



Conclusion

By looking at forty-four dilemma actions under a microscope, we found that they are more likely to succeed if they create a public issue *either* out of the absence of a reaction by the opponent *or* because of a clumsy, possibly repressive reaction when a nonviolent group is breaking one of its laws. If it is possible, the skillful use of media (including social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) is an effective amplifier, as happened in the examples of Indivisible or No Somos Delito (We Are Not a Crime).

What we have learned from the research and case studies is a need to carefully adapt the core elements of dilemma actions to a range of cultural contexts and in response to a range of repressive regimes. In the age of social media, successful tactics are often shared between activists coming from various struggles “horizontally” (with no mentoring, training, or education from a third party). Successful (and

sometimes very creative) cases of dilemma actions often serve as role models or inspiration for movements operating in very different contexts and very distant parts of the globe. But we should be wary of just “copy-pasting” a tactic from one context to another. It is essential to make sure that in each case, the dilemma action has been carefully adapted to the specific situation. This is even more important when groups add an element of humor, mocking, or political satire to the design process. What might be funny and fun in one context could be offensive and disrespectful in another.

So how do we learn from successes and failures, and then apply what we learned?

As we’ve said, our goal was to move beyond experience and anecdote and theory into proof. The recent rise of right-wing politics, growing illiberalism, and xenophobia has demanded a growing struggle to hold these democracies accountable to their supposed ideals. We now have proof that dilemma actions work in this cause. As a subset of nonviolent resistance movements, they can significantly help a group advance its calls for democracy. We have also explained the specific elements of a successful dilemma action, offering a contribution to social movements across the globe.

Our research clearly shows the amazing potential of dilemma actions as a strategic tool to tackle human rights abuses, autocracy, injustice, and inequality. Not only are dilemma actions more likely to grant their organizers visibility and a possibility for mobilization, but they also often

inspire other local and international actors to replicate those tactics.³² In two-thirds of the cases we studied, other movements replicated the tactics. More often than not, the response from the opponent was self-compromising, giving organizers a window to follow the original action up with secondary tactics or protests. The creative and strategic processes behind organizing dilemma actions are vital, and we will continue to share our findings with the world.

Two things keep democracy and freedom alive: strong institutions and active citizens. It is a two-way street. Institutions must serve their citizens, and citizens must in turn defend democratic institutions from abuse. Plenty of movements and organizations across the globe are challenging their autocratic governments with courage and creativity. In this time of democratic backsliding, we see that Americans and Europeans may have taken democracy for granted for too long.³³ Those of us who have taken part in civil resistance movements in the past know all too well that authoritarians depend on apathy. Apathy, though, also plagues democracies. Our finding that over 60 percent of dilemma actions attracted new members suggests that these sorts of tactics can pull many citizens out of apathy and into engagement.

And that's where you come in. Remember that sharing your experiences helps inspire others and sharpen their strategies. The bottom line is that democracy is simply too serious a matter to be left to politicians or parties alone. And grassroots campaigning is more effective when it's fun. Oligarchs,

just like autocrats, are weakened when they become objects of derision. Together, we have every reason to research, study, and practice dilemma actions and laughtivism in prodemocracy struggles. It may be the best direct remedy for challenging authoritarians and defending our democracies at home.