

## TACTIC

# CLANDESTINE LEAFLETING

When it is unsafe to protest or campaign publicly, there are many creative ways to deliver your message without putting yourself at risk — even floating lanterns or ping pong balls.

## CONTRIBUTED BY

### Andrew Boyd

Andrew Boyd is an author, humorist and long-time veteran of creative campaigns for social change. He is Wrangler-in-Chief Emeritus at Beautiful Trouble.

---

**“IN SOME SITUATIONS THE SIMPLE ACT OF SHARING YOUR OPINION ON A LEAFLET CAN BE HIGHLY DANGEROUS. A CREATIVE APPROACH CAN BOTH KEEP YOU SAFE, AND MEMORABLY SPREAD YOUR MESSAGE.”**

---

“Art is anything you can get away with.”  
—Marshall McLuhan

In some situations the simple act of sharing your opinion on a leaflet can be highly dangerous. A creative approach can both keep you safe, and memorably spread your message.

In Myanmar (Burma), citizens placed leaflets in floating lanterns and released them to waft over the city. In the early days of the uprising against President Assad, Syrian activists would write the word “Freedom!” on hundreds of ping-pong balls, released them from the top of a hill in Damascus, and let them bounce through the streets. During the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, the ANC used nonviolent “leaflet bombs” — small time-bomb devices that would explode hundreds of pamphlets into the air, while doing no harm to anyone nearby.

Even when there is no risk involved, sometimes leafletting in creative ways can be a more effective way to get people’s attention. Make it fun. Make it unusual. Make it memorable. Consider climbing up on someone’s shoulders and handing out leaflets from there. Or putting your custom message inside a fortune cookie and handing out the cookie. Or using theatre and costumes. (See Beautiful Trouble’s “Advanced Leafletting” tactic for more examples of this kind.)

## LEARN MORE

### POTENTIAL RISKS

In a repressive political environment, the risk of speaking out can be severe. Even leafletting clandestinely can be dangerous if you are caught in the act, or if the messages can be traced back to you. So take precautions: If fingerprints are a concern, use gloves. If you think your handwriting could be recognized, disguise it. If you are launching your messages (via ping-pong balls, floating lanterns, or other means) from a central location, be sure to quickly disappear from that spot once they are launched.

### RELATED TOOLS

#### Stories

- Conflict Kitchen
- Kubatana’s yellow poster campaign
- Panty power
- Yellow Pigs in Parliament

Advanced leafleting

Andrew Boyd, Beautiful Trouble, 2012

<http://beautifultrouble.org/tactic/advanced-leafleting/>

## **Tactics**

- Advanced leafleting
- Creative disruption
- Currency hacking

## **Principles**

- Balance art and message
- Foster safer spaces
- If protest is made illegal, make daily life a protest
- Know your community

## **Theories**

- Decolonization
- Memes

## **TAGS**

Action design, Art, Communications, Democracy, Dictatorship, Direct action, Human rights, Humour, Language, Media, Pranks, State violence