

# XR STRATEGY

## Extinction Rebellion US Theory of Change - Civil Resistance Model

**As it states in the XR principles, “we set our mission on what is necessary: mobilizing 3.5% of the population to achieve system change – using ideas such as “Momentum-driven organizing” to achieve this.”**

Theory of change answers the following questions: How is what you’re doing going to lead to the outcome you want? What is the basis for your plan for making change? How does anyone know your plan has a chance to succeed? Is it based on any kind of data?

XR’s theory of change is the **Civil Resistance Model** and it answers those questions.

The Civil Resistance Model is based on evidence that shows that historical resistance movements have won through using **disruption, risk, and escalation**.

(Much of this section is taken from Momentum Training Materials, sometimes word for word.)

### **Disruption and Polarization**

Civil resistance movements use disruption - civil disobedience - because it causes polarization. Disruption that works is disruption that causes polarization. Polarization is the practice of asking the public, “Which side are you on?” through actions. Through small symbolic action as well as mass civil disobedience (disruption) we dramatize the crisis in the public eye creating a new awareness of our issue and new opportunities for people to join the movement.

Collectively our actions force people to choose a side between the world as it is and as it should be. This process is by definition not meant to be pleasing. It’s breaking business as usual. Disruption is disruptive.

### **Courage, Not Hope**

Unlike most mainstream environmental groups, XR doesn’t use the strategy of positivity and hope to recruit people. For many years, other climate orgs have been using this strategy - of asking people for very little and not trying to frighten them. This strategy

has increased awareness to some extent. And we're very grateful for all the work that good people have done. But overall unfortunately it hasn't worked. GHG emissions keep rising – since 1990, GHG emissions have risen 60 percent - and we find ourselves on a clear path to extinction.

We share with people how deadly and dire our situation is and we ask people to consider what they should do to respond in a way that matches the problem.

XR's message is tapping into a need that is clearly not being filled enough - a feeling among many people that the world is dying around us, but people are not acting like there is a crisis. We aren't fully psychologically integrating the reality of the situation. But the reality of the situation is that we're in a house on fire, filling with smoke, and the mainstream movement is still talking about hope and taking incremental action rather than working together to do whatever is necessary to put out the fire.

One key XR slogan is: We need more courage, not hope. We aren't having the kinds of discussions yet broadly of what will be required of us, what kind of people we will need to become, to become the people we've been waiting for. To put this in perspective, you probably remember from the Heading For Extinction talk, Gail asked at the conclusion: are you willing to get arrested? Are you willing to go to prison? We all have this information in front of us, how would you act accordingly?

People care deeply and are deeply worried. But most mainstream climate groups aren't asking much of them. They ask for a small monthly donation, they ask people to vote and to contact congress, and they occasionally ask people to do an act of civil disobedience that isn't more than a symbolic act, and they reassure people that the consequences of the arrest will likely be small, if any. That's because the civil disobedience actions are **arranged** to be that way. XR US is one of the climate groups that takes a different view. And we come with a big hug of solidarity and love to ask the more mainstream groups to ask more of themselves and everyone. If we were all to truly take in how serious the danger we are all in is, how would our movements be different? What would be doing differently? How far are we willing to go? How much are we willing to give?

We need hundreds of organizers, people who commit a certain amount of time every week to build capacity to bring thousands of people into the streets to do mass, sustained disruption. Regular people like you and me, who can, become organizers. We just have to become willing and take the time to learn. Systemic change on the scale we need has only ever come from groups of people organizing outside the system. Not by

relying on politicians. But instead creating a crisis that politicians can't ignore and feel forced to act. No one is coming to save us. Together we can do it!

## Our Actions Ask the Public: Which Side Are You On?

Often when activists strategize about reaching the public, they speak about the public as a monolith. But it's much more helpful to us if we can figure out who the public is and where they are in relationship to the movement. This is called the,

## Spectrum of Support

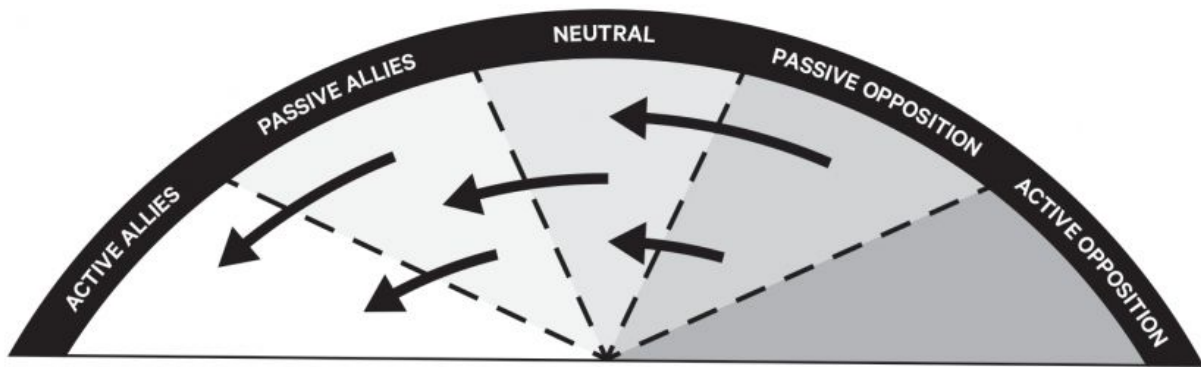


Image credit: [httpbyebye45.net/shift-the-spectrum-of-allies](http://byebye45.net/shift-the-spectrum-of-allies)

### Active Allies (3.5% of the population need to be active allies in order to win)

- people in your organization
- people who are actively fighting on the same side as you

Active allies does not mean people who do civil disobedience for your cause. It means people who support through voting for your issue, or support on social media, or protest/marches, writing letters etc.

### Passive Allies (we need 51% of the population)

- people who agree with you but aren't active
- agree with does not mean like you or like your civil disobedience or movement tactics, see more below

### Neutral

- people who aren't involved or don't know about the movement or issue. Some may be more friendly neutral, meaning they don't much care but kind of see your point. And some may be more hostile neutral, they don't much care but they kind of don't like your point.

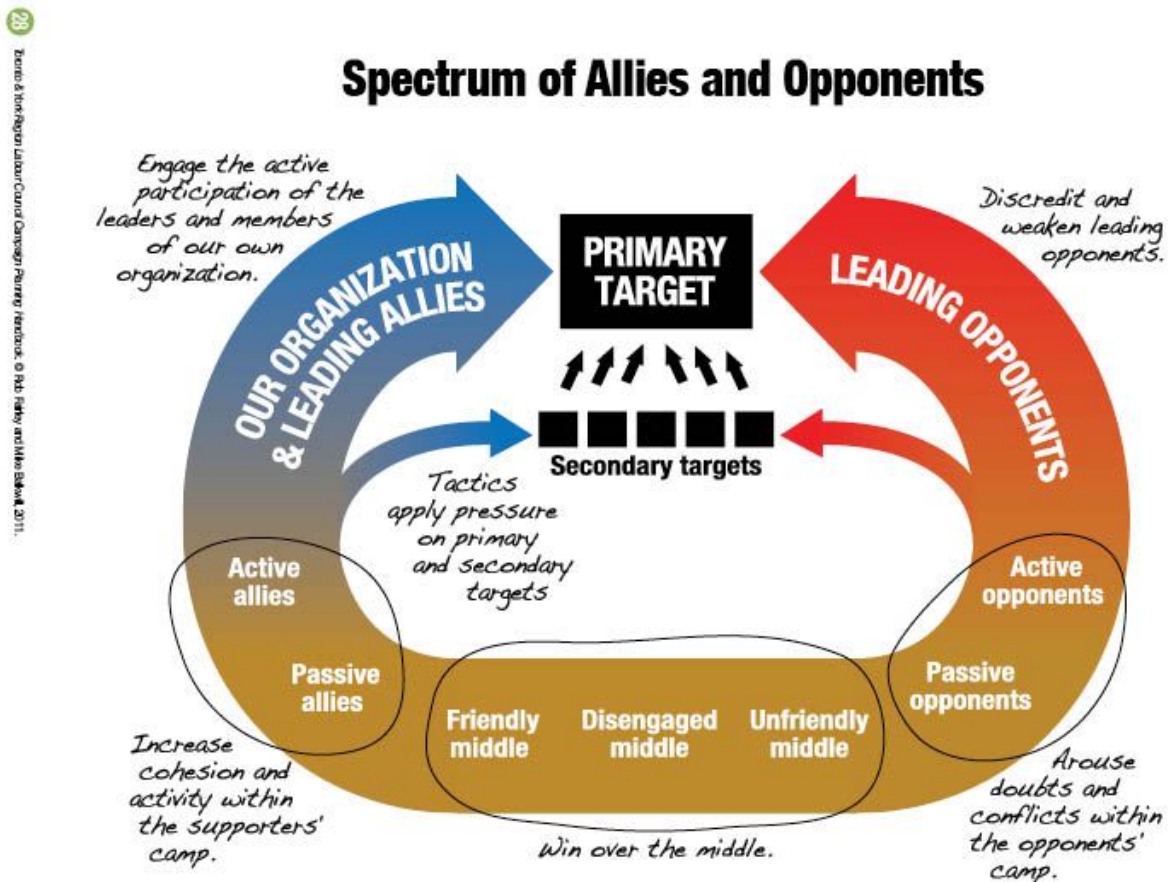
### Passive Opposition

- people who oppose your issue but aren't doing anything about it

### Active Opposition

- people who are organizing against you
- people who are fighting with those organizing against you

## Spectrum of Allies and Opponents



Source: Adapted by Fildes/Edmond from "Spectrum of Allies" in Training for Change by George Lakay.

Disruptive actions, if done well, will pull more of the passive allies into the movement. And will cause more of the neutrals to see the problem and the need for change and become passive allies even if they dislike the disruption and don't join the movement. Disruptive actions will also arouse doubts within passive opponents and reveal the motivations of, and create conflicts within, the active opposition.

## How Many People Do We Need

The rebellion XR is part of helping to create is premised on extensive research that shows conclusively that if 3.5% of the population in any country is **actively** engaged in sustained resistance, governments inevitably concede or collapse under the pressure. In the Spectrum of Resistance, this would be the Active Allies portion. The research shows that governments simply can't endure this many people engaging in serious disruption if it lasts for an extended period of time. Read more here: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/01/worried-american-democracy-study-activist-techniques>

This is good news! This means we don't need 51% of the people or more to actively join the movement.

The research also shows that movements that succeed need 51% of the population to be Passive Allies - people who agree with you but aren't active. But agreeing doesn't mean agree with everything and agreeing doesn't mean liking you or your movement's tactics. One reason so many people who care about making change don't get involved in civil resistance is because they believe - because we are taught this - that in order to make change we can't piss people off and have to get everyone involved or to agree with us. That's just not the case. Civil resistance movements do not succeed because they win over most people to like them or actively support them or join the movement.

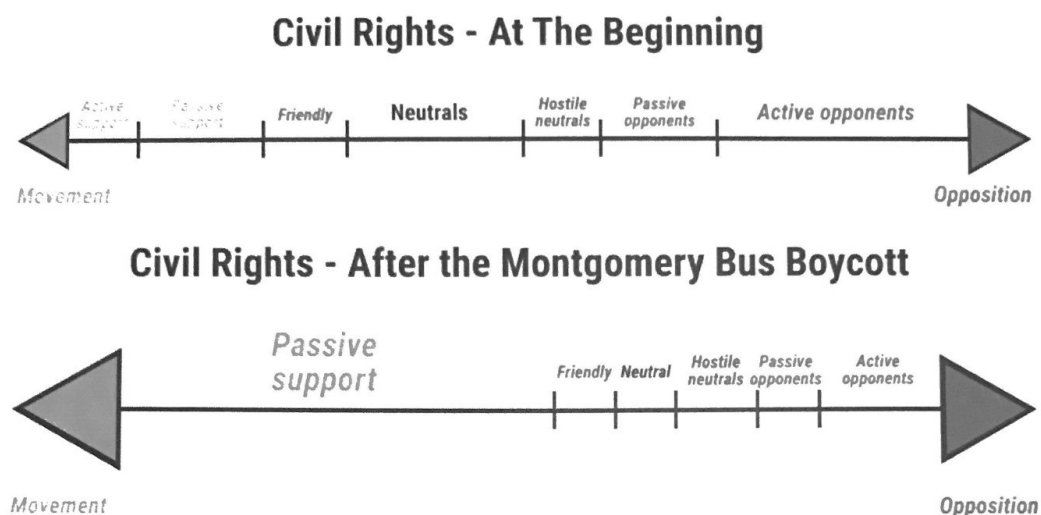
This is key to understand.

They do not succeed because the resistance movements are well loved. In fact, resistance movements of these types are often disliked by the large majority of the population. In 1968 Martin Luther King Jr was disliked by 75% of the US population. That did not prevent the civil rights movement from winning.

Civil resistance movements don't win due to popularity. They win by making it clear what the problem is and that disruption won't stop until changes happen. They make it impossible for their issue to be ignored. The disruption raises awareness and forces people to take a side, and isolates the opposition. Over and over again during the civil rights movement, activists were told they were going too far, risking too much, that people would dislike what they were doing etc. But throughout the civil rights movement there were key moments when they adapted, experimented, learned, and took risks against strong opposition - even opposition from within their own movements, even in some cases opposition from Dr. King - and that all led to their overall success.

For example, see the following image for how the spectrum of support moved in the civil rights movement.

The spectrum of support is an excellent tool to breakdown the public's position on an issue or movement. Below you can see how the public shifted from the beginning of the Civil Right movement to its first victory.



**We know we are winning when we increasing active and passive popular support.** These are the metrics of a movement's success. The spectrum of support allows us to map this.

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Image credit: Momentum Participant Guide

Again, this did not mean that 50% of the country liked the civil rights movement or MLK Jr. We can't win if more than 50% of the population **actively** opposes us. But we can win if, as in the civil rights movement, for many varied reasons, 50% of the public

supported the government taking measures to address the demands of the civil rights movement. This often sounds like people saying, “I don’t like what they’re doing, but they have a point. Change is needed.” Or, “I really dislike their tactics and I wish they’d stop but the government needs to address the issue. Something’s gotta change.”

Civil resistance movements work because they cause polarization and force change, while only needing 51% of the population to generally agree that what they’re fighting for is needed to some degree.

Government and some of the public that is neutral or passively opposed to the movement end up passively acquiescing to the goals of the movement just so the disruption will end.

**But disruption alone often isn’t enough.**

## **Escalation and Sacrifice**

Historically, movements that escalate, win. But this isn’t to be taken lightly or approached as a formula. This is very serious and can be dangerous because the people/institutions/corporations/governments we fight will often stop at nothing to keep their profits and power.

Communities or movements working together locally will figure out whether to escalate, how much escalation, who, and when is appropriate. Especially because the consequences for escalation will be very different based on people’s race, class, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship status, which state you’re in etc. Our only goal here is to lay out the facts about how civil resistance movements have won in the past. Not to tell anyone what they should do.

To win, disruption escalates - often in phases - in scope and size.

**Escalation is increased sacrifice/risk plus increased disruption, for those who can.** People power can grow with escalation. Increasing the level of risk, or another way of saying that is increasing how vulnerable we are willing to make ourselves, helps grow our movements because when the public sees increased risk and disruption some of the public’s hearts will open, they will feel compelled to act. This is especially the case if the state takes advantage of the ways people make themselves vulnerable - by beating and/or jailing people - it can lead to the state losing public support and legitimacy and increasing the number of people who are friendly neutral or passive allies etc. When this

happens, it can often be a turning point in civil resistance movements winning. This was the case in the civil rights movement for example.

Escalation - in the case of increased disruption - is also needed because the public and government can quickly adjust to disruption. Movements that win always find varied, creative ways to disrupt.

<http://www.aeinstein.org/nonviolentaction/198-methods-of-nonviolent-action/>

Movements that use the same tactics over and over can lose momentum.

Also, if the government isn't persuaded by the level of disruption we've engaged in, then we escalate until they are.

Increased disruption and sacrifice pushes the issue more and more to increase the level of crisis, and therefore force a resolution.

If you look at successful civil resistance movements like the civil rights movement or Otpur, you'll see that it's the escalation that often propels a movement's message farther than it would otherwise reach. And engages people's hearts.

Historically we've seen that when these methods are used by approximately 3.5% of the population or even less, in sustained ways, their movements win.

But no matter how much disruption and escalation we do, no movement survives, much less grows and thrives on its own. All civil disobedience movements depend on coalition building and more importantly, solidarity - supporting other movements.