

Educators Fighting Authoritarianism Content and PPT Slides

Introduction

Authoritarianism is on the rise globally and in the United States, threatening democratic norms and freedoms. This guide accompanies the *Freedom Trainers* presentation and offers a narrative framework for understanding the problem, exploring strategies for resistance, and highlighting the unique role educators can play in defending democracy.

1. Understanding the Context

Authoritarianism is not just about individual leaders—it is a system supported by multiple institutions. Over the past two decades, elected autocrats have increasingly subverted democratic processes, consolidating power through legal and extralegal means. In the U.S., this trend is accelerating, rooted in historical patterns of racism, misogyny, and white supremacy.

Academic freedom is often an early casualty. Autocrats fear independent thought, making schools and universities prime targets for control. Recognizing these dynamics is essential for educators who seek to safeguard democratic values.

2. The Authoritarian Playbook

Authoritarian regimes employ predictable tactics:

- Deploying military forces domestically
- Overreaching federal law enforcement
- Targeting critics through investigations
- Granting impunity for lawbreaking
- Regulatory retaliation against opponents
- Refusing to relinquish power

Participants are encouraged to reflect on how these tactics manifest locally and how they impact communities.

3. Why Civil Resistance Matters

Research analyzing 35 cases of democratic backsliding (1991–2021) reveals a stark truth:

- **Without civil resistance:** 7.5% chance of reversing backsliding
- **With civil resistance:** 51.7% chance of success

Movements that include national trade unions succeed at far higher rates (83%) than those without (29%). Civil resistance—nonviolent struggle for political, economic, or social objectives—includes protests, strikes, boycotts, civil disobedience, and constructive interventions.

4. Lessons from History

Educators have historically played pivotal roles in resisting authoritarianism:

- **Norway (1942):** Teachers refused Nazi curricula, taught in secret, and made repression backfire.
- **Chile (1980s):** Educators and students organized strikes, hunger protests, and international advocacy under Pinochet.
- **Hungary (2022–present):** The Tanítanék movement mobilized tens of thousands against Orbán’s education policies through strikes and creative noncooperation.

These examples demonstrate that educators can leverage their positions to protect democratic norms and inspire collective action.

5. Strategies for Today

Resistance requires undermining the regime’s **pillars of support**—institutions and actors that enable authoritarian power. The most effective tool is **noncooperation**, which can range from symbolic acts to mass collective action. Enough noncooperation can cause pillars to defect or become unreliable.

Key tactics include:

- **Protest and Persuasion:** Vigils, marches, symbolic acts
- **Social Noncooperation:** Cultural refusals, boycotts, mass resignations
- **Economic Noncooperation:** Strikes, divestment campaigns
- **Political Noncooperation:** Local governments refusing unlawful directives

6. Planning for Redlines

Movements must identify **redlines**—clear triggers for mobilization—and prepare tactics before and after these thresholds are crossed. Planning ensures rapid response and prevents despair. Examples of redlines include:

- Privatization of public education
- Removal of DEI materials
- Deployment of military forces in communities

Organizing around redlines builds capacity, unity, and resilience.

7. Educators as Movement Builders

Educators can:

- Celebrate and protect colleagues who take courageous stands
 - Use classrooms and public platforms to teach about authoritarianism and resistance
 - Organize symbolic actions and noncooperation campaigns
 - Partner with trusted institutions to create safe spaces for organizing
-

8. Resources and Next Steps

- **Freedom Trainers:** freedomtrainers.net
 - **Redline Workbook:** [Download here](#)
 - **Training Opportunities:** Beautiful Trouble, Horizons Project, Freedom Trainers workshops
 - **Case Studies & Videos:** *Bringing Down a Dictator*, *A Force More Powerful*, and more at nonviolent-conflict.org
-

Conclusion

Authoritarianism thrives on obedience. Educators, through organized noncooperation and civil resistance, can help dismantle the pillars that sustain authoritarian regimes. This guide provides a roadmap for understanding the threat, learning from history, and taking strategic action to defend democracy.

Educators Fighting Authoritarianism

Freedom Trainers Presentation about non - cooperation, pillars of support, and countering democratic backsliding...



Chat

Think about a time you successfully went against the rules or took some risk in order to stand up for someone else.

What did you do? Why did you do it? Share with us what you did!

To: Everyone ▾

More ▾

Type message here...

01

The Context





Authoritarianism in the US and Globally



2 decades of rising global autocracy ; “elected autocrats” subvert democracy; extensive far -right authoritarian collaboration

In the US, a long history of authoritarianism grounded in misogyny, racism & white supremacy; the South has faced it for a long time

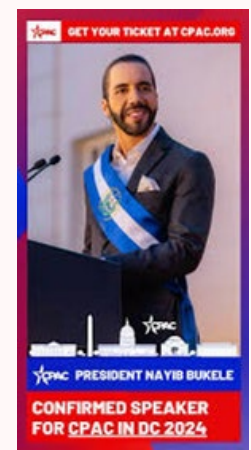


Consolidation is happening quicker in the US than in other similar cases (e.g. Hungary, Turkey); crossed threshold into “competitive authoritarianism”

Authoritarianism is a system, not just a person, propped up by multiple institutions.



Academic freedom often an early casualty of authoritarianism: autocrats don't like free thinking (ex. Hungary)



The Authoritarian Playbook



**Direct Investigations
Against Critics**



**Give License to
Lawbreaking**



Regulatory Retaliation

**Deploy Military
Domestically**



**Federal Law
Enforcement
Overreach**



**The Autocrat Won't
Leave**



Chat

How is this affecting you or your community? What are you observing in your communities from this playbook?

To: Everyone ▾

More ▾

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02

How to fight?

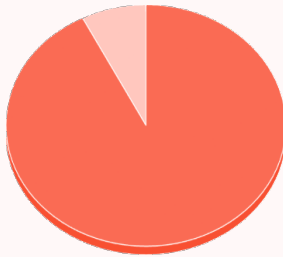


How we get a democratic u-turn

Analyzing 35 cases from 1991-2021, the predicted probability of stopping democratic backsliding:

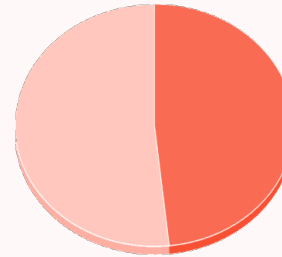
Without a civil resistance movement

7.5%



With a civil resistance movement

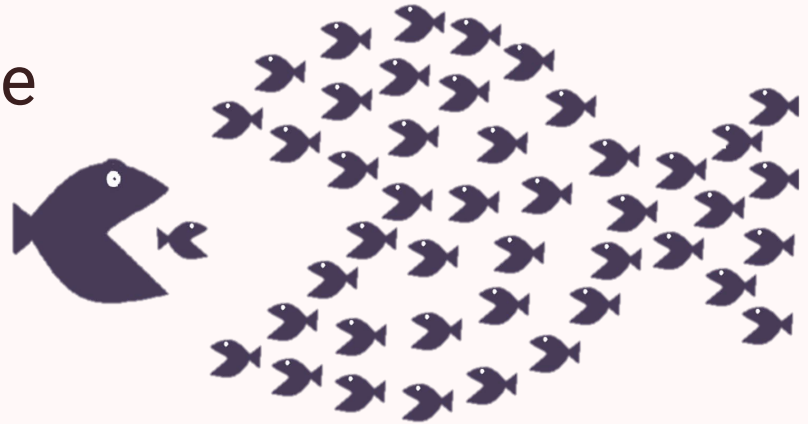
51.7%



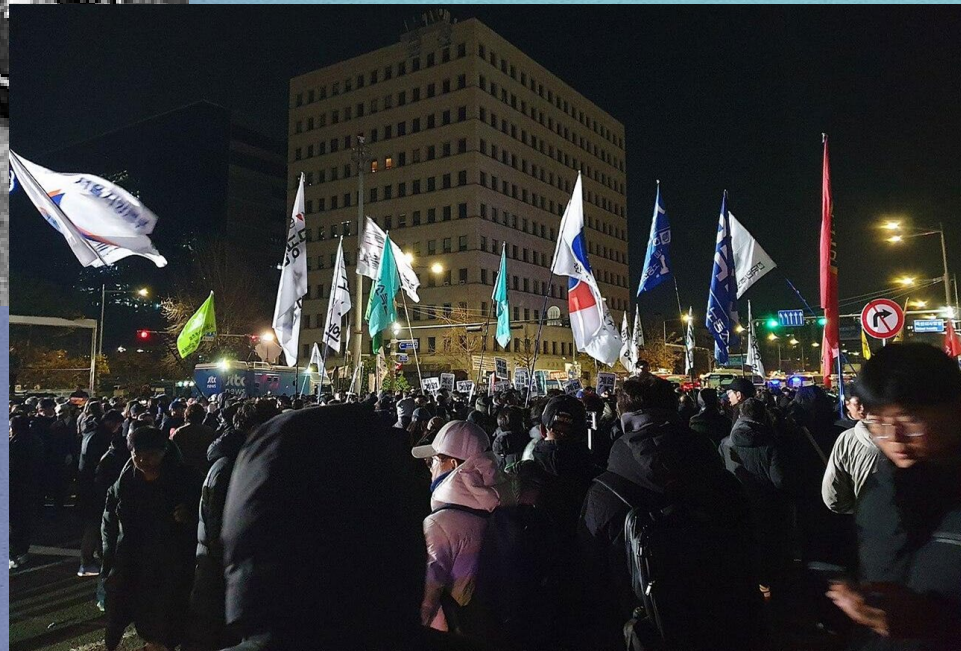
NB: approximately 83% of movements with national trade union participation succeed, versus only 29% of movements without.

What is Civil Resistance?

Waging struggle for political, economic, or social objectives without the use or threat of violence. It can include protest, sit-ins, strikes, boycotts, civil disobedience, and constructive interventions.









PROTECT PEOPLE

harm reduction,
protect targeted people



DEFEND CIVIC INSTITUTIONS

safeguard democratic
institutions (elections, EPA, etc)

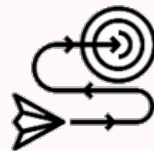
DISRUPT AND DISOBEY

strategize acts to support
disobedience and protest policy



BUILD ALTERNATIVES

parallel institutions,
alternative party platforms,
new culture-building



Source: Daniel Hunter /
[Choose Democracy](#)

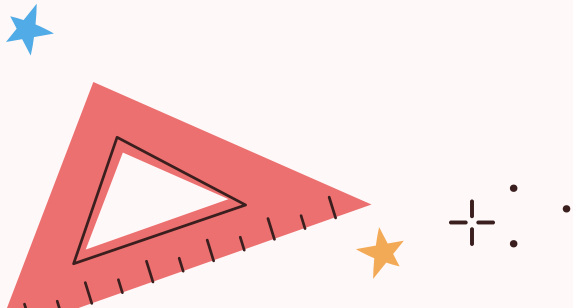
Winning Pro - Democracy Campaigns

- Large, diverse participation & sustained momentum (3.5% rule)
- Expanding the repertoire of nonviolent tactics
- Elicit loyalty shifts among key pillars
- Maintain discipline & resilience despite escalating repression



Winning Pro-Democracy Campaigns

Educators can be key!



Educators and resistance: global examples

- **Norway:** Prevented Nazi takeover of education (1942)
- **Argentina:** Created lessons plans designed to ignore Perón's regime (1946 - 55, 1973-4) ★
- **Chile:** Educators and students mobilized against Pinochet's dictatorship (1973 - 1990)
- **Venezuela:** Resisted the teaching of regime - friendly materials (2001 - 2013)
- **Türkiye:** Supported minority (Kurdish) rights in education under Erdogan (2016)
- ★ • **Hungary:** Tanítanék ("I wish to teach" in Hungarian) movement of resistance against Orbán's attack on education (2024)



Norway (1942)

Around 8,000 - 10,000 of Norway's 12,000 teachers refused to teach the Nazis' fascist curricula, submitted letters of refusal, and continued to teach classes clandestinely. Prevented schools from being incorporated in fascist state and thwarted Quisling regime.

Tactics:

- Wearing of symbols (paper clips)
- Boycotted state institutions
- Refused to teach curriculum
- Resigned, taught in secret, made repression backfire



Chile (1980s)

During Pinochet's dictatorship, diverse groups of Chilean educators and students organized strikes, underground study circles, and mass demonstrations, using schools and universities as hubs of nonviolent resistance against authoritarian rule.

Tactics:

- Hunger strikes
- Occupying spaces
- Public shaming of Pinochet's regime
- Clandestine education



Hungary (2022-present)

Tanítanék, the grassroots movement, built a nationwide coalition, supporting punished educators, mobilizing 90,000+ supporters, and sustaining nonviolent resistance to Orbán's authoritarian education policies.

Tactics:

- Strikes over unjust wages, poor conditions
- Student walkouts & human chains
- Creation of public strike fund (backed by key influencers)
- Significant digital outreach



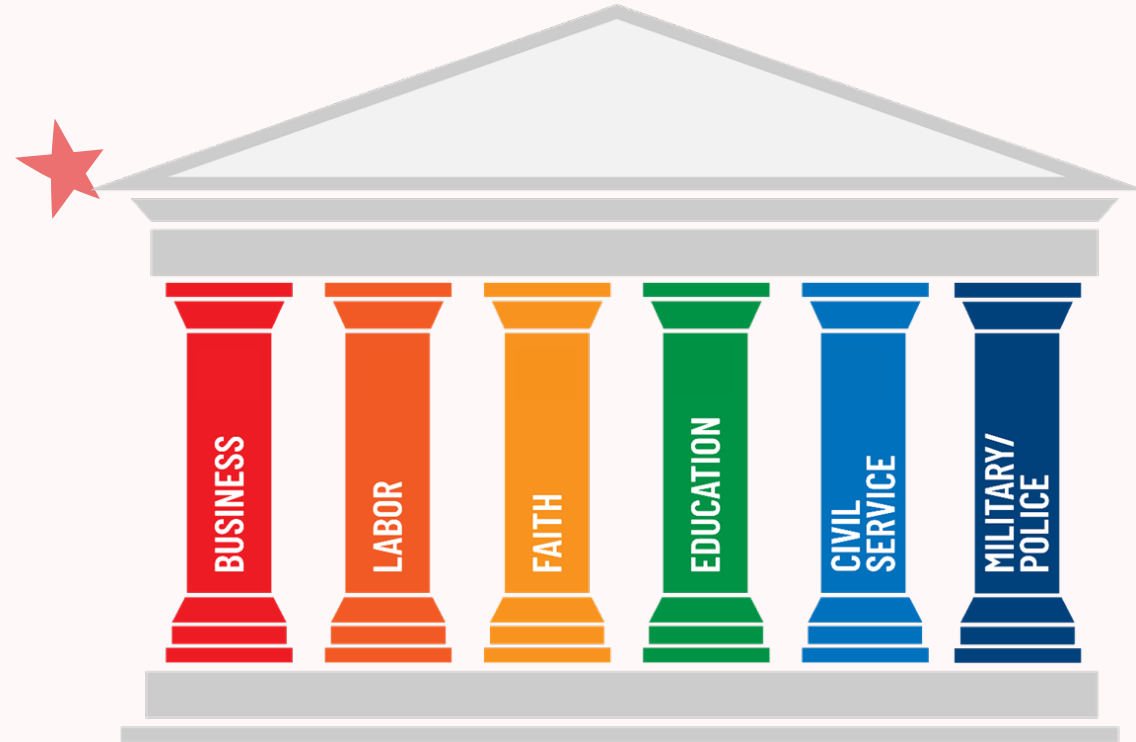


Pillars of Support

ell



the Regime's Pillars of Support



BUSINESS

LABOR

FAITH

EDUCATION

CIVIL SERVICE

MILITARY/POLICE

...and many more.



Types of People Power



Protest & Persuasion

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
- Bird dogging



Building Alternatives

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:

- Occupation of buildings
- Mutual Aid food/health
- Guerilla gardening
- Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party alternative elections



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:

- Worker strikes
- Boycotts
- Rent strikes
- Tax refusal
- Fix bathrooms signs
- Jury-conscientious objection

Noncooperation is the act of refusing to cooperate or comply with requests, demands, or orders.

Enough noncooperation will cause a pillar to completely defect — or at least be unreliable in the autocrat's aims.



Levels of Noncooperation

**Individual &
Small Group
Noncooperation**



**Collective
Noncooperation**



**Mass
Noncooperation**





“We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was 'legal' and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was 'illegal.' It was 'illegal' to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany.”

— **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Letter from a Birmingham Jail



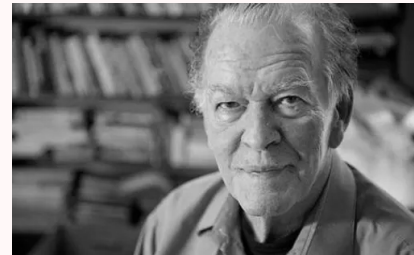


“By themselves, rulers cannot collect taxes, enforce repressive laws and regulations, keep trains running on time, prepare national budgets, direct traffic, manage ports, print money, repair roads, train the police and army, issue postage stamps or even milk a cow.”



— **Gene Sharp**

Author of From Dictatorship to Democracy



**Should Naval Academy leader push
back on Trump's book ban? 600 grads
say yes.**

Rick Hutzell 5/9/2025 5:30 a.m. EDT  7 Comments

Dodgers block ICE agents from entering stadium in Los Angeles, team says

The baseball team reportedly had plans to announce assistance for immigrant communities in L.A. on Thursday.

Avelo Airlines Faces Backlash for Aiding Trump's Deportation Campaign

Small federal agency blocks DOGE employees from entering its building

The U.S. African Development Foundation denied several DOGE employees access to its offices Wednesday, as DOGE makes sweeping eliminations across federal agencies.

Updated March 6, 2025

5 min

Summary

🔖

🔖

1244





June 11, 2025



Register

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Harvard Gains Support in Its Lawsuit Against Trump

Dozens of institutions and associations argue that Trump's funding freeze is about more than just one university. It's about the future of American democracy.

NEA NEWS

The Idaho Teacher Who Refused to Back Down

The poster said, "Everyone is Welcome Here." School officials told Sarah Inama to take it down.



UTLA teacher talks about resources for students amid ICE raids
3 minutes left





Chat

We've given a lot of stories and tactics. What's one tactic that's interesting to you to explore today?

To: **Everyone** ▼

More ▼

Type message here...

04

Planning and Redlines



Bad things don't create movements — organizing does

Oct 5, 1966 — Fermi Plant's partial meltdown of nuclear fuel in the reactor's core



March 28, 1979 — Three Mile Island nuclear facility



Redline Exercise



1. Pick a Redline

1. Remind yourself of the strategic goals

- Cut through confusion by identifying your red lines to trigger mobilization to your base (and beyond)
- Advance greater unity.
- Build capacities (e.g. mobilization skills, strategic coordination, networks of trust) that increase flexibility and durability for the road ahead.
- Avoid despair and dropping out.
- Get public defections —even if they are long - term
- Remain nonviolent.

1. Who are allies, friends, comrades, colleagues, fence sitters that you can act with?

1. Identify some tactics to do before (another) redline is crossed and then after it's crossed



Tactics to consider

A. Protest and Persuasion

- Mass demonstrations outside government buildings or courthouses.
- Silent vigils or symbolic acts (e.g. “blackouts,” empty chairs, candlelight marches).
- National days of protest themed around constitutional defense.

B. Social Noncooperation

- Boycotts of businesses aligned with anti - democratic actors.
- Cultural refusal: artists, athletes, public figures withdraw participation in government - linked events.
- Mass symbolic resignation from advisory boards or commissions.

C. Economic Noncooperation

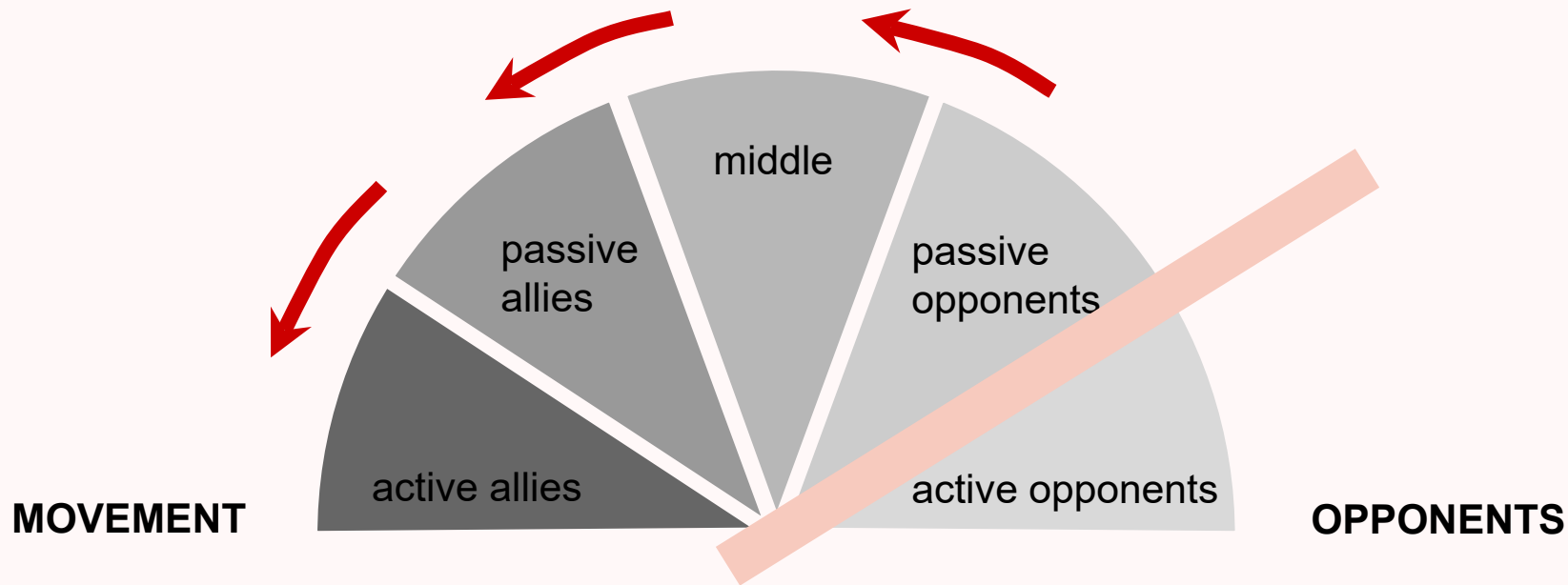
- General strikes or targeted walkouts (e.g. teachers, tech workers, service sectors).
- Divestment campaigns against corporations funding election deniers.
- Tax resistance or “withholding campaigns” in protest of unconstitutional governance (legal advice required).

D. Political Noncooperation

- Local governments and city councils refuse to recognize illegitimate actions.
- Electoral officials publicly affirm rule of law and refuse to carry out unlawful directives.
- Cross-party coalitions to publicly denounce redlines and enforce political norms.



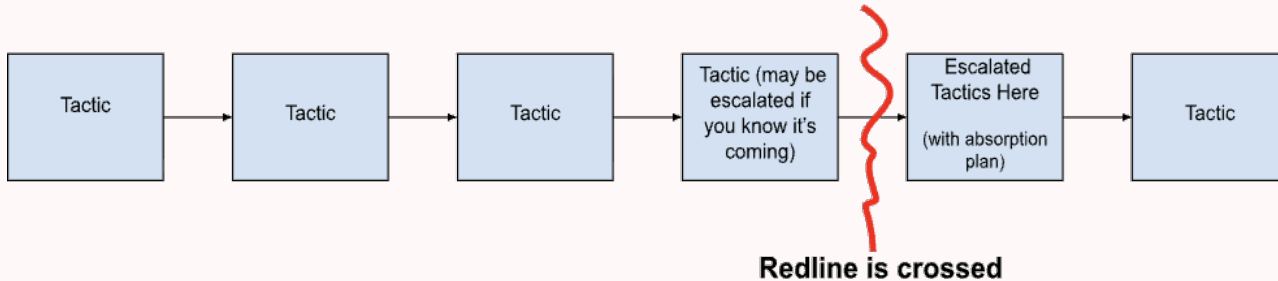
Spectrum of allies



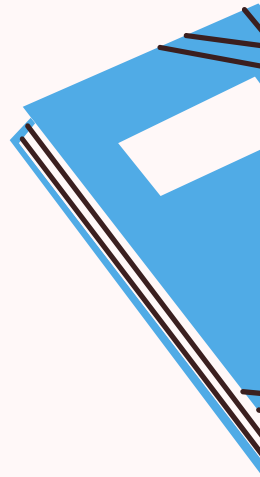
Put actions in some order

In the face of an authoritarian, you will not win with strong talking points, merely turning out a lot of people to a rally, doing a press conference, or gathering signatures. Anti-authoritarian struggles undermine the pillars of support, using noncooperation to stretch the boundaries of what's acceptable so that pillars heed the call to also resist/slow down orders.

Not all tactics will be escalated, risky noncooperation. But to get there, there may be a range of different persuasion and organizing efforts to get to larger levels of noncooperation.



Identify what larger noncooperation that might be achieved? Put those at or near the end. Then place other actions in sequence. What are the actions before the redline? What are after? Talk about how you'd absorb new people's energy.



Group # Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools

What redline are we exploring?

- ☐ Privatize public education and drain funds from public schools, in order to enrich corporate shareholders in (charter schools?) and private schools, as well as tax payers seeking a tax credits for funding school vouchers
- ☐ Silence or diminish parent and community voice in how our local, public schools are run
- ☐ Remove instruction or reading material related to the histories of whole groups of people based on their identities, including Black people, Indigenous people, immigrants, LGBTQ+ people and people with disabilities
- ☐ Create conditions that limit teachers' ability to perform their roles with excellence
- ☐ Diminish programs that advance equity for students with disabilities any special needs, including differently-abled children
- ☐ Reduce or eliminate critical in-school programs due to removal of federal funding

Who are you with?

- parents,
- students,
- educators and
- other stakeholders who love public education

Group # Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools

Tactics we might use before/after redlines

What are different organizing nonviolent actions – symbolic actions, noncooperation, etc — we might we use?

Set and reach a percentage of parents in your school who will sign the non -permission slip

Turn your school bake sale, fall barbecue, party into a celebration of histories of Black people and immigrant communities being targeted by the federal administration

Host a backpack giveaway & include books featuring LGBTQ+ and BIPOC protagonists

Post a message to your social networks with the amount of money your school district is losing from federal cuts and ask parents to email superintendent & school board members to find out what schools will lose, and ask them to go ON RECORD with their response

Weekly non-compliant rituals like “ten minutes of truth” that families, teachers and students deliver to groups at their schools or online to break down context and history of current events

Form a committee to take escalated action: observe and interrupt ICE activity in the school area, protest or boycott a local or regional donor to privatization efforts, enact “disruptive teaching & learning” like wheeling a blackboard into an event with electeds or banner drops

DC mobilization and establishment of the People’s Department of Education

Whole school communities turn out to May Day actions

Next Steps

To get involved, please share your contact info: bit.ly/EdNonCooperation

Group # _____



What redline are we exploring?

- ☐ ICE inside schools
- ☐ ICE abduct students
- ☐ Ordered to remove all "DEI" materials
- ☐ National Guard deployment in our city
- ☐ Other: _____

Who are you with?

List allies, friends, comrades, colleagues, fence sitters that you can act with?



Tactics we might use before/after redlines

What are different organizing nonviolent actions – symbolic actions, noncooperation, etc — we might we use?

TACTIC

TACTIC

[REDLINE IS CROSSED]

ESCALATED TACTIC

TACTIC

Next Steps

What are organizing next steps for us to do to carry this out?



Interesting actions we see



1

Educate students and the public about authoritarianism and effective solutions

E.g.

- Use holidays, like King Day and International Day of Democracy (September 15th)
- Teach the broader public: teach-ins
- Lead Freedom Trainings

2

Use symbolic actions to grow the movement and keep using free expression

E.g.

- Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools
- ICE resistance: signs of solidarity

3

Noncooperation with enablers of ICE and authoritarianism

E.g.

- Avelo Boycott
- Target Boycott
- T-Mobile boycott
- Shareholder pressure via pension funds

4

Encourage and provide awards to those who take courageous stands for democracy

E.g.

- Celebrate librarians who refuse to remove books
- Teachers teaching truth
- Support outside of NEA with people doing great work



05

Resources!



Full Redline Workbook



Download the complete
Redline Workbook at [this link](#).

See more resources at [FreedomTrainers.net](#).



Videos

Teachable movies about noncooperation and how people have overthrown unjust regimes:

- 1-hour Bringing Down a Dictator - story of Otpor's overthrow of dictator Milosevic in Serbia (*translated into many languages*)
- 30-minute views A Force More Powerful - case studies of nonviolent resistance in Chile, Denmark, South Africa, and more...(*translated into many languages, has study guide for classrooms*)
- 4-minute video explaining Pillars of Support
- 2-minute video explaining 4 paths to resist Trump (Protect people | Disrupt | Defend civic institutions | Build alternative)



Read more



Horizons Project

- [Authoritarianism: How You Know it When You See it](#)
- [Horizons Project Pillars of Support caselets](#)
- [Pillars of Support short case studies](#) (unions, faith, business, professional associations, vets/military groups)
- [Big Tents & Collective Action Can Defeat Authoritarianism](#)
- [We Are Stronger Than We Think](#)

[Global Nonviolent Action Database](#) (Swarthmore University)

- [Norwegian Teachers Prevent Nazi Takeover of Education \(1942\)](#)

Choose Democracy

- [10 ways to be prepared and grounded now that Trump has won](#)
- Explore a “choose-your-own-adventure”-style book on how resistance might look: <http://whatiftrumpwins.org/>

[Harnessing Our Power to End Political Violence \(HOPE\)](#) trainings and materials
focused on skills related to how to make violence and repression backfire

[Waging Nonviolence:](#)

- [Hungarian teachers’ movement \(Tanitanek\)](#) challenging authoritarianism
- [Busting the Myth that Gen Z Isn’t Protesting](#)

[Freedom Trainers:](#) supporting trainings focused on strategic nonviolent action and organized noncooperation

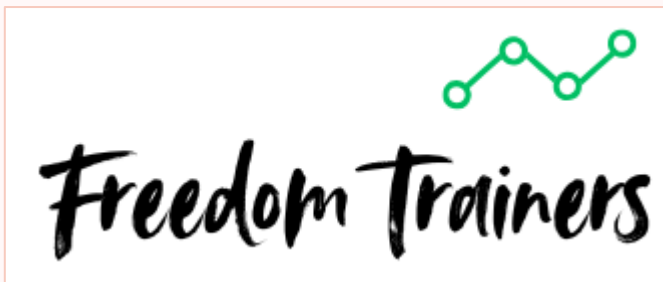
Want more training?

Beautiful Trouble offers skills training on tactics: BeautifulTrouble.org

Horizon's Project leads training with Harnessing our Power to End Political Violence (HOPE - PV): [https://horizonsproject.us/hope - pv/](https://horizonsproject.us/hope-pv/)

Maria and Daniel work with Freedom Trainers: freedomtrainers.net





Freedom Trainers

Freedom Trainers has workshops coming up:

- San Francisco TOT (Aug 20-21)
- Seattle TOT (Sept 12-14)
- New York TOT (Nov 7-10)
- Minneapolis TOT (likely Nov 18-20)

...more coming!

We do not publicly post our training - of- trainers workshops.

If you want to join but don't see an upcoming workshop, please contact us at freedomtraining@proton.me !