

Noncooperation Tactics to Make a Redlines Backfire

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I. Introduction

President Trump is going to do outrageous things. But outrageous things don't necessarily mean that people will "rise up." They have to be prepared and organized to rise up.

Let's look at two nuclear disasters to understand this:

In 1979, the **Three Mile Island** reactor nearly melted down — risking millions of lives. But it didn't just trigger fear; it **sparked massive protest**, deepened the anti-nuclear movement, and brought in new activists. This wasn't just about the event — it was about the **infrastructure of movement** already in place, ready to act.

Contrast that with an earlier, nearly identical crisis at the **Fermi nuclear plant** near Detroit. It, too, nearly melted down — but hardly anyone noticed. Why? Because there was **no visible movement**, no voices to explain the danger, no ready-made community to take action.

People are more likely to rise up in those moments if we have:

- Organized networks for rapid-response (a broad network, a highly concentrated bold crew ready for escalated direct action, or ideally both)
- Prepared simple messages that speak to mainstream values
- Create a space for people to "get the facts" — so they aren't relying solely on state information
- Prepared key institutionalists or others with perceived expertise to act
- Offer a noncooperation tactic that matches the moment (sending out a request for petitions or sharing talking point memos will **not** be that).

This workbook focuses primarily on that last component.

In this workbook, we're calling these moments "redlines moments" — because they're particularly acute pain points. Trump will keep doing a lot of damage and any group/network may not be in a position to throw our weight against all of them. So "redline" is a way to consider what might be particular key points *in the future*.

Preparing for any one redline may help prepare for multiple future redlines — so we're preparing for future repression/expansion of Trump's power.

II. Identify a Redline to explore

Consider your own principles and values. Then align this with likely future actions of the Trump administration.

Since Donald Trump is hewing so closely to Project 2025, it remains a helpful guidebook at what is coming up. You can find unimplemented policies in neat categories by the [Project 2025 Tracker](#). You can read examples of resistance in future Project 2025 policies from the [Resisting Project 2025 guide](#).

Here are some example redlines:

- Trump openly flouts (again / even more so) a court order
- A local Governor or judge is arrested at their home
- Trump uses the insurrection act (or other mechanism) to arrest peaceful protestors
- Trump calls on loyalist groups (militias, police unions, National Guard) to block election processes or intimidate officials
- Trump orders federal agencies or the military to "monitor" or override state election processes, citing fraud
- Trump claims election victory for Republicans prematurely in 2026
- After an election, Trump refuses to seat Democracy Party Electeds

Or add in your own:

-

Reframe the Redline?

Accept that some redlines that matter to you (even death knells for your work), may not resonate to the wider public. This is a tension. One option, before going forward, is to consider if picking more widely understood redlines is better for your group — or if there are useful ways to reframe those redlines to be more visceral/relatable. Possible examples to expand our thinking:

Cuts to Social Security or safety net programs	<i>"You don't want your mother-in-law moving in with you because her retirement check stopped coming."</i>
Mass firings or purges of civil servants and scientists	<i>"Imagine flying in a plane where the mechanic, the air traffic controller, and the weather forecaster all got replaced by influencers with no training."</i>
Arrest of local officials or judges	<i>"If they can arrest a judge, imagine what they can do to your kid's school librarian."</i>
Nonprofit Killer Bill	<i>This is the Meals on Wheels killer bill.</i>

III. Strategic Objectives

Remember core strategic objectives for a good strategy:

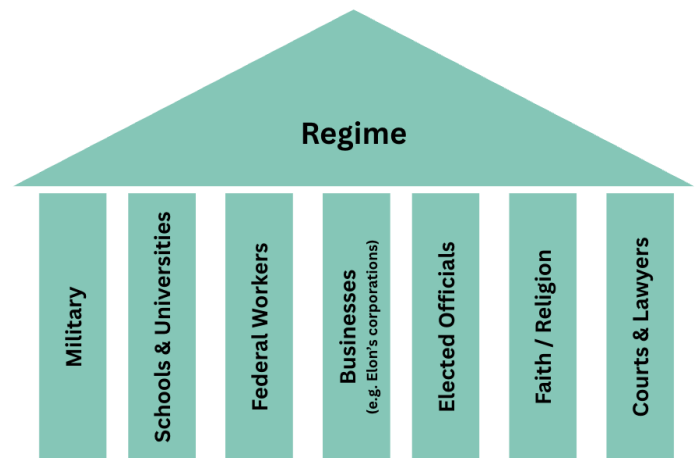
- Cut through confusion by identifying your red lines to trigger mobilization to your base (and beyond)
- Advance greater unity.
- Build capacities (e.g. mobilization skills, strategic coordination, networks of trust) that increase flexibility and durability for the road ahead.
- Avoid despair and dropping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

IV. Analyze the Pillars that uphold that policy

In nonviolent strategy, a regime (democratic or authoritarian) rests on various pillars of support.

These are not just the elite actors but every level that implements said policy. For example, to implement a nonprofit killer bill requires:

- **government bureaucracy** (civil servants to write regulations, audit, and choke off funding)
- **judicial system** (prosecute, revoke licenses, interpret rules)
- **police** (monitor, raid, or intimidate)
- **intelligence** (compile list of problem nonprofits, monitor financial flows)
- **media** (spread propaganda, censor nonprofit)
- **business elites/banks** (comply with requests, provide funding for compliant nonprofits)
- **tech/cloud providers** (deplatform nonprofit infrastructure, block donation processing)
- **nonprofit infrastructure** (accept new policies, comply with orders).



Each pillar can be pressured, persuaded, or peeled away to prevent anti-democratic actions.

“Pillars” do not move as a bloc. So you may see an individual, a few individuals, or as much as all of them move at once. Your power analysis tells you how important this is (a random sergeant taking a stand means one thing, a retired 5-star general means another...). You may aim for five different motions for a pillar.

Have a pillar get politicized

- Training for lawyers about how *other* lawyers have fought in Poland
- Positive relationship-building between local police and immigrant communities

Have a pillar privately oppose

- Principles First has led right-wingers who oppose Trump and moved people inside the administration to negatively oppose — but quietly (hard to see!)

Have a pillar publicly oppose

- 600 Naval Academy grads sign a letter opposing the Academy’s book censoring;
- Two columnists who quit the Washington Post’s internal censorship;

Have a pillar publicly take action against

- Tesla executives and staff join the call for Musk to return to DOGE;

Have a pillar publicly refuse to participate (full defection).

- After Musk’s 5-line memo, 1.3 million federal workers fully noncomplied.

Your assessment of what motion you're attempting to make may depend on where the pillar is, your relationship/closeness, etc.

List all the pillars for your particular redline scenario. Don't limit yourself to just the elite "managers" but also the workers who implement policies and the compliance of other institutions:

-
-
-
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Common Pillars

Pillar	Role in Redline Scenarios	Potential Leverage Tactics
Military & National Guard	May be pressured to support election-related overreach or unrest response.	Secure pledges of neutrality; organize outreach by veterans; highlight illegality of orders.
Law Enforcement	Can be weaponized to enforce unconstitutional orders, suppress protests, or ignore court rulings.	Encourage police unions to commit to constitutional enforcement only; public pressure campaigns.
Judiciary	Either a target of defiance or the enforcer of accountability.	Public support campaigns for judicial independence; mass legal observer programs.
State Legislatures	May be used to override certified results or block seating of officials.	Targeted lobbying; noncooperation by state workers; national attention and protest.
Media	Shapes public perception of legitimacy and resistance.	Mobilize trusted local journalists; fact-checking alliances; pressure platforms to stop disinformation.
Business Elites	Provide campaign funding and economic normalization of political actors.	Boycotts; pressure CEOs to denounce redlines; investor divestment campaigns.
Religious & Cultural Leaders	Influence public morality and legitimacy narratives.	Partner with clergy for democracy sermons; cultural events promoting peaceful resistance.
Civil Service & Bureaucracy	Must enforce or resist unconstitutional orders, like blocking certifications.	Encourage internal whistleblowing; support networks for conscientious objectors.
Electoral Institutions	Key targets in election denial	Legal protection, visibility campaigns,

	strategies.	rapid response teams for intimidation.
Public	Source of both consent and resistance.	Mass mobilization; education campaigns; building broad-based alliances.

V. Who are you with?

Think about the group that you're connected with. Then assess what capabilities do they have (and which can they share). Capabilities such as:

- Relationships (with who?)
- Skills / trainings
- Access to resources (\$ / materials)
- Reputation
- And so on.

Then consider what levels or areas of unity do you have. This relates to the framing of the action — are you all unified that US's version of rule of law is worth preserving? Or are you all united that a rule of law that applies to everyone is a common goal?

List some of the groups that you're connected with who are likely to do something:

Group you're connected with	Capabilities they have	Overlapping principles

Questions to consider:

- Are there structures that need to be created?
- What risks need to be encouraged?

VI. Back-Fire Principles: Using the HOPE-PV Framework

HOPE-PV has a framework to use repression/redline moments into backfire. Consider:

1. REVEAL — Expose the Injustice

Powerholders prefer to act in the shadows. If we want a redline to resonate, we must **bring the facts into the light** — using images, stories, and trusted voices.

- *Example: After the murder of George Floyd, footage circulated widely, making it impossible to ignore — and pushing millions to confront systemic racism.*
- *Example: Climate activists link hurricanes and fires to fossil fuel companies and government failure, using real-time images and data.*

What's the injustice that you're revealing? How will you get that revealed to people more widely?

2. REDEEM — Validate the Target

Redlines often come with smear campaigns. Those affected are devalued, criminalized, or painted as disposable. Our job is to **re-humanize** them.

- *Example: The Muslim Ban protests didn't just oppose policy — they spotlighted the families, workers, and students being punished.*
- *Example: Mutual aid networks after disasters showcase community care — reminding the public who really carries each other.*

How will you redeem/affirm those being targeted?

3. RE-FRAME — Interpret the Event as Injustice

The system will try to spin it — calling it a misunderstanding, an isolated event, or your fault. We need to **name it clearly as wrong**, and make it part of a larger story.

- *Example: Parkland students refused to accept the “bad apple” framing, instead pointing to the gun lobby and demanding systemic change.*

- *Example: The #MeToo movement reframed long-ignored abuse as part of a power structure — and told stories that reached across divides.*

How will you frame this injustice?

4. REDIRECT — Mobilize Outside the System

Redlines are often pushed into courts, reviews, or commissions — slow processes that demobilize people. Instead, we can channel public anger into **direct action and visible resistance**.

- *Example: After Parkland, youth-led walkouts, marches, and sit-ins bypassed the usual channels and forced a national conversation.*
- *Example: In response to Tesla union-busting and racism, decentralized “Tesla Takedown” actions gave people tools to act locally.*

Remember your pillars. What are some pillars you are asking to act with you — and how might you use your bodies to make that happen?

5. RESIST — Build Strength and Withstand Pushback

After redlines are revealed, the backlash begins — intimidation, bribes, threats. We can **protect each other**, expose these attacks, and build long-term strength.

- *Example: Activists facing repression in Palestine solidarity or Stop Cop City build support networks, legal funds, and public counters to repression.*
- *Example: Indigenous land defenders resist pipeline threats not just with protests, but through ceremony, care teams, and legal defense.*

What support systems will you need?

VII. Nonviolent Action

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.

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

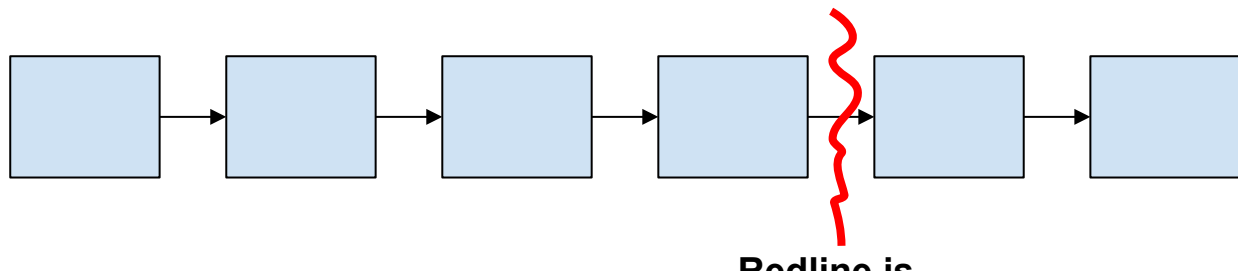
- General strikes or targeted walkouts (e.g. teachers, tech workers, service sectors).
- Divestment campaigns against corporations funding election deniers.
- Tax resistance or "withholding campaigns" in protest of unconstitutional governance (legal advice required).

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.

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.*



Examples

Red Line	Tactics Before	Tactics After	How It Rebounded
SERBIA Milošević refused to accept defeat in the 2000 presidential election, falsifying results.	Youth group Otpor! spent years training activists in nonviolent resistance. Built a decentralized network using humor and anti-authoritarian messaging. Practiced tactics like graffiti, street theater, leaflets, and mock trials to delegitimize the regime. Coordinated with opposition parties and international allies.	Mobilized nationwide protests immediately following the stolen election. Organized general strikes and mass student walkouts. Used SMS and flyers to spread rapid, decentralized calls to action. Took over the Parliament building with defecting police and soldiers.	Mass pressure forced Milošević to resign within days. Otpor!'s training and network allowed fast response. The regime's fraud delegitimized it even among loyalists.
GEORGIA • President Eduard Shevardnadze attempted to maintain power through fraudulent parliamentary elections.	Youth movement Kmara! was modeled on Otpor!, trained in civil resistance. Independent media and NGOs like Rustavi-2 prepared to expose fraud. International observers were invited and aligned with civic groups to monitor voting. Civic education and voter registration drives built momentum.	Protesters occupied the parliament building, offering roses as a symbol of peace. Coordinated protests grew rapidly in Tbilisi and spread. Shevardnadze's own security forces refused to suppress demonstrators.	Peaceful symbolism plus mass mobilization broke the legitimacy of Shevardnadze. The stolen election galvanized disillusioned elites and citizens. He resigned; new elections were held, won by reformer Mikheil Saakashvili.
RUSSIA • Navalny was arrested upon returning from Germany, where he had recovered from being poisoned by Russian government.	Navalny's team built a digital infrastructure including YouTube exposés on corruption. Created a Smart Voting system to unite opposition votes in regional elections. Maintained a decentralized network of volunteers in dozens of cities.	Released a viral video called "Putin's Palace: History of the World's Largest Bribe," with over 100 million views. Organized simultaneous protests across over 100 cities, despite police threats. Protesters used snow writing, flash mobs, and encrypted messaging to coordinate.	Arrest shone a global spotlight on repression, leading to sanctions. Smart Voting revealed cracks in regime control. The regime tightened repression. The arrest heightened Navalny's profile globally.

VIII. Long-Term Preparation

Describe some of the different preparation that you need to do now to set yourself, such as:

Community/Base/Civic Education: Build knowledge of the Constitution, state election laws, and rights.

Coalition Building: Unite labor, students, faith groups, veterans, and immigrant communities.

Training in Nonviolence: Prepare activists for noncooperation, nonviolent discipline and de-escalation.

Resource Networks: Coordinate food, bail, transport, and safety teams for mobilization days.

Framing: If something happens, we have a storyline. (Hint: It might not *only* be “outrage” — this is bad — but might be exposing the weakness of the regime: “If they were popular, they wouldn’t steal an election.”)

Absorption: How will we use the “redline moment” to grow the movement’s capacity? This isn’t just thinking organizational list growth — but how we do support the ecosystem of activity that educates, trains, mobilizes, organizes, and inspires?

IX. Closing

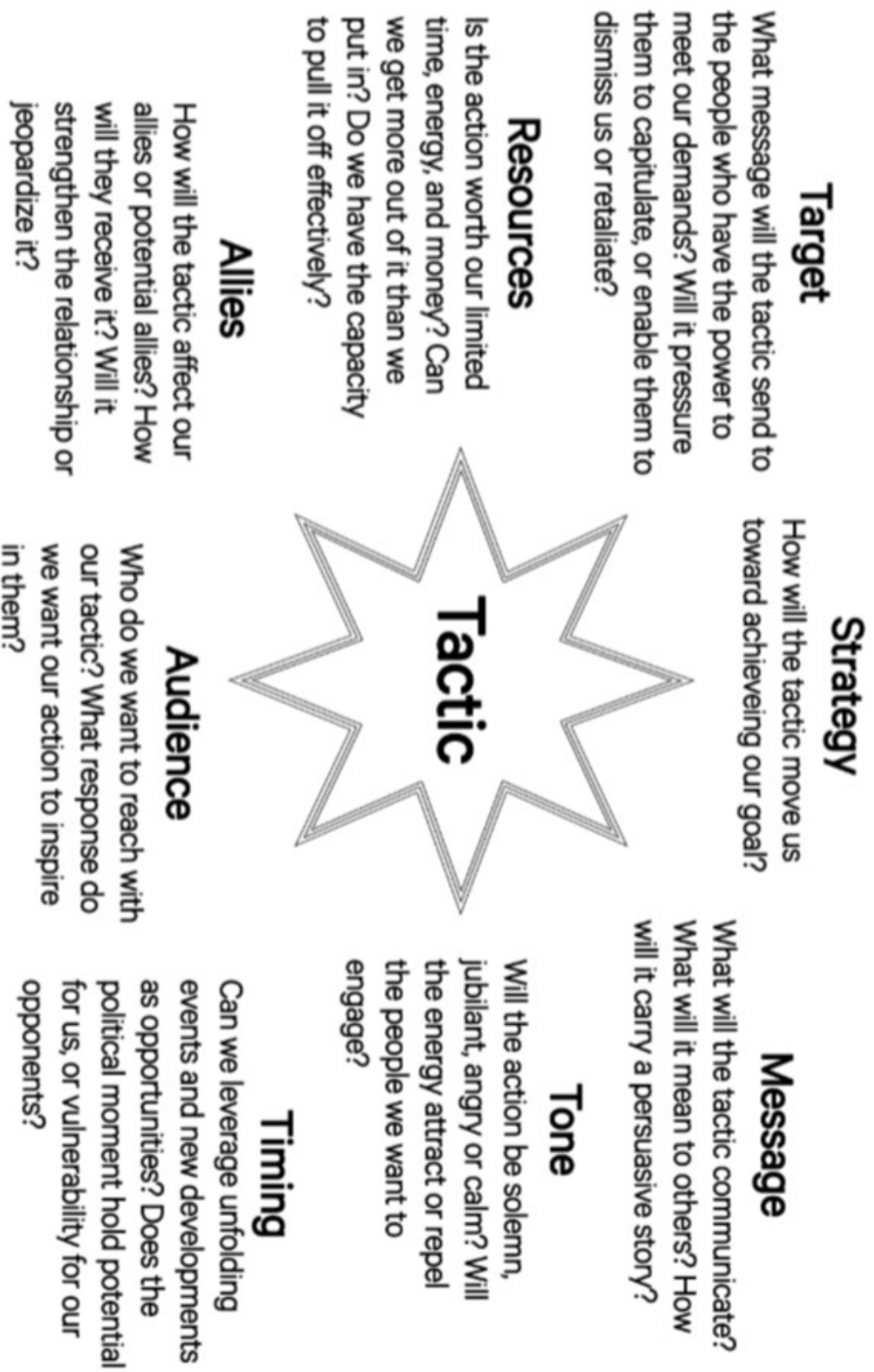
When the Trump administration deported Kilmar Abrego Garcia in direct violation of a judge's order, it crossed a **redline**. Kilmar, a longtime U.S. resident, was taken from a Tennessee jail and dumped into a violent El Salvadoran mega-prison — a clear act of state defiance against the courts. The system's message was chilling: even the law won't protect you if you're targeted. But instead of cowering, people organized.

Activists moved to **reveal** the injustice. His union and immigrant rights groups released photos and legal documents, while his wife, Jennifer, gave interviews that rehumanized Kilmar and turned him from an abstract deportation case into a father and worker ripped from his community. Politicians, including members of Congress, publicly **reframed** the act not as a bureaucratic error but as a kidnapping.

The movement **redirected** public outrage into pressure campaigns. Kilmar's name was invoked regularly at town hall protests, even in very rightwing districts. Petitions, direct actions, and protests bypassed official foot-dragging. Senator Chris Van Hollen's high-profile visit raised the stakes significantly — all while the administration dared the courts to stop them. Labor leaders from AFL-CIO's Liz Shuler to Sean McGarvey of the Building Trades's viral view kept the issue on people's face.

After weeks of pressure, Kilmar was returned to the U.S. — a major retreat for the administration. (As of writing, the fight isn't over: upon return, he was immediately charged and remains behind bars.)

This moment shows the importance of organizing around redlines: it's not enough to catch an abuse—we have to expose it, frame it as systemic, and mobilize fast to make it costly for those in power.



The Target's Power Stands on Pillars of Support

The diagram consists of a large triangle representing the roof, with its base at the top of a rectangular structure. This rectangular structure is divided into seven equal-width vertical columns, representing pillars of support. The entire structure is outlined with a black border.

For the issue that you select – Who are the powerholders? Write the name(s) in the “roof” of the House of Injustice. Now, name each of the “pillars of support” - the institutions and organizations that help the powerholders to sustain power. Within each pillar, identify if you think it can be won over or at least neutralized. If possible, add some thinking about HOW you might do that.

Worksheet: Spectrum of Allies Segments

1. **Active Allies:**

You believe you can **already** count on them to help you.

If your target falls in this area of the spectrum – you tactics will need to find ways to engage your allies even more actively in working with you toward your goal.

2. **Passive Allies:**

You think they have the same interest, investment or need to solve the problem as you do, and may be close to agreeing with you about your vision, but perhaps may not be able or willing to actively or overtly support you.

If your target falls in this area of the spectrum - your tactics will need to help move them to the “*active ally*” position; increasing their interest and willingness to be active.

3. **Neutral:**

These are people, organizations, institutions that may not know about the problem; may not know about you and your work; have no particular investment in the problem.

If your target falls in this area of the spectrum – your tactics will need to find ways to inform or educate them about the problem and your position in order to move them to a “*passive ally*” position. Examine your tactics to be sure you will not move them toward your opponent’s position.

4. **Passive Opponents:**

These are people, organizations, institutions that you think have some interests that would be opposed to your vision; they may have relationships with people who are actively opposed to you.

If your target falls in this area of the spectrum – your tactics will need to create doubt about their position, raise fears that their position may be “costly” to them in some way. You want your tactics to move them to a “neutral” position and NOT to an active opponent position.

5. **Active Opponents:**

These are people, organizations, institutions that have a big investment in opposing your position (related to power, position, finances, relationships, etc.).

If your target is located in this area of the spectrum – your tactic goal would need to put them into a great dilemma, that any action they would take against you would be very “costly” to them. Your tactic goal would be to move them into a “*passive opponent*” position.

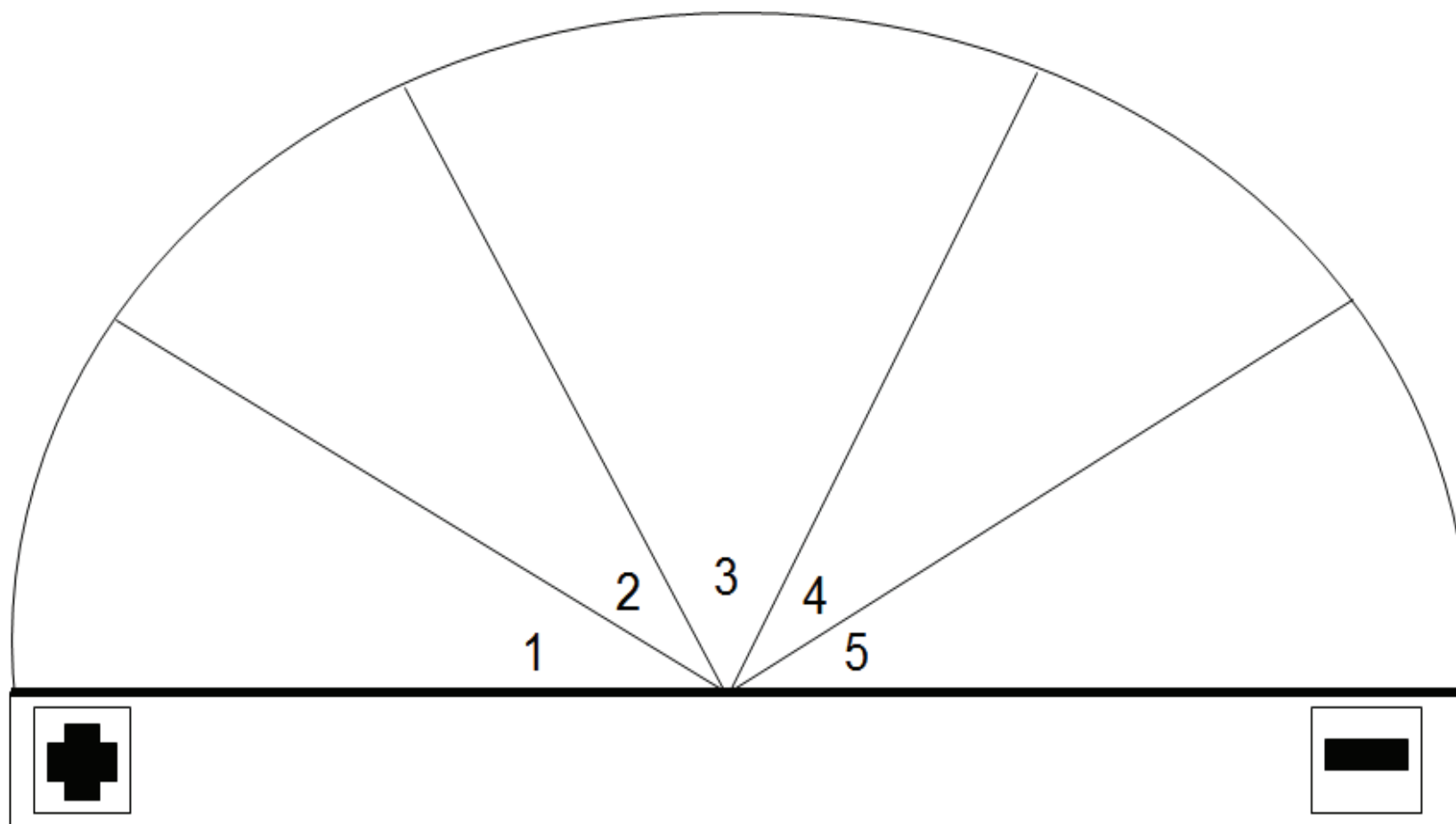
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Problem Statement: _____



Source: Original Source – Training for Change (www.trainingforchange.org) and adapted into five segments by New Tactics in Human Rights.

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