

MILITANT STREET TACTICS: PUSHING & PULLING



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WHY MILITANCY?

All across Occupied Turtle Island, social movements are seeing a massive rise in state repression and fascist violence. In so-called Toronto, those against the genocide in Gaza have endured escalating police violence even at supposedly 'low-risk' actions: we've seen multiple arrests at overpass protests, several early-morning house raids in response to wheatpasting a corporate storefront, and even deployment of the same brutal knee-to-neck restraint tactic that was used to kill George Floyd. Elsewhere, we've seen an equally rapid rise in Zionist violence, including the use of IOF chemical weapons against students at Columbia University. Witnessing and experiencing the trauma of this escalating repression necessitates doing everything we can to keep our community safer.

Yet appeasement is not the answer. It is not possible for us to avoid confrontation with cops or fascists: if there is anything the last few months of organizing have taught us, it is that we could face repression regardless of how 'peaceful' we are, and that repression will only keep getting worse—unless we fight it. **Instead of seeking an illusion of safety by ceding our ground to police and fascists, we must instead seek real, material safety by fighting back.**

Disciplined confrontation and strategic escalation can enable us to protect ourselves while simultaneously enabling the pursuit of more materially impactful goals. Not only can militant tactics keep us safer when a confrontation does occur, strong displays of militancy may even act as a deterrent to police violence. While it is unlikely that a group of unarmed antifascists will be able to overpower the full force of the police, if it is clear to the cops that they will be met with active confrontation, they might decide that violence is not worth the effort.

This zine, specifically, is meant to introduce some fundamental concepts of enacting and defending from physical force in the context of rallies, community defenses, and antifascist actions. This is in no way a comprehensive guide to all forms of physical confrontation that can occur on the ground. We intend to simply provide a foundation upon which one can base their own practice and develop strategies for the future.

What is Push-Pull?

Pushing and pulling are just as we already innately understand: pushing = exerting force forward to move something away, and pulling = holding and bringing things towards oneself. There will be times on the street—and elsewhere—when the front line of any group must push or pull someone, either to confront an opponent or protect a comrade.

When facing active aggressors, the first thing to understand is how to resist their pushes, and prevent their pulling of either yourself or your comrade. However, there are many other things that one could face in such a confrontation, such as punches, kicks, thrown objects, and more—not to mention police munitions such as batons or tear gas. However, These, remain outside the scope of this particular introductory zine.

PUSHING:

When two people engage in a physical confrontation, there are various factors that can determine which of the two individuals will overcome the other. If we simplify the complex dynamics of such interactions to a matter of simply who will out-push the other, there are three key dynamics that come into play:

1. Physicality
2. Aggression
3. Technique (posture and positioning)

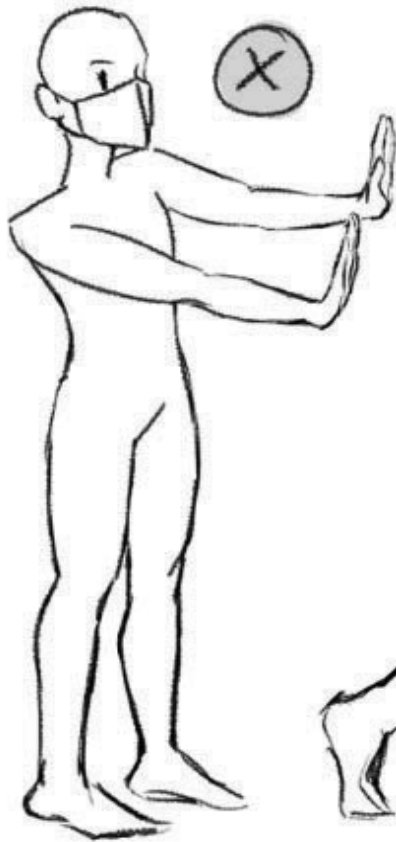
The first factor, physicality, refers to the differences in physical bodies of the two interacting persons—i.e. their size, physical strength, weight, and height. The second factor, aggression, refers to the confrontational energy that each individual can deploy. A low aggression push could be considered feeble, meek, or fearful, whereas a more high-aggression push will be stronger, combative, and powerful.

These first two dynamics *are* important to take note of, because if the difference in physicality or aggression between you and your opponent is too great, then these factors will ultimately trump your differences in technique. Understanding the third dynamic will be the goal of this zine, but mastery of technique can only take you so far.

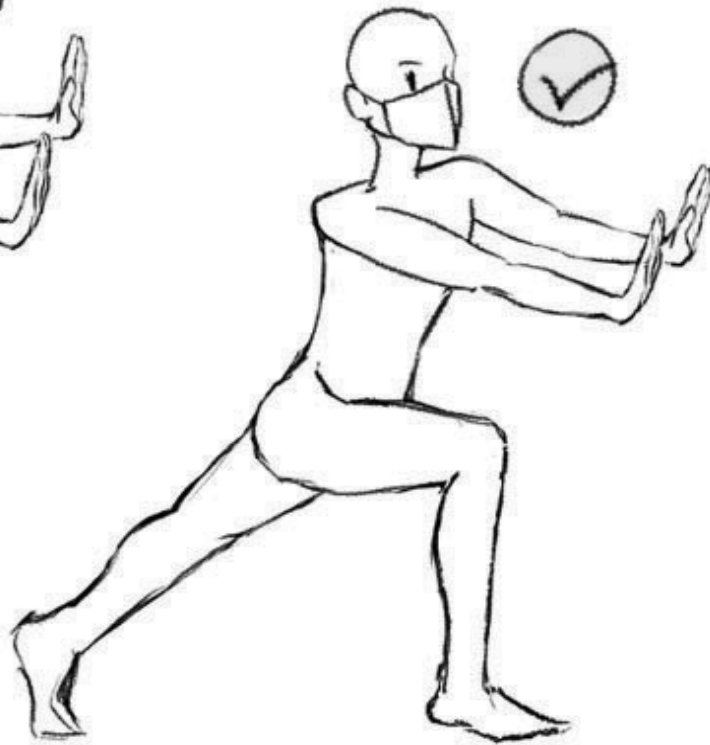
How to make a stronger push:

Pushing is essentially about moving forward—this first and foremost depends upon the legs. Posture is about enhancing the amount of drive we are able to get from our legs: a weak posture will do a poor job of transferring energy from the legs forward, and a strong pushing posture will do a good job of transferring energy from the legs forward.

Bad Pushing Posture



Good Pushing Posture



Leaning forward with one foot in front of the other creates a stronger forward push because the angle enables your legs to send more energy forward. It also ensures more stability if you get pushed back. This is something we already instinctively understand, but sometimes seem to forget at actions.

Consider not pushing with your arms but instead with your shoulders, using your arms to maintain strong contact with the comrades on your left and right side. Instead of interlocking elbows, as is sometimes suggested, grab the shoulders of the people beside you, as illustrated below. If you are holding a banner or umbrella, keep one arm free and use the other to hold the shoulder of one person next to you. The same applies if you need to defend from a potential brawl.

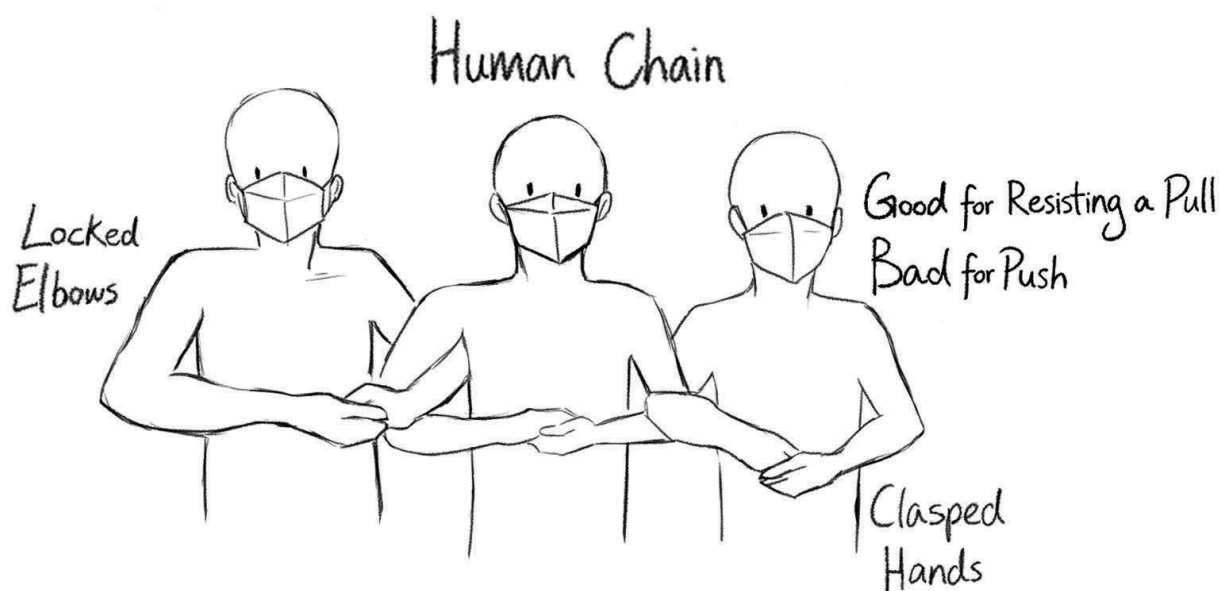


If there seem to be enough people at the front of the line already, add more bodies directly behind it instead of overcrowding the front line. A second line directly behind the first provides support, stability, and forward drive to the front line. Those in the second line should make sure their posture is *not* any more upright than that of the front line: this will direct the applied force downward instead of forward. Instead, try to ensure your posture is lower than that of the front line. To see a somewhat extreme example of this principle being applied, look up the formation of a rugby scrum: notice how the players in the second line bent lower than those in the front. Three lines is ideal, and we should try not to add additional lines of support beyond that. Each additional line will increasingly lose efficiency in the transfer of forward drive.

To counter the opposite side's pushing attempt, a strong enough force in the opposite direction is required to neutralize their forward drive. For this reason, the same postures and concepts applied in all of the above discussion of pushing may be applied to countering the opponent's attempts to push.

The Human Chain:

The human chain is a popular protest line formation and represents a powerful symbolic gesture—a posture that has near-universally come to proclaim “we shall not be moved.” However, this is a bad formation for pushing against an opponent, or for confronting an opponent’s push. **A long chain of linked arms can help protestors hold onto each other and can be effective in resisting a pulling/separation attempt, but they do not enable efficient transfer of forward drive energy between linked bodies.**



PULLING:

Unlike pushing, which is fairly straightforward, assessing when to pull can be a bit tricky. Pulling can be used very creatively. One tactic we've seen deployed successfully was at a recent community defense, where a chud who was blocking the forward advancement of a banner line was not pushed but rather pulled into the line and behind it. Once inside the space controlled by the community defense crew, he was yelled at, shoved around, and ultimately surrounded, picked up by multiple people, and then thrown out of the space utterly humiliated. Thus, pulling can be an effective tool against an opponent utilizing a powerful pushing posture. By pulling them in the same direction that their own force is aimed at, they will be caught unprepared and find themselves tumbling forward.

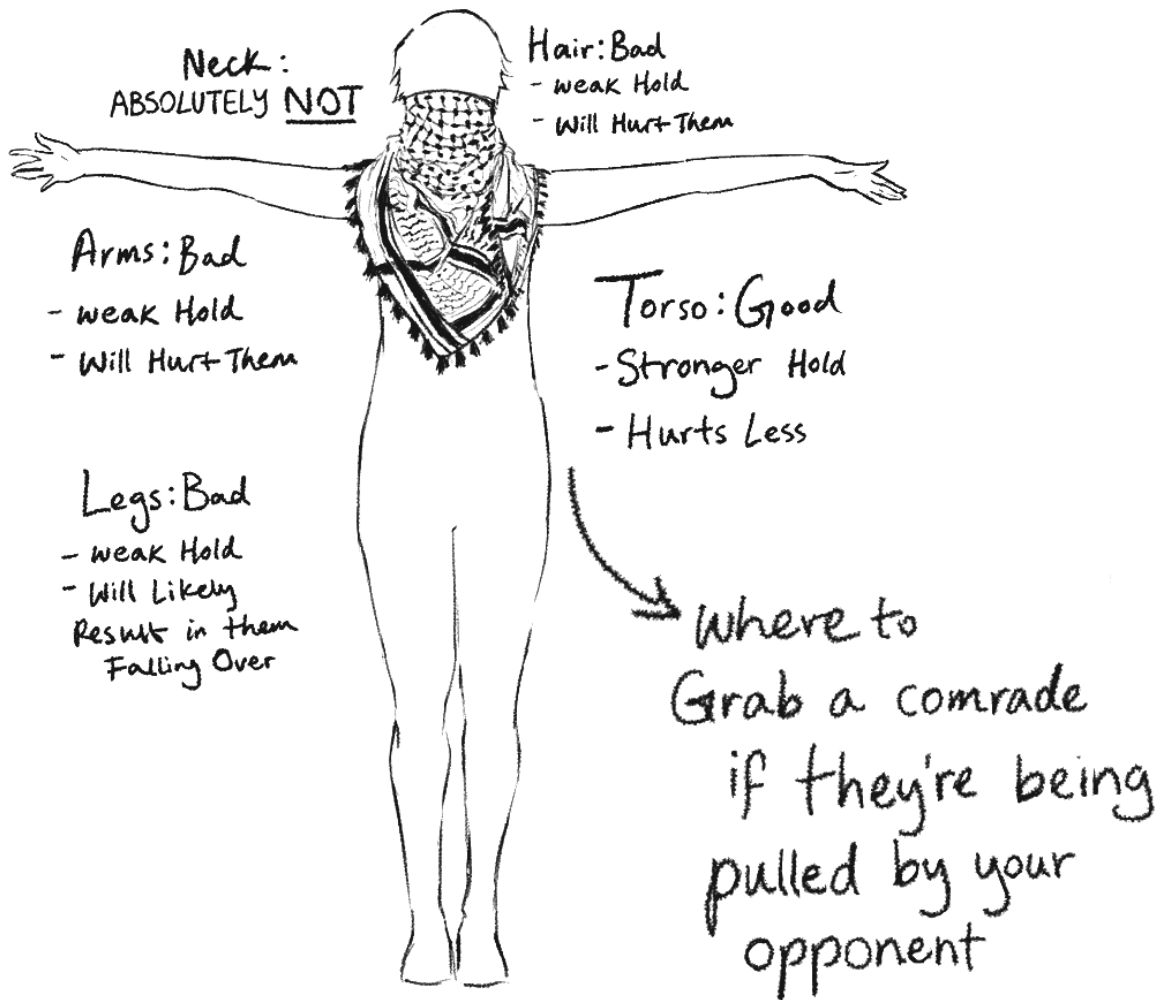
The most important use of pulling, however, is as a tool for helping our own friends. People can be grabbed by opponents when the front line is overextended or weak, in moments of general chaos, and if they are physically distant from their comrades. Being able to pull people away from harm when they are grabbed can be one of the most effective ways to help someone facing fascist violence or arrest.

Pulling our friends:

There are many different contexts and ways in which to pull our comrades out of an escalated situation. Sometimes it's as simple as taking their hand and leading them to a safer area during a moment of confusion or confrontation. If a friend is being grabbed by cops who haven't quite gotten control of them yet, successfully pulling their body away from the police may be an effective de-arrest tactic. In all cases of pulling a comrade away, the most crucial factor is your own situational awareness. You must firmly understand what kind of threat is at hand, and to get to safety immediately. Otherwise, you might not only fail to help a comrade but also land yourself in danger.

Out-pulling the enemy:

A pulling match with the enemy can occur over an attempt to grab a comrade, or over a contested item, such as a bike. In both situations, the priority should be establishing a dominant hold by establishing a grip as close as possible to the object or person's center of mass. If an opponent has grabbed a friend's arms or wrists, for example, grab them by the torso to pull them away. Do not grab their limbs (arms or legs), their hair, and especially not their neck.



If your opponent has already done a good job of establishing a dominant grip over the object or person being pulled, try to attack their fingers. Prying their fingers open—or even just attempting to do so—can significantly increase your chances of winning. This tactic is especially important to employ if the opponent has grabbed a sensitive body part, such as a person's hair, their neck, or their genitalia. However, note that trying to pry your opponent's fingers open when your opponent is a cop can be particularly risky, since they will likely interpret that as assault and can use it as grounds for your arrest.

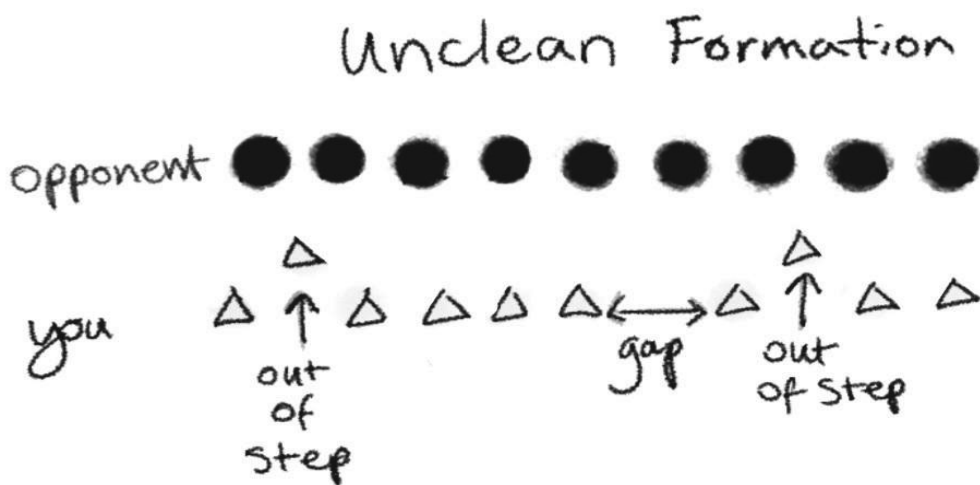
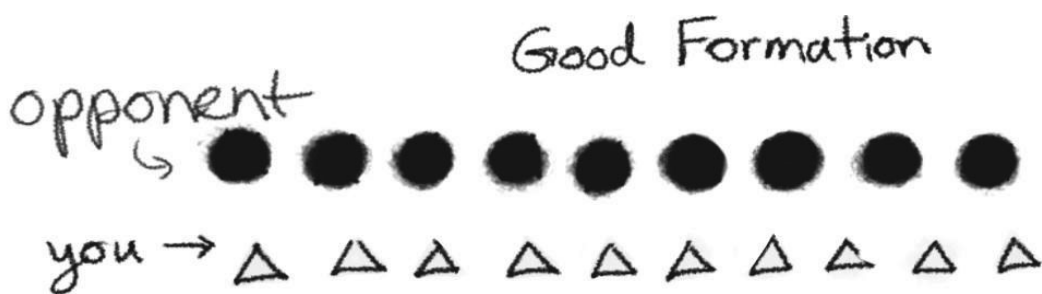
Make sure you obtain consent to grab and pull the people in your crew before the action, and take note of any injuries or medical issues your crew members might have that could cause harm if they get grabbed. In case a stranger gets grabbed and you're in a position to pull them back to safety, it's probably safe to assume they'd rather be pulled back than face more violence from your opponents. Nonetheless, be ready to take a level of accountability in case your action does cause additional harm to the person you attempted to rescue.

Return to safety:

After any pulling attempt, it is very likely that you will be exposed and in danger. Key to situational awareness is knowing where you need to head for safety after attempting to pull. Diving back into the thick of the crowd, and having front-liners form a strong human chain by interlinking their elbows to negate further pulling attempts, is a good strategy. In certain scenarios, leaving the action altogether may also be feasible, though this runs a risk of being followed by your opponents. What is important is to be sure of what direction you are going in and to disappear from the spot as quickly as possible. **It is very important that after a pulling match you do not remain simply exposed.**

FORMATION:

The importance of a clean line cannot be ignored when it comes to pushing/pulling actions during a rally, community defense, or direct action scenario. A clean solid front and back line will ensure better pushing force and prevent overextension, thus reducing people's chances of being pulled. A clear line is also essential for maintaining a controlled space of safety. An unclean line will make the boundary of the controlled space porous and flimsy.



In the above diagram are two examples. The line at the top is clean, and the one at the bottom isn't. In the first formation, all bodies are in a near-perfect straight line with uniform gaps between each person. In the second, however, some people are out of step, and thus more exposed. This second line also has a gap in the formation, which the opponent may use to barge through and break the line. Such cases of overextension pose a threat, and we must prevent them from happening.

To maintain a good line formation, it is essential that all members of the line maintain formation in relation to *each other*, not against their opponent. Opponents such as cops, counter-protestors, or agitators will try to poke at the line at various points, pressing in on or even giving up space in an attempt to disrupt the formation. It is important to not fall for these attempts and to keep in step with your comrades.

An unclean line formation is often the result of members focusing on maintaining a set amount of distance against their opponents and not realizing that they've fallen out of step with the rest of their line. It can also result simply from members not paying attention to how they're moving. To ensure clean line formation, it is key to continuously maintain your position directly beside, and close to the other members of the line.

CHANGING CONTEXTS:

All of these tactics are contextual and may not apply in all circumstances. It's essential to understand rapidly shifting contexts—for example, sometimes a situation might begin as a pushing contest but accelerate into a full-on brawl. When your opponents are attempting to bash your face in, it is obviously no longer appropriate to push forward in a solid line formation. Hands will need to be unlinked from each other in order to protect oneself. Similarly, your opponent in a pushing match may attempt to catch you off guard by pulling you forward instead—note that the low forward posture best for pushing is not very useful when you are being grabbed and pulled. With an increasing number of people involved, situations may even evolve into various combinations of shoving, pulling, brawls, or object throwing at multiple spots and from multiple directions. Be aware of what the context of any given situation is and how the situation may be shifting. Adaptability and awareness are just as important as good technique.

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