

STRATEGIC ESCALATION

NOTE FOR FACILITATORS

You are welcome to “File>Make a Copy” to make your own adjustments.

This workshop is designed to last 120 minutes. [See timeline agenda.](#)

Workshop goals:

- Understand different kinds of actions: symbolic actions, noncooperation (omission), , and alternative cooperation
- How to be more powerful in action design
- Discuss how tactics may shift under a Trump Presidency
- Touch on action safety and maintaining discipline

It's designed as an online course. If you decide to adapt it for in-person:

- You'll need to adapt the warm-ups and closings.
- This current designs leans on videos — so you may need to set-up a laptop/projector to play.



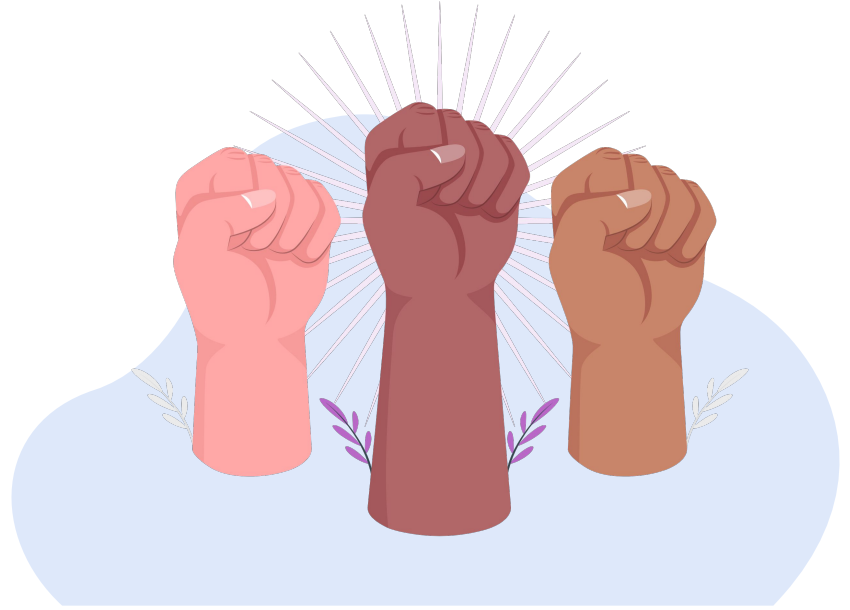
Agenda and Estimate Times

15 minutes	Actions we have done & what makes an effective action
25 minutes	Types of action: Symbolic Actions, Noncooperation, and Alternative Cooperation
20 minutes	What changes under a Trump Presidency?
10 minutes	BREAK
25 minutes	Actions in Fascist Regimes
20 minutes	Action Reflections and Tactical Ideas
5 minutes	Closing



STRATEGIC ESCALATION

How to get out of ruts — and make powerful actions



Think back.

What's an effective action you have been part of or heard about?

Take 5 minutes to draw the action.

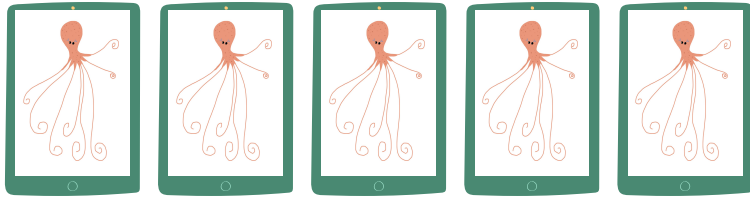
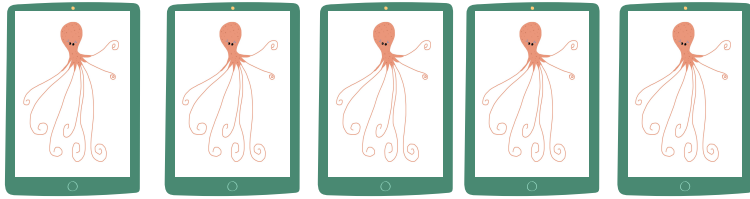
It doesn't have to be great artwork. But we'll ask everyone to go on video and show their drawing.

Go!



Think back.

What's an effective action you have been part of or heard about?



Everyone hold up your drawings to the screen.

Let's take a moment to look and see. *Feel free to ask questions to each other about the action.*

What made that action effective?



When you said it felt effective, what did you mean? What about the tactic made that action effective?

Share in the chat.



To: Everyone ▼

More ▼

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What makes an action effective?

-



Additional Criteria for Effectiveness

INTERFERES WITH INJUSTICE

Talking is not enough. Actions should either build people power or otherwise get in the way of injustice.

The most powerful actions directly interfere with an unjust system — making it harder for wrong-headed powerholders to do what they want.

CONVINCES NEW PEOPLE TO ACTIVATE

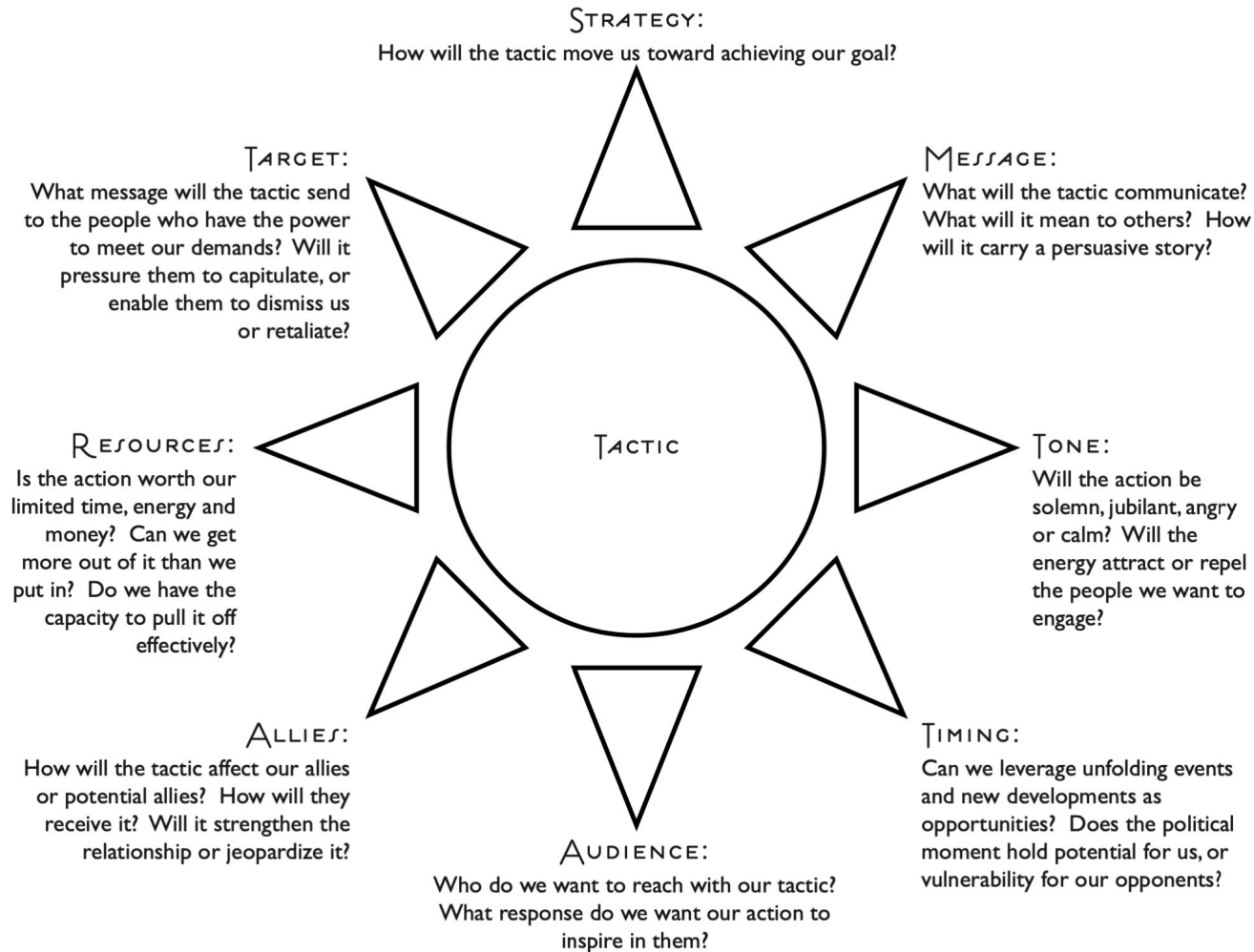
People power is about *people*. One major criteria is seeing if this action *activates* new people. Simply being “convinced” is not nearly enough.

Activate does not necessarily mean they’ll join our protest — but they must have clear, actionable steps afterwards.

BUILDS MORE ENERGY THAN IT TAKES

Consider this: *how much energy does it take to do the action versus how much energy does it create for the movement?*

A singular action may be effective — but at the cost of a group being wiped out afterwards.



Different Types of Actions



Symbolic Actions

To raise public awareness of an issue and persuade a target to act in a desired way

Examples:

- marches/rallies/vigils,
- street theater,
- letter-writing/petition drives
- skywriting,
- mock awards,
- picketing,
- group lobbying,
- mock elections, and
- “haunting” officials/birddogging.



Noncooperation

To undermine the authority of an unjust system by disrupting it, refusing to cooperate with it, or otherwise making it harder, or impossible, for the system to keep its unfair policy

Examples:

- student strike,
- sanctuary,
- Industry or consumers’ boycott,
- rent withholding, and
- tax refusal.



Alternative Cooperation

To build an alternative institution or policy by acting as though it is already in place to disrupt or directly challenge the current system/policy, and demonstrate alternatives

Examples:

- nonviolent land seizure,
- occupation of building,
- citizens’ arrests,
- guerilla gardening,
- Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party alternative elections.

Which kind of action was your drawing?

Recall your drawing — the example of action that you thought about earlier?

Which category was it? *Symbolic Action?*
Noncooperation? Alternative Cooperation?

What do you make of this?



To: Everyone ▾ More ▾

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What changes under a Trump Presidency?



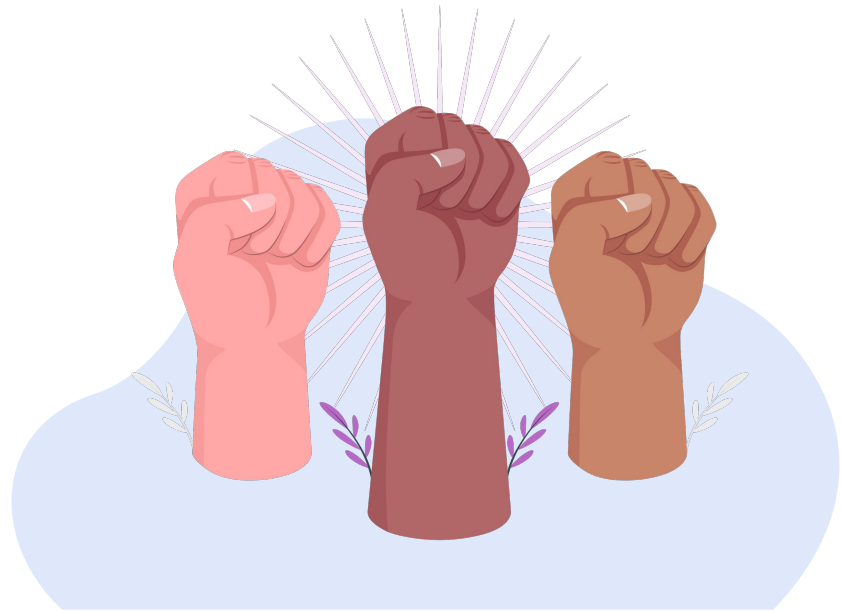
- Harder to win minor reforms
- People more open to systemic analyses
- People will consider actions they wouldn't do before (aim for defections from the other side!)
- Small groups lead experiments with noncooperation and alternative cooperation strategies
- Traditional protest will be targeted (so make repression rebound)
- Mass protests will result in even less change — but can show movement unity (or, if poorly timed, expose the lack of it)



Break!



ACTIONS **UNDER FASCISM**



Let's go to Serbia.

There's a repressive government under the leadership of Slobodan Milošević.

A decentralized group called *Otpor* is forming and developing actions.

(Warning: images of police violence.)





BRINGING DOWN A DICTATOR

Narrated by MARTIN SHEEN

Though their work, Milošević is forced out of office.

(You can see the full story in *Bringing Down a Dictator* — all resources will be shared later.)



What are some lessons for us?

As we go into another short case study, drop some lessons you note from this story that may be useful for us.



To: Everyone ▾

[More ▾](#)

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Now let's go to Chile.

Another repressive government this time under General Augusto Pinochet.

Unlike the US, political protests have been outlawed for quite some time. Repression is rampant. How do they organize?



A computer monitor with a dark purple frame and a matching stand. The screen shows a video title card with a blurred background of people in a natural setting. The title 'A FORCE MORE POWERFUL' is written in large, bold, white capital letters with a black outline. Below it, the subtitle 'A CENTURY OF NONVIOLENT CONFLICT' is in smaller white capital letters. At the bottom, 'NARRATED BY BEN KINGSLEY' is also in white capital letters.

A FORCE MORE POWERFUL

A CENTURY OF NONVIOLENT CONFLICT

NARRATED BY BEN KINGSLEY

They also eventually forced Pinochet out of office.

(You can see the full story in *A Force More Powerful* – all resources will be shared later.)



What are some lessons for us?

- *Lessons for us...*

What are some lessons for us?

Keep testing the boundaries

One of the reasons political space gets smaller is because people self-censor.

To avoid this, groups need to keep testing the boundaries. Calling the union strike was a way to test — *how will the opposition respond?*

We have to take risks.

Prepare to make repression rebound

Repression isn't the goal. But if your primary goal is "safety" it will result in safe actions that don't challenge authority. Authoritarians' primary weapon is fear — which is the goal of repression. You can make it rebound.

Create some systems to handle that repression. Otpor had:

- a rapid-response network
- solidarity with attacked persons
- leaders saying it won't work ("the more they repress, the more opposition grows").

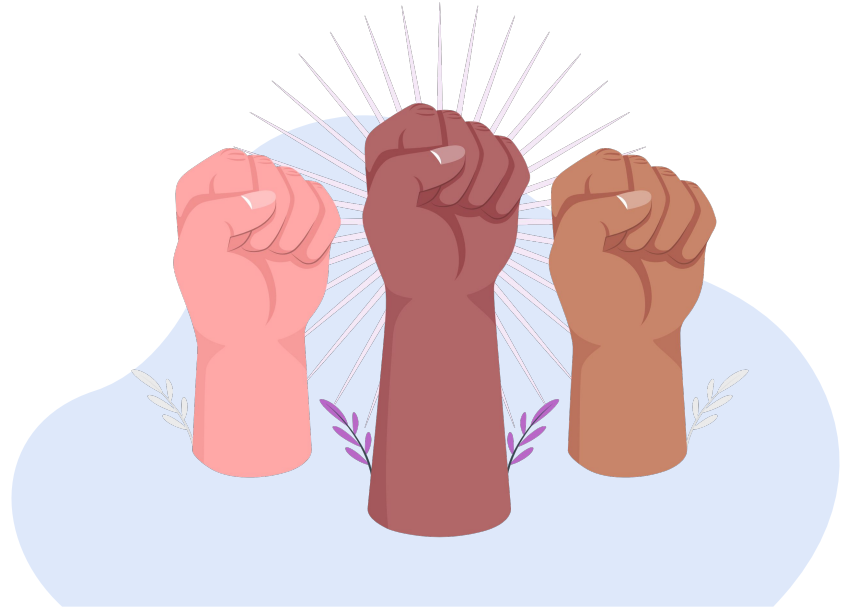
Stay adaptable

Getting committed to any single tactic is a huge mistake.

You cannot *only* march or *only* occupy a building.

You have to adapt. Both examples show groups who adapted rapidly based on what the opposition was doing and adjusted.

ACTION IDEAS





Small groups: What insights or action ideas are coming up for you?

You may have ideas coming up inside of you. They may be ones you want to try *right now* — or ideas for future actions.

Let's get together and share what you're learning in small groups.

Come back with at least 3 insights or tactic ideas.

Ideas (tactics or insights)

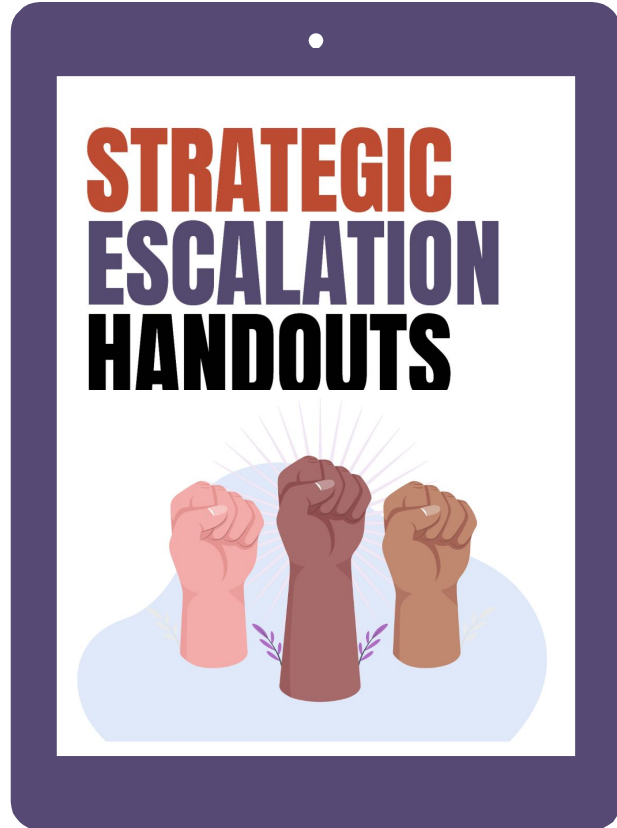
- *Tactics or insights for us...*



MORE RESOURCES & LINKS

Find handouts from this workshop at:

bit.ly/3NBV9Dg





HANDOUTS

Handouts on moving towards more powerful tactics:

- [Tactic Typology](#) by Daniel Hunter
- [Action Logic](#) by Beautiful Trouble
- [Beautiful Trouble Toolbox](#)
- More about the [Tactic Star](#) by Jonathan Smucker
- [198 Tactics](#), examples of a wide-range of nonviolent actions by Gene sharp
- A facilitator's writing about [helping groups get beyond marches and rallies](#)

A Tactic Typology

by Daniel Hunter, Training for Change
hyar1@gmail.com

	SYMBOLIC PROTEST	NONCOOPERATION (economic, and political)	ALTERNATIVE COOPERATION
Goals	To raise public awareness of an issue and persuade a target to act in a desired way	To undermine the authority of an unjust system by refusing to cooperate with it and making it harder, or impossible, for the system to keep its unfair policy	To actively cooperate with an alternative institution or policy by acting as though it is already in place, thereby challenging the current system/policy
When used effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• is a socially acceptable and often legal way to educate and raise public awareness• leads to less symbolic forms of action• can create safe and known actions for wider participation• shows injustice not just tells about it	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• channels people's frustration and anger into more spirited action• uses small numbers to grow a larger movement• highlights the injustice of the system, not just pulls out of it• is prepared for repression	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• educates people in an experiential, participatory way• does not require large numbers of people to begin• avoids the question "why are we doing this?" because its outcome is clear
When used ineffectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• is only symbolic and does not lead to greater participation or change• burns out participants who see no way to change, only repeated protests• only speaks to those who already know the issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• requires too much resource to win and therefore loses• becomes obsessed with action instead of ability to reach out to new people• stays isolated• does not connect to everyday issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• is separated from the political world (e.g. organic co-ops without any connection to others)• is not a challenge to the policy opposed• is too confrontational for participants
Examples	marches, rallies, street theater, letter-writing, petition drive, skywriting, mock awards, picketing, group lobbying, mock elections, "haunting" officials, vigils, and turning one's back	student strike, sanctuary, consumers' boycott, rent withholding, refusal to pay taxes, industry strike, boycott of government-supported organizations, boycott of elections	Citizens' Document search, nonviolent land seizure, occupation of building, citizens' arrests



VIDEOS

Videos about how people have overthrown unjust regimes and the tactics they have used.

Movies by International Center for Nonviolent Conflict:

- [Bringing Down a Dictator](#) - Serbia
- [A Force More Powerful](#) - Chile, Denmark, South Africa, and more...





BOOKS

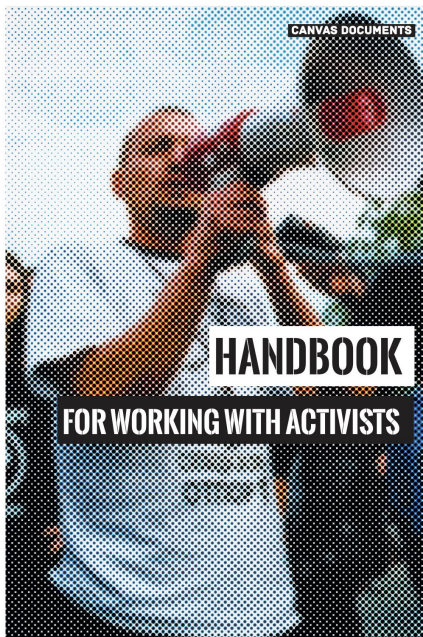
Written by folks who helped overthrow the dictator Milosevic, this book by CANVAS explores building power:

[Handbook for Working with Activists](#)

We also recommend [The Paradox of Repression and Nonviolent Movements](#).

For practical stories of power building in the United States, we recommend:

- *Local People* by John Dittmer
- *Strategy and Soul* by Daniel Hunter





WANT MORE TRAINING?

Beautiful Trouble offers skills training on tactics. BeautifulTrouble.org

Harnessing our Power to End Political Violence (HOPE-PV):
<https://horizonsproject.us/hope-pv/>

Momentum Training:
<https://www.momentumcommunity.org/>



Closing Remarks



Thanks

This session was created by [Daniel Hunter](https://danielhunter.org) (danielhunter.org) for the Fight Back Table. Feel free to use and adapt this workshop for your own groups fighting for justice.