

## Background

The Extinction Rebellion has nonviolence as one of its core principles which is non-negotiable for everyone who wants to take action under the name of XR. It is non-negotiable because we see it as a fundamental cornerstone to the way we are working and that divergence from this principle will put the whole of our international network at risk.

XR was started by the [Risingup!](#) Network, which have been working with the following approach to nonviolence:

## WE ARE A NON-VIOLENT NETWORK

*Non-violence keeps our movement alive. We use non-violence to reveal the true perpetrators of systemic violence that people suffer from daily all over this world. It is our strategy to bring light to the injustice that too many suffer each day. We feel pain from the abuses of the police and others, and we will keep exposing their violence through our discipline. Non-violence has unequivocally been demonstrated to be an effective tool in mass mobilisations and so we base a cornerstone of our movement on this.*

*At the same we also recognise that many people and movements in the world face death, displacement and abuse in defending what is theirs. We will not condemn those who justly defend their families and communities through the use of force, especially as we must also recognise that it is often our privilege which keeps us safe. We stand in solidarity with those whom have no such privilege to protect them and therefore must protect themselves through violent means; this does not mean we condone all violence, just that we understand in some cases it may be justified. Also we do not condemn other social and environmental movements that choose to damage property in order to protect themselves and nature, for example disabling a fracking rig or putting a detention centre out of action. Our network, however, will not undertake significant property damage because of risks to other participants by association.*

## Strategic perspective

We work from the perspective of strategic non-violence, meaning that we are choosing it primarily because it is the best strategic choice as clearly demonstrated by the social science research. One of our main references for this is the work of Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan and their study '[Why civil resistance works](#)', see this [Ted talk](#) for a brief summary. Also Gene Sharp have been contributing a lot of work in this field, summarised in [this film](#) and through the [Albert Einstein institution](#)

This body of work has concluded, among other things that:

- Nonviolent uprisings between 1900-2006 were about twice as successful in achieving their aims compared with their counterparts which were using violent tactics.
- The nonviolent uprisings attracted wider segments of the population to take parts while the violent ones primarily attracted the participation of young and able-bodied males.
- Nonviolent uprisings also managed to create more stable results after succeeding while the campaigns which were won by violent means tended to more often descend into a spiral of civil war and infighting.
- If we were to rise up against the authorities with violent means then we would be using an approach which they know how to handle with police and military. In order to be successful we need to make the struggle asymmetric, and not engage using the tools of violence, as we will always be out-matched.

## Accountability

We define nonviolence as being defined by how it is being perceived by the general public rather than by ideological argument. It is possible to argue on and on about whether “throwing bricks through windows without hurting any human being” is violent or not, and such attempts at categorisation are flawed. In the end the vast majority of people will regard it as violent if masked individuals throw bricks and then run away from the scene, and any philosophical argument whether its nonviolent or not becomes irrelevant.

We believe nonviolence lies a lot within the gesture of how you do actions and if you take accountability for it or not. For example during a previous campaign, *VoteNoHeathrow*, which *RisingUp!* ran before launching XR, members cracked windows with a small tool in a peaceful way through calmly walking up to a window and putting small cracks in it using a [window punch tool](#) intended for cracking glass, and afterwards staying on the scene to take accountability for it, as seen in [this video](#)

In short:

- Taking accountability for actions is key
- The gesture of how you do an action is important

## Verbal nonviolence

We are also emphasising verbal nonviolence within *Risingup!* and XR, meaning that in all situations we stay respectful towards police and the people in power and don't resort to blaming and shaming individuals as outlined in our [principles and values](#)

Part of the reasoning here is that it is clearing the space for us to focus on the real systemic issue as outlined in [this article](#) as well as providing space for the people in power to more easily defect and come out in support of the movement.

## Variations

As stated above, our main position on nonviolence was inspired by the research which outlines it as the best strategic option. However, others in the network also have a spiritual and faith-based stream which contains a more principled stance when it comes to nonviolence. Both positions are welcome within XR and help us to guide our actions.

On future actions, we would also like to take feedback from the XR organism on how it believes nonviolence is working within the movement and whether new developments should be made to our position. We are uncompromising in our commitment to nonviolence but as a growing and learning network we are open to different interpretations.