence) is a “belief in the use of peaceful methods to achieve any goal,” which is in “opposition to any form of violence.” See Nonviolence. (1983). In *Scott, Foresman Advanced Dictionary* (p. 757). Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company.

Note 18. Another definition of *direct action* posits that it is “Unconventional participation that involves assembling crowds [or protesters] to confront businesses and local governments to demand a hearing.” See the same reference and page number. See also Gandhi, M. K. (1993). *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 428.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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