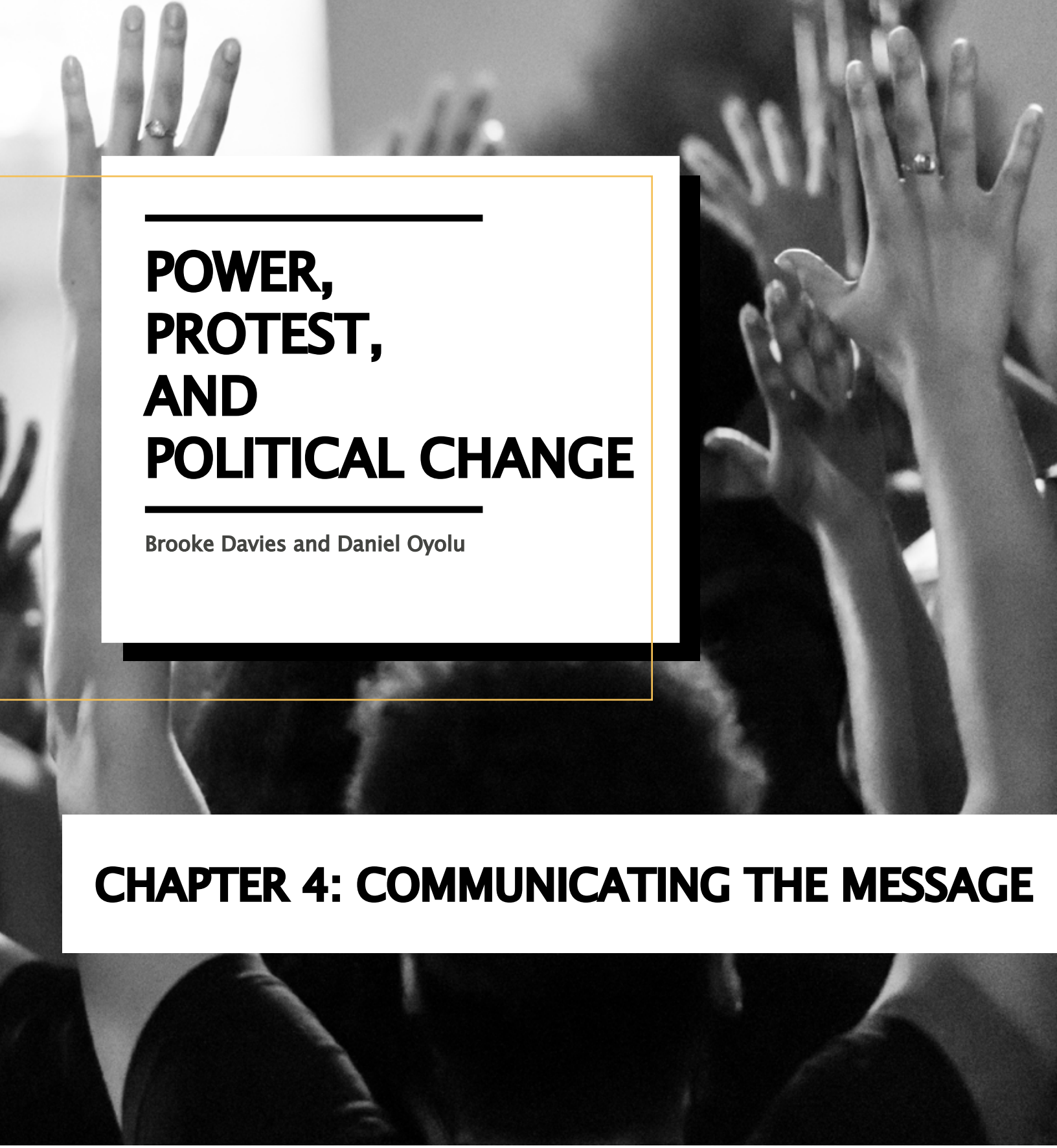

POWER, PROTEST, AND POLITICAL CHANGE

Brooke Davies and Daniel Oyolu

CHAPTER 4: COMMUNICATING THE MESSAGE

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Allyship – When one person or group enters into a supportive relationship with another person or group to achieve a discrete goal or purpose.

Activist – A person who campaigns, via civil resistance or other means, for political change.

BATNA – Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement, or the best course of action should a party decide to no longer negotiate.

Civil Resistance – The act of openly disobeying an unjust, immoral or unconstitutional law as a matter of conscience, and accepting the consequences, including submitting to imprisonment if necessary, to protest an injustice. Also commonly referred to as civil disobedience, nonviolent action, nonviolent conflict, nonviolent struggle, and other variations.

Coalition – A collection of distinct people, parties, organizations, or other entities engaging in joint strategic action under one group or organization.

Decentralization — A type of movement structure where there is no single person in charge, nor one center of power for the movement. Instead, there are various parties involved in the sustenance and maintenance of the power-building process.

Direct Action — The tactics of civil resistance to injustice. More than 250 forms of nonviolent direct action have been identified, including marches, boycotts, picketing, sit-ins, and prayer vigils, to name a few.

Interests – In negotiation theory, interests refer to the "basic needs, wants, and motivations" underlying a party's position or point of view on an issue.

Movement – An organized effort to promote or attain political change.

Negotiation – The process of discussing, compromising, and bargaining with other parties in good faith to persuade them to reach an agreement or resolution to the dispute. Although negotiation is often assumed to be an adversarial process, you can also (and normally do) negotiate with allies and supporters.

Organizer – A person who engages and empowers others with the purpose of increasing the influence of groups historically underrepresented in the policies and decision making that affect their lives.

Pillars of support – The organizations, entities, institutions, and actors that provide

the political leadership with the knowledge, skills, and/or resources to maintain and wield power. They include civil servants, religious groups, media organizations, businesses, and security forces, among others.

Political Leadership – The governing body with the power to produce, implement, and amend laws and policies in a jurisdiction. Also commonly referred to as the authorities, power structure, "haves," and in authoritarian contexts, the "regime."

Power – the ability, whether physical, mental or moral, to affect change.

Protest – In our report, we will refer to "protest" as the direct actions that involve demonstrations of disapproval, exemplified by people present in both on- and offline public spaces.

Our definitions were informed by The King Center's Glossary of Nonviolence, Encyclopedia Brittanica, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, and Saul Alinsky's seminal work, Rules for Radicals.

INTRODUCTION

The mass protests that erupted across the United States this summer inspired the idea for this project. After the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and too many other Black Americans, protests across the country swelled by the millions into what we now know to be the largest direct action in the history of this country. Yet despite that unprecedented demonstration of support and power, many activists in the US felt that only piecemeal reforms and lip service were given in response to their demands. Sharing their frustration with the slow pace of progress, we asked ourselves: If you want to make change as an organizer, how do you build power to get into the negotiating room, and then how do you wield that power effectively once you've sat down at the table with your political leadership? How do you overcome a vast power asymmetry between you as one individual and your entire state or national government?

To answer those questions, we looked to both home and abroad. We interviewed organizers across the US, from national movements like Black Lives Matter, the Sunrise Movement, and March for our Lives, to local jail support groups in Charlotte, North Carolina and community services movements in Houston, Texas. We interviewed civil resistance experts at the US Institute of Peace and Freedom House, ambassadors of opposition governments living in exile, high-ranking officials in transitional governments, and activists across six countries, including Yemen, Belarus, Tunisia, Syria, Sudan, and Venezuela. And we poured through theoretical works on negotiation, power, and community organizing, as well as modern case studies. Each struggle we heard and read about had its own unique contexts and histories, but at the end of our research we were surprised by how fundamentally similar these stories were at their core. The same challenges those in the US described to us were and are currently being felt around the world, from movement to movement and country to country.

And just as we heard the same problems articulated to us over and again, we also heard a need from many of our interviewees to have more access to solutions. Some of our interviewees likened their organizing to "building the plane as we're flying it." Others said that they were only able to exchange ideas and advice during small weekend retreats or over Twitter. Almost all of them, no matter if they had four years of organizing experience or forty, wanted more ideas from fellow activists from around the world.

That is what this report is fundamentally about: **to consolidate the wisdom from activists all over the world on how to overcome the common challenges they face when building power and negotiating with their political leadership, and to put forward our own findings informed by our shared background in dispute resolution, negotiation, and community organizing.**

Of course, the problems and solutions we name are certainly not the only ones available—but they are some of the most common. And they are also some of the newest challenges. We have seen in our research that much of the most beloved literature on building power and negotiating as a movement was written in the mid-20th century, well before the possibilities and perils of social media, before women's

leadership in public life emerged as a mainstream idea, and before globalization imposed far-reaching consequences on where power was even located. We live in a new world, with new challenges, and as such we need new ideas for how to overcome them.

To be clear, what this project is not is an Organizing 101 handbook, or an Introduction to Negotiation course. While we will be referencing negotiation and organizing principles throughout, that ground has been well-trodden, and we have provided links to skills trainings, articles, books, and guides on our resources page. In this area we wish to serve merely as aggregators of the best knowledge on organizing and negotiation. What we have reserved for this report is an examination of the greatest challenges organizers face when attempting to prepare themselves for and engage in negotiations with their political leadership to achieve political change, and what to do about it.

Moreover, throughout this report we'll be focusing primarily on a specific subset of nonviolent struggle: direct action, and more specifically street protests, such as marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, and the like. By scoping our findings in this way we do not mean to imply that such direct actions are the most effective ones, or even that direct action is the most effective form of nonviolent struggle. However, we have seen that **protest is increasingly the predominant form of nonviolent struggle in the 21st century.** As of this report's writing, we are living in a world and context that is currently exploding with them. Just this year we have seen high-profile mass protests erupt around the globe, from the US, Lebanon, Mexico, Israel, India, Brazil, and Nigeria, to even long-politically dormant locales like Russia, Belarus, Thailand, and elsewhere. People on every continent are waking up, and they are using protest to announce: We are here, and we are not going anywhere until you give us what we want.

While this chapter specifically focuses on Communication, the other chapters available for download include:

1. **The "Big Trap:" When (and When Not) to Negotiate;**
2. **Coalitions and Allies; and**
3. **Sustainability**

Since we know that every organizer may face only one or several of the challenges addressed above, these chapters were designed to be read separately. As such, if you read the report in full you may feel that some of the information is repeated—and indeed some of it is. However, we think they all contain valuable lessons for anyone seeking to build power and engage in negotiation, and our sincere hope is that anyone can find value in any of them.

One-pagers distilling the need-to-know content of each chapter are also available on the report page and in each one-pager's dedicated chapter.

COMMUNICATING THE MESSAGE

A ONE-PAGER

Reports can get long. Here's a one-page breakdown of what you need to know:

Why is communication important? The ability to effectively communicate the message of a movement has long been important to movement-building. Crafting strong and compelling narratives around a movement and continuing with a consistent and clear message can help organizers effectively communicate what they want, and then make demands from the political leadership. That process both helps legitimize the movement's own story, galvanizing supporters in the process, as well as delegitimize the counter-narratives a political leadership may tell about that movement.

Where does social media play into this? Social media allows people to create their own source of news and information-sharing separate from what is documented in the mainstream, while also taking control away from the political leadership. Essentially, organizers can operate parallel to the mainstream and create another outlet for the public to remain informed on their movement's message and its goals, giving organizers greater control *over* that message in the process. Effective communication and messaging also helps organizers build the bread and butter of their movement: people power. Social media gives people another, easier option to be involved and participate: one tap and they can share their views and support of the movement. All of this is to say, social media has given organizers a vast communications toolkit they can use to galvanize supporters, control their message, keep others from delegitimizing that message, and gain new support in the court of public opinion.

What should you think about when crafting a narrative? From the literature and our own conversations, we have found it is important to craft narratives and counter narratives based on the interests of those you are appealing to, what they care about, and what to say that will persuade them to support the movement. Knowing who will be on the other end of your messaging and thinking about what you can communicate to reach them is pivotal.

When crafting narratives, organizers should consider these three audiences:

1. The general **public**;
2. The **political leadership** a movement is seeking to negotiate with; and
3. **Coalitions and allies** within the movement itself.

COMMUNICATING THE MESSAGE

"One can lack any of the qualities of an organizer—with one exception—and still be effective and successful. That exception is the art of communication. It does not matter what you know about anything if you cannot communicate with your people. In that event you are not even a failure. You're just not there."

–Saul Alinsky, Rules for Radicals

A fundamental function of an organizer is to give voice to situations and people who otherwise may not have one. Communication for an organizer means bringing **injustices to the fore, appealing to the moral conscience of a society, generating outrage at the world as it is, and sparking hope that the world can become as it should be.** When the political leadership would rather ignore or address the issues facing their communities and country, organizers make sure they cannot. Communication for an organizer is thus about using narratives, messages, and stories to raise public consciousness, garner support for the movement's actions and clearly direct that support down a unified strategic path, and clarify for the political leadership what the goals, demands, and visions of the movement really are. It is thus nothing short of essential.

And in the context of negotiation, crafting strong and compelling narratives around a

movement, and then consistently communicating that message, can help organizers gain public support and make clear demands of the political leadership. Moreover, communicating a movement's story effectively can also help *legitimize* that story, and in turn *delegitimize* the stories that the political leadership tells about the movement. All of these benefits—generating public support, framing demands to the political leadership around a clear ask, and warding off attempts at delegitimization—can lead to better negotiating positions for organizers once they get to the table.

However, when confronting all of the levers of power a government has to get its own message out, along with the interests and agendas of the media itself, crafting, communicating, and then consistently telling that story can be enormously difficult. Moreover, if a movement suffers from vague or muddied messaging, it can signal that the movement is disorganized, and therefore *weak*. Parties acting in bad faith outside the movement can and will take advantage of that muddied narrative, either through delegitimization or cooptation. When communicating and negotiating with the political leadership, it is thus imperative to demonstrate a clarity of purpose.

This chapter will discuss the different ways that organizers and activists can both communicate their message out to their audiences and combat counter-narratives and delegitimization attempts at the same time. It is divided into three parts. It will first dig a bit deeper into why exactly communicating a movement's story is important to its negotiating strategy. It will then explore how organizers can target and then message to different audiences key to their movement's success, strengthening their BATNA in the process. Finally, it will examine how organizers can leverage media and digital tools to stop the political leadership from weakening their BATNA.

PART I: THE THEORY OF NEGOTIATION AND COMMUNICATION

In his interview, "Truth and Power," philosopher Michel Foucault established that the "production of truth" is power itself.[1] **Organizers telling their movement's story have a chance to tell their truth, define the narrative, and build power for their movement—but to do so, they also have to effectively defend against the other side's counterattacks, delegitimization, and counter-narrative efforts.** When a movement is going up against a political leadership, it has to fight the inherent power imbalance that comes along with it.

In negotiation theory, if one party is attempting to strengthen its position at the table—and thus close a power imbalance between it and the other side—one of the best tools to do so is by building its BATNA. As first explained by Roger Fisher and William Ury in their seminal book, *Getting to Yes*, a BATNA is a party's Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement. In other words, it is the party's best course of action should the parties decide to no longer negotiate. And as Fisher, Ury, and Patton put it: "the better your BATNA, the greater your power."[2]

PRINCIPLE

Effective communication builds a movement's BATNA by allowing it to reach audiences—and thus potential supporters, coalition members, and allies—who might not normally be listening. Should the movement then get a "no" in the negotiation room, it now has an even greater base of support it can activate, lean on, organize, and mobilize to impose consequences on those political leaders for saying no—so that the next time the movement gets to the table, it'll have the power to get to yes. As Fisher, Ury, and Patton wrote, "good communication is an especially significant source of negotiating power. Crafting your message with punch can increase your persuasiveness."[3]

However, effective communication not only builds up a movement's BATNA—it can also worsen the political leadership's BATNA in turn. By cultivating a broad base of support and legitimacy, movements are also sapping the political leadership's "**pillars of support**," which we define broadly as the organizations, individuals, and institutions that provide the political leadership with its legitimacy, knowledge, and resources to maintain and use power. In short, they are the entities and individuals upon which the political leadership relies on for both its symbolic and literal ability to function. Effective communication attacks two of a political leadership's primary pillars: (1) its allies and constituents' support; and (2) its legitimacy. By the nature of its opposition to the political leadership, using communication to generate wide support for the movement saps that support from the leadership. And as nonviolent experts Dr. Maria J. Stephan, Director of the Nonviolent Action Program at the US Institute of Peace (USIP) and Harvard Kennedy School Professor Erica Chenoweth have found, "broad-based campaigns are more likely to call into question the legitimacy of the [other side]."[4]

Undermining both of these pillars—the support of a leadership's constituency and its legitimacy—can help the movement build its BATNA and weaken the other side's in preparation for a negotiation, thus increasing the chances that the movement walks away with a deal that meets its interests.

PART II: SPEAKING TO THE AUDIENCE

Using communication to strengthen the movement's BATNA and weaken the BATNA of the political leadership requires organizers to understand the audience they intend to target with their messages. Social movement theory underscores how effective protests must "develop narratives that resonate with a captive audience."[5] Moreover, the legendary labor organizer and thinker Saul Alinsky emphasized the importance of communicating effectively to your audience. He stated, "**Communication for persuasion, as in negotiation, is more than entering the area of another person's experience. It is getting a fix on his main value or goal and holding your course on that target.** You don't communicate with anyone purely on the rational facts or ethics of an issue."[6] To him, doing so requires a deep understanding of how that audience thinks, what they believe in, what they hate and what they love, because different aspects of the same issue will reso-

nate differently for certain audiences. Negotiation theory has termed these qualities "interests:" they are the "basic needs, wants, and motivations" underlying a person's position or point of view on an issue.[7]

PRINCIPLE

Organizers that communicate effectively must thus understand, and then craft a message around, the interests of the audience they are targeting. They must also ask themselves: what does that person or that group care about? What makes them tick? How can I get to that core need, want, and motivation?

When thinking about building a movement's BATNA by gaining new or galvanizing existing supporters, we have identified an organizer's three most important audiences to communicate the movement's ideas, goals, and strategy to, especially in the context of a protest:

1. **The general public**, in order to gain popular support and thus build power;

2. Members of the **political leadership** the movement is ultimately trying to move; and

3. The movement's own **allies and coalition members**.

Each of these audience members will be address in turn below.

Audience 1: The Public. The general public's support can help build a movement's BATNA, because they are one of the primary pillars of support that keep a political leadership in power. In a democracy, losing your constituency means losing your office. And even in nondemocracies, we have seen that regimes still rely on public support—or at least the illusion of it—to make the case for their continued existence. In the balancing scales of public opinion, as more people join or voice support for the movement's cause, a political leader may face increasing opposition in turn from those same supporters if he or she continues to ignore or oppose that cause. As a result, organizers should work to sway the support of the public behind the movement's goals. To further explain how to communicate with the public in order to sway public opinion and build a better BATNA for the movement, this section will look at (1) communicating with the public, and (2) delegitimizing the other side's message.

Communicating with the public. In a world with record-short attention spans and an ever-expanding mountain of content to sift through, movements benefit most from communicating their message in clear, stark moral terms. By way of example, a movement that executes this type of communication masterfully in the US is the Sunrise Movement, a youth-led movement dedicated to pushing their political leaders to support bold action to combat the climate crisis. The Sunrise Movement's entire communications strategy is to create situations that engender a strong emotional response from the wider public. For instance, Sunrise has a very specific way it makes asks of political leaders when negotiating with them:

- First, Sunrise organizers will put their ask to a political leader in strict moral terms: often along the lines of, "Will you advocate for the Green New Deal, or will you continue to ensure that the next generation suffers and dies due to your inaction?"
- Then, the leader may say no, or attempt to sidestep the issue. When he or she does, Sunrise can then turn back to their public audience and broadcast that leader's failure to commit. Their message to the public be-

comes, in essence: "Hey we're in a climate emergency! Your leaders have failed you and your children who will die because of their cowardice, and now it's time to vote them out!"
- Finally, Sunrise then uses that message to galvanize support for phone-banking, donating, and voting for that political leader's opponent in the next election.

What is most effective about Sunrise's strategy is that they are creating a scenario in which either they receive a "yes" in a negotiation, which is a win, or a "no" specifically meant to galvanize the public, *which is also a win*. They make these asks, at their core, not to get the politician to say yes, but to get the public's attention.

The Sunrise organizers know that their audience, the public, cares about inhabiting a viable planet for them and their children, and a world that is not at risk of catastrophic environmental deterioration. Furthermore, the organizers care less about what the leader will say and more about the public, who have the power to vote out the leader. They create a very real threat for that leader of being voted out and losing their job, which in turn motivates that leader to listen to Sunrise. This type of approach directly attacks the political leadership, while giving their movement a better position to negotiate from.

However, when dealing with an audience as diverse, as complex, and as polarized as the American public, different groups of people will inevitably perceive the same issue differently. **It is essential that organizers not only think about how to communicate with the public, but how to communicate with which specific public they want to target.** Alán de León, an organizer in Houston, puts these differences in perspective when discussing the receptiveness of Houstonians to a Green New Deal:

> "In Houston, there are 250,000 jobs in the energy industry. When you're talking about transitioning out of the fossil fuel industry and banning fracking, well what people here hear [is that] you're putting them out of a job. There aren't 250,000 people working in that industry in the Northeast. So how we frame issues is so critical."

Whereas people living in Houston may care about how the government addresses climate change because of the economic impact it could have in the city, those living in the Northeast, whose jobs are not tied to oil and gas, might see climate change as mainly an environmental and moral imperative to solve. In short, in the South, the Green New Deal is an economic threat; in the North, it's a solution to an existential one. Organizers must be attuned to the nuances and differences in interests their audience may hold even on the same issue. Knowing the audience, how they perceive a situation, and how that situation affects them will allow an organizer to find the most effective way to communicate with them and persuade them to action. A one-size-fits-all approach will fail because of these varied interests, and thus weaken an organizer's ability to negotiate successfully.

Delegitimizing the other side. Just as organizers will put forward their narrative of the state of their society in order to make the case for the cause they're promoting, the political leadership will have its own gloss on the questions that the movement is raising—and often with armies of communication staffers, longstanding media connections, and well-worn talking points at its back. In building their BATNA by communicating to the public, organizers will have to delegitimize the other side's narrative as much as they have to promote their own in order to generate support and legitimacy. And

to be clear, by delegitimizing the other side's message, we mean creating or highlighting an inconsistency between the political leadership's stated values, and the actual actions they take. This next section will evaluate how (1) organizers have used violence by the political leadership, and (2) humiliation to delegitimize the leadership's message.

One way to delegitimize political leadership is by broadcasting their efforts to forcefully repress the direct actions that organizers stage, which in turn generates a backlash and rise in support for the very movement that political leadership was attempting to undermine. Experts have called this phenomenon the "paradox of repression," although it has long been a tactic used by the Civil Rights movement of the mid-20th century, and by Gandhi's struggle against British imperialism. As two experts at USIP described the phenomenon, **"backfire [of repressing nonviolent protests] leads to power shifts by increasing the internal solidarity of the resistance campaign, creating dissent and conflicts among the opponent's supporters, increasing external support for the resistance campaign, and decreasing external support for the opponent."**[8] Furthermore, these factors hinge on the movement remaining nonviolent in the face of a more powerful and violent regime and "this is communicated to internal and external audiences."[9]

Moreover, this finding has held true in cases around the world. Whether it's police forces in Belarus burning their uniforms in response to President Alexander Lukashenko's brutal crackdown of the pro-democracy protesters demanding his removal, or the murderous knee on George Floyd's neck in Minnesota, time and time again brutal acts have been the catalysts for a movement's popularity, power, and legitimacy. It gives the movement the ability to point to the political leadership and say: "Don't you see now who these people really are? Join me, and we can kick them out."

CONNECTION POINT

A member of the media we spoke with on this issue noted a grim rule of thumb in his industry: "if it bleeds, it leads." He was proven right of course by the summer's coverage of the Black Lives Matter Protests, which overwhelmingly showed instances of police violence, or instances of violence within the protests themselves, instead of the more peaceful (and thus less "eventful") direct actions held across the country.

Moreover, it only takes a smartphone to capture this repression on video, and then widely share it to millions of potential viewers. As experts on nonviolent action put it, "Images of repressive violence are easier than ever to capture and distribute: obedience among internal regime supporters as well as external allies is weakened when the world sees protesters being dispersed forcefully, beaten, or killed."[10] Organizers can use these terrible moments to demonstrate that the political leadership's narrative is illegitimate; law enforcement officers and government officials in a legitimate system are supposed to serve and protect the people, not violently mistreat or murder them. With these acts of repression, organizers can promote the message that the political leadership

should not be trusted.

Still, it should be noted that the benefits of experiencing such brutality raise feelings of enormous ethical discomfort. It should not require the most extreme assaults on humanity for more people to heed the messages and ideas of a movement organizing for a just cause. But unfortunately, these brutal events propel a movement forward. The press covers it, leaders may be forced to address it, and activists get elevated platforms because of it.

As one final (and lighter) note, another way to delegitimize a political leadership's message is through **humiliation**. In Syria, for example, activists looking to communicate their displeasure with the regime and its security forces would write revolutionary messages on ping pong balls and send them rolling down a hill, forcing security forces to go running after them. Better still, activists would bury radios broadcasting anti-government communications in trash and manure. Security forces would have to rummage through the manure to collect and disable them. For the organizers, this was a way to show that the security forces were not as powerful as they seemed, to demonstrate opposition their authority, and to delegitimize the Syrian regime's message of total and unrelenting authority.

Audience 2: Political Leaders. Of course, a movement must also speak to the political leadership it is trying to move. As contentious as organizing and negotiation can be, organizers must keep in mind that they are ultimately in a game of *persuasion*. And that means speaking to their political leader's interests as much as they speak to the interests of the general public and their supporters. As one instructive example, one of our interviewees laid out exactly how she was able to effectively speak to the interests of her state political leadership:

CASE STUDY: SPEAKING TO THE AUDIENCE IN NORTH CAROLINA

Kristie Puckett-Williams, an organizer with the ACLU of North Carolina, was once asked to speak before the North Carolina State Senate on why it should pass a Second Chance bill, where after a period of time certain crimes would be erased from a person's criminal record. Kristie, who spent time in prison on a felony charge while pregnant and survived domestic abuse as well as a devastating drug addiction, knew she had a story to tell. But sitting in a state legislature chamber, surrounded by lobbyists and interests groups, her first thought was, "what could I possibly say to these people that would get them to listen?" Here's what happened next in her own words, edited lightly for clarity:

> I was intimidated by all the power, I was intimidated by all these people who were legislators . . . what am I going to say? And I thought to myself: well what is the one thing we all have in common, that I can assume we may all have in common in this room? *Children*. And so when I talked about the impact of a criminal record, I didn't talk about the impact on me, *I talked about the impact of my criminal record on my children*, and how that disrupted and dismantled their lives, and they had nothing to do with it.

> And every single vote after that [in the State Senate] was a unanimous vote. Because before that the discussion was about budget and money and on and on, and I had to bring it back to something that every single person could relate to.

PRINCIPLE

Kristie's story swayed the State Senate to her side because she spoke directly to one of their interests, rather than just to her own. And moreover, her story illustrates another key tenet of crafting a message: the power of the personal narrative. It was Kristie, sitting in front of these legislators and telling her story, and her children's story, that ultimately persuaded them. As she said, it wasn't budgets, and it wasn't money. It was her own story.

Of course, there are moments and opportunities to use communication as a blunt weapon against less amenable political leaders. Many leaders are wary and afraid of receiving negative publicity from the press, and so the threat or reality of bad press can quickly influence their decisions to move on an issue. For example, one group of activists in Boston had trouble getting on the mayor's calendar to address a list policies they wanted to change. Through collaboration with other seasoned community members, they found out that the mayor would sometimes move on issues if local media outlets portrayed him in a negative light. Instead of trying to contact the mayor, they started going to the press with their complaints and desires for new policy. Seeing that negative press, the mayor and his cabinet would then scramble to deliberate and address the concerns of those activists, while working to control the public damage. For those types of leaders who are swayed by media opinion, organizers should look to negotiate with the media first, because they can hit at that leader's interests in a way the organizer cannot. By communicating with those leaders via the media, organizers can ramp up the pressure.

Another way to communicate with a political leader and promote action in favor of a movement is by being able to say that, by and large, the community they govern is in favor of the movement, proposal for a new law, or potential change in policy. In Houston, organizers were able to persuade the mayor to sign a cite-and-release ordinance because they could communicate the following:

1. The organizers knew more than the mayor on the particular issue and had made themselves the experts. This gave the organizers more leverage to influence the mayor's decision on the matter, because since they communicated how well they knew facts on the ground, *the mayor was compelled to accept their framing of the issue*.
2. The community was in support of the change, and by signing the ordinance, the mayor would be on the side of the people. Through extensive coalition-building with other organizations around the city, organizers could authoritatively tell the mayor that their proposal was what the citizens of Houston wanted.
3. Various city councilmembers were in support of the ordinance. Even though the mayor had the ultimate say on the issue, communicating the support of other members of the political leadership effectively signaled to the mayor that he should also say yes.

CASE STUDY: BREAD AS PERSUASION IN SUDAN

Sudan's 2019 revolution was able to topple long-time dictator President Omar al-Bashir in part because of the sheer enormity of the protests. However, the protesters themselves knew that numbers alone would not pry al-Bashir from office: only the military could do that. The military had the power to force al-Bashir down that the people on the streets simply could not, no matter how many millions they could turn out. In order to garner support from the soldiers they needed, they relied on a message they knew the soldiers would relate to. To corral the military to their side, one of the most commont chants they would shout was: "Can your salary buy you a loaf of bread?"

The protesters knew that the soldiers were in as much economic pain as they were, and so they appealed to something everyone could relate to: anger that a salary could no longer afford to feed your family.

Audience 3: Allies and coalition members. While the prior two audiences have involved more public forms of communication, the way a movement privately communicates and coordinates with its allies and coalition members is no less essential. It's a simple truth that coordination and organization are paramount to a successful negotiation. **A movement that can't communicate with itself is a movement that can't negotiate.** Communicating effectively to *potential* allies can also force a political leadership to negotiate, instead of maintaining the status quo, because it chips away at that leaderhip's pillars of support. Below is a brief list of four factors to consider when communicating with allies and supporters. To read more on inter-movement communication and coordination, see Chapter 2, "Coalitions and Allies."

1. **Make sure that all the relevant groups within a coalition are represented** and have a voice when it is time to start making decisions. For example, organizers can use a quota system to ensure representation of certain key groups, or mandate consensus before any major decision is made, or even set up an executive committee for the coalition. In taking representation into consideration early, organizers can avoid coordination problems and representation crises.

2. **Give enough time for thoughtful preparation,** especially if negotiators come from different organizations with different interests and strategic goals. Organizers will want to identify their goals for a big negotiation and make sure that everyone on the team, including each different coalition member, understands and is on board with those goals. They can then jointly devise a strategy ahead of time, so that by the time they reach the negotiating table, everyone is on the same page.

3. **Always start with the shared goals.** Another way in which allies and coalition members can engage in effective communication is by holding themselves accountable to starting at a place of shared values. Often, and particularly around questions of negotiation strategy, different parties within a coalition may have the same goal in mind but differ on how to achieve the goal. Working **from the goal to the tactics, and not vice versa,** can help ensure that com-

mon ground is emphasized.

4. **Answering what comes next.** It is also helpful for the coalition to consider contingency planning in the event that the negotiations do not result in the outcome the coalition desired. This specific type of preparation can help mitigate potential infighting in the heat of a post-negotiation strategy session, and it allows the organizers to know exactly where they're all going together, even if they are starting from the backfoot after a hurting negotiation failure. Otherwise, if the movement has no clear plan of action for what comes next after a failed negotiation, they are giving the political leadership a surefire way to break the movement's momentum: just say no.

PART III: COMMUNICATING TO DEFEND YOUR BATNA

As stated above, it is crucial that organizers prepare to both communicate their message as broadly and effectively as possible, and also to ward off delegitimizing attacks from the other side. One way that political leaders both in the US and around the world (as this summer has proven) attempt to delegitimize a movement is to characterize it as violent, or disorganized, or at the least unpopular—think President Donald Trump calling the Movement for Black Lives "anarchists" and "thugs."[11] By doing so, he is making a counter-case to the public that the movement is a lawless and dangerous organization, and therefore without legitimacy. In the literature and our own research, we have found that the most effective ways for movements to combat this delegitimization—and in negotiation terms, an attempt to weaken the movement's BATNA—is to control the narrative. Below we will discuss how to do so.

In the US and around the world, mainstream media outlets still largely control much of how the general public receives its news and learns about events. Because of the power mainstream media still holds in sharing stories, organizers and protesters should work to protect their narratives to the furthest extent possible. To control the message presented to the mainstream media, we have identified several possible approaches.

Negotiate with the media. One way they can consider protecting their messages is by nego-

tiating with the media itself. Specifically, organizers can decide not to speak to the media unless the outlet is willing to meet their demands around representing their viewpoints in a way that reflects their movement's true message. This is a negotiation in and of itself—if a member of the media would like access to a rally, or to film a demonstration, or to conduct an interview with a movement's organizers, then that organizer has leverage to use to make that person agree to certain preconditions, like filming a speech in its entirety or guaranteeing to give a certain amount of time to an interview.

Subvert the media. Another way organizers can protect their narratives is by subverting the mainstream media itself. A member of the media in Charlotte, North Carolina who covered the Black Lives Matter protests this past summer shared his distrust of mainstream media and press with us. For him, the media is driven solely by money and interests. Because the media tells stories with the interest of making a lot of money, this person tells activists not to communicate with mainstream media. Rather, he encourages them to consider working with community journalists and outlets that may have interests more sympathetic to the concerns of the movement.

However, nothing can compare to the might of social media in subverting traditional channels of communication. To Harvard Professor Erica Chenoweth, "new information technology is making it easier to learn about events that previously went unreported."[12] For activists, this type of subversion of the mainstream media isn't just a way to increase the movement's power, but it also can decrease the power of political leadership. In describing the power of social media, an organizer in the Movement for Black Lives shared:

> "I for one like Twitter, because you take power away from big organizations and corporations like CNN and ABC to influence what you see and when we see it. Now we have the power of Twitter, so we can tell our own story when we want to tell our story. We can use the power of social media to give power to the people. Instead of having power only with people at the top, we have people reporting on their daily lives and on what's going on."[13]

Since social media allows people to create their own source of news and information-sharing separate from what is documented in the mainstream, organizers can create another viable outlet for the public to become informed about that movement's message. In her article, "The Future of Nonviolent Resistance," Professor Chenoweth explained, "with access to new channels of communication, people can also bypass formal gatekeepers to communicate directly with others whom they perceive as likeminded. Since elites can no longer control information as easily as they once could, news and information featuring ordinary people may be easier to find today."[14]

Technology has also broadened the ability of organizers to educate the public about the issues a movement is organizing around. For organizers online, informative Twitter threads can be a way of educating people and spreading messages. Tiktok has become a powerful tool that younger organizers in particular use to disseminate valuable information on their movements, and to educate others about them.

DIGGING INTO THE DETAILS: LEVERAGING DIGITAL TOOLS

There are other ways that organizers have used digital tools to communicate and build power. In Belarus, developers built an app that show which products in the supermarket financially support President Lukashenko's regime. The app allows people who do not want to support the government to buy other, "safe" products instead. Moreover, it gives protesters another avenue to voice and express their disapproval of the regime. And in Hong Kong, during the pro-democracy protests organizers were keenly aware that at any point they could be detained and their phones confiscated. Since sharing videos of the protests and the government's attempts to crackdown on them were vital to communicating their message, they innovated. In order to safeguard against potential capture by the authorities, organizers would encourage the protesters to constantly AirDrop videos onto each other's iPhones. That way, even if one phone was confiscated, a hundred more would still have its videos. The movement's message was alive and kicking in the iCloud.

People want to get involved in movements for change, and organizers have the opportunity to facilitate this. In discussing the capability of people in movements to express their opinions, Professor Chenoweth writes, "Digital organizing makes today's movements very good at assembling participants en masse on short notice. It allows people to communicate their grievances broadly, across audiences of thousands or even millions." People want to have different ways to express themselves and communicate their desires for the changes they want to see. They want to share content with their fellow citizens in solidarity with the movement, and they want to express their message to their political leadership. However, each individual person has different preferences for the type of action they are willing to perform. As organizers create various ways for engagement and expression, people can now also decide whether they will march on the streets of Minsk, Belarus or use an app that tells them what items to avoid purchasing in a supermarket. Both of these actions communicate messages to the government and to fellow citizens that they want Lukashenko gone.

In the context of international protests, social media can help protesters in a country inform and communicate to members of a diaspora around what is happening in the home country. The diaspora can play a strong role in sharing the message of the protests around the world and amplifying the cause. During the 2019 Sudanese revolution, for example, members of the Sudanese diaspora around the world staged protests in different cities, from the US Capitol Building to the UK Parliament. Sudanese individuals living outside of the country also raised money and awareness to help communicate their desire to see President al-Bashir ousted. A similar dynamic occured during the protests this summer. Inspired by the Black Lives Matter protests across the US, protests erupted in solidarity all over the world in Paris, London, Johannesburg, and elsewhere. The

added exposure and international uproar led some world leaders to even speak out against the murder of George Floyd and police brutality in the United States.

CONCLUSION

When organizers can successfully communicate the message of their movement, they can force their political leadership to act. Organizers have the ability to communicate the message of a movement in a way that causes different audiences to support and join the movement, while also taking power away from the political leadership. This makes effective communication of the messages of the movement an essential tool in building power.

Endnotes

1 Michel Foucault and Colin Gordon. Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977 133 (1980).
2 Roger Fisher, William L. Ury and Bruce Patton, Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In (2011).
3 *Id.*
4 Maria J. Stephan & Erica Chenoweth. *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, 33 Int'l Sec. 7, 42 (2008).
5 Erica Chenoweth, *The Future of Nonviolent Resistance,* 31 J. Dem. 69, 70 (2020).
6 Saul Alinsky, Rules for Radicals 88 (1971).
7 Fisher, Ury, and Patton, *supra* note 2.
8 Anthony Wanis-St. John and Noah Rosen, *Negotiating Civil Resistance*, USIP 11 (2017).
9 *Id.*
10 *Id.*
11 Julian Routh, *Trump calls protesters who confronted Pittsburgh diners 'Thugs!',* Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (Set. 8, 2020), *at* https://www.post-gazette.com/news/politics-nation/2020/09/08/Trump-tweet-reaction-viral-video-pittsburgh-protesters-diners/stories/202009080069.
12 Chenoweth, *supra* note 4 at 72.
13 From an interview with that organizer.
14 Chenoweth, *supra* note 4.