POWER, PROTEST, AND POLITICAL CHANGE

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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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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 that 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 possibil-

ities 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.**

This report includes the following chapters:

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

Since we know that every organizer may face only one or several of the challenges addressed above at a time, 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 some of it indeed 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.

THE BIG TRAP

When (and When Not) to Negotiate

"No one can negotiate without the power to compel negotiation. [To build that power] is the function of the community organizer."

–Saul Alinsky, Rules for Radicals

When we asked organizers in the US and around the world about the biggest challenges they faced in previous negotiations, so many named one particular obstacle that we called it the "Big Trap." Wherever they organized, the Big Trap followed a similar pattern:

1. Organizers would build the movement's power through protest and other tactics;

2. Its power would grow to the point that it drew the attention of political leaders afraid of facing the consequences should they continue to ignore or attempt to repress the movement;

3. Those political leaders would extend an offer to negotiate, and the movement would accept;

4. When negotiations began, the movement's protests and direct actions would diminish or dissipate altogether; but

5. Without sustained pressure to negotiate, **those political leaders would no longer see the organizers as stakeholders they had to work with.** The negotiations would lead nowhere, or simply cease.

While certainly a simplification, the story above evokes a tension almost every movement faces: that while engaging in negotiations may help a movement achieve its goals, the very act of doing so may lead to their failure at the table. Agreeing to engage in negotiations can break a movement's momentum, cutting off the organizers' very source of leverage they needed to reach a deal that meets their interests. This is the Big Trap.

CASE STUDY: CHARLOTTE'S TRAP

Like other cities across the country, Charlotte, NC saw a wave of protests and direct action in the wake of George Floyd's murder on a scale it had never before experienced. As a result of the attention the protests received—along with well-publicized videos of Charlotte police brutally cracking down on peaceful protesters—the Charlotte City Council invited the city's most prominent organizers to join a "Safe Communities Committee" to create a proposal for police reform. Elated by the win, and exhausted by weeks of marches met with tear gas and rubber bullets, the protests largely dissipated after the Committee began its work. While the Committee was largely considered an encouraging first step in the negotiation for policy reform, the effort was ultimately a failure. By the end of its work, the City Council refused to implement the Committee's recommendations and instead adopted a series of reforms proposed by the Charlotte police department. The movement was left without both reform and momentum they could lean on to pressure the City Council to implement their reforms. While many of the organizers threatened to go back out onto the streets, they ultimately couldn't turn that threat into a credible one—their momentum had been broken.

Stories like Charlotte's,[1] and those of movements all over the world that have fallen into this trap, implicate a fundamental question all organizers must ask when thinking about engaging in negotiation with their political leaders: will negotiating right now help us reach our goals, or is there more that needs to be done beforehand to increase the likelihood of success at the table? Could negotiating at this point actually keep me from getting what I want?

To be clear, when we're talking about the ques-

tion of whether or not to engage in negotiations, we're asking two interrelated questions: (1) whether to walk through the door in the first instance, and (2) whether a movement is willing and able to withstand the weeks, months, and even years of lengthy negotiations that coming to a deal may require. It's a perhaps obvious but important truth that any negotiation takes time—and negotiation of new policy, be it a new affordable housing ordinance or the overhaul of a state's criminal justice system, will take more. These issues involve a complex web of stakeholders, they can be highly technical, and as such their resolution may balloon into a dozen rounds of negotiation, or more. Organizers should brace to endure long rounds of negotiations, starter agreements, and piecemeal concessions as their policy winds its way through the legislative process. And all the while, they will have to fight to get into—and then stay—in the room.

To do that, organizers will need sufficient leverage, sustained over time, that can hold up against attacks and attempts at delegitimization. **This is the heart of the Big Trap: that a movement is unable to sustain the same level of power—or in negotiation parlance, the leverage—that it needs throughout the negotiation in order to reach a deal that meets its interests.**

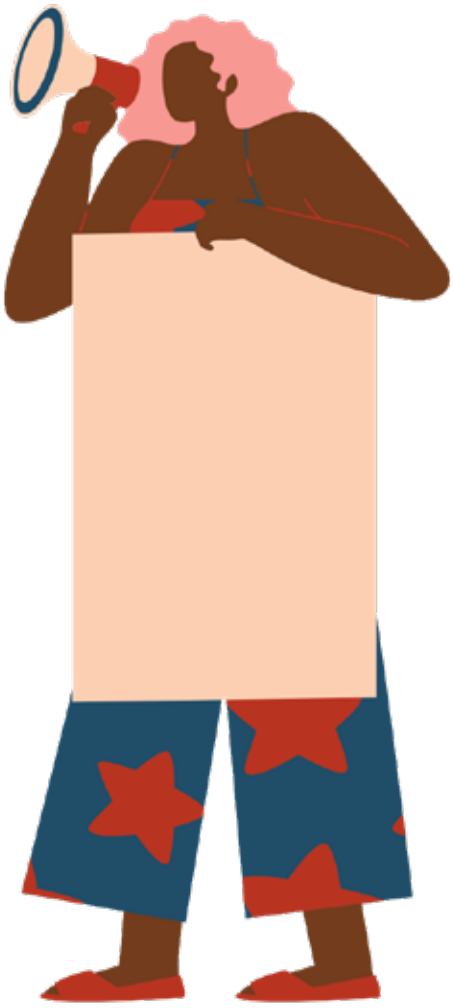
This chapter also assumes that the movement ultimately sees a negotiation as in its interests—which of course is not always true. One strategy organizers can and have chosen is to simply refuse to negotiate, and to attempt to build power for as long as it takes for their political leaders to capitulate. For instance, the Sunrise Movement, a youth-led movement advocating for bolder action on climate change, as a matter of practice does not see a point to negotiating with political leaders when they can just try to vote them out should those leaders say "no" to an ask. Moreover, organizers within Sunrise see it as their job to negotiate more with the public, rather than with their political leaders. Their talks with political leaders are mostly to prove a point to their real audience (the public) about why they should support Sunrise in the fight against the climate crisis.

Moreover, some movements believe it's not even ethically permissible to negotiate for certain rights that should themselves be non-negotiable. Sometimes it is simply not in an organizer's interests to try to "negotiate" a compromise to secure, say, her community's voting or civil rights. Negotiation can feel like giving up on principles that should never be surrendered, or caving to the status quo. As one Black Lives Matter activist put it bluntly: "I don't negotiate with terrorists."[2]

As members of a negotiation and mediation program, we tend to inherently see the value of talking with the other side—at the least to see if a good deal is even possible. We think that negotiation can open doors that were previously closed, create options that benefit each party, and resolve conflict through agreement, rather than attrition. Experts in civil resistance note that negotiation helps (1) address strategic differences within a movement's coalition; (2) shift the loyalties of those in power, the political leadership's "**pillars of support**," to the movement's side; (3) reach a mutually acceptable agreement to end the conflict; and (4) achieve and consolidate smaller wins via changes in policy or political behavior.[3] Civil rights leaders and community organizers from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi to Saul Alinsky advocated for negotiation to be a core part of a movement's strategic plan. Two scholars at the US Institute of Peace (USIP) characterized nonviolent resistance's relationship to negotiation well: "if mass mobilization is indeed the nonviolent spear of social change, effective negotiation is the tip of that spear."[4]

However, we also recognize that **there are moments when engaging in negotiation is not only a bad idea, but a trap**. As Gene Sharp, one of the great thinkers on civil resistance, once warned, "grave dangers can be lurking within the negotiation room" when trying to overcome great power imbalances with the political leadership. This is what this chapter is about. It is both a cautionary tale and guide for how to overcome one of the biggest obstacles that movements face around the world when engaging in negotiation.

This chapter is divided into three sections. It first provides a brief outline of the theory behind organizing and negotiation, it then digs into the specific ways that movements can get caught in the Big Trap, and finally it outlines strategies to avoid falling in.



Three Conceptions of Negotiation:

"You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit ins, marches, and so forth?" You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action . . . to create a situation so crisis packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. I therefore concur with your call for negotiation. Too long our beloved Southland has been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue."

–Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter from a Birmingham Jail

"The Organizer must be able to split himself into two parts—one part in the arena of action where he polarizes the issue to 100 to nothing, and helps to lead his forces into conflict, while the other part knows that when the time comes for negotiation that it really is only a 10 per cent difference [between him and the opposition]—and yet both parts have to live comfortably with each other. Only a well-organized person can split and yet stay together. But that is what the organizer must do."

–Saul Alinsky, Rules for Radicals

"Negotiations are not a substitute for open struggle. There is always the possibility, even the probability that the conflict will not be resolved at this stage. A prerequisite for negotiations is a determination and ability to struggle."

–Gene Sharp, How Nonviolent Struggle Works

PART I: THE THEORY OF ORGANIZING AND NEGOTIATION

Before diving into the specifics of the Big Trap, we think it's useful to start off with a brief theoretical outline of how exactly organizers can think about the relationship between power-building and negotiation. Specifically, this section tackles the question: given that this trap exists, when exactly should movements negotiate, and under what circumstances?

Thinkers and practitioners in community organizing start at the premise that there exists a vast power asymmetry between the political leadership and the organizer: the "haves and the have-nots." Community organizing, they propose, can close the asymmetry—it both builds a movement's power and saps the power of the political leadership. It levels the scales.[5]

In the context of negotiation, power-building can thus be conceived of as *leverage-building*—it is building up your hand at the negotiation table so that you can successfully assert your interests and get the deal you want. And experts on civil resistance note that a movement's biggest source of leverage is its ability to impose political costs on the leaders it wants to extract concessions from—*cessation of direct action* is the thing that political leaders want in exchange for policy change, and it is further action that is hanging over their heads as a consequence to rejecting a deal.

EXPERT NOTE: BATNAS

Roger Fisher and William Ury in their seminal work, *Getting To Yes*, termed the consequences a party will experience as a result of not reaching a deal a "BATNA," or the Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement. In theory, the party with the stronger BATNA—who will face the least consequences for saying no—will be able to reach more of their interests at the negotiation table. Thus, power-building can also be understood as BATNA-building. A movement is building its BATNA by sustaining or increasing the power it started with, while also decreasing the other side's BATNA by increasing the consequences of saying no to a deal.

As two scholars at USIP put it:

> The path to negotiation is paved with leverage gained through civil resistance. What can be called the fundamental bargain in civil resistance cases comes about because actions taken by civil resisters impose costs on and erode the legitimacy of opponents, who in turn may be persuaded to talk and make changes to a policy or institution in return to relief from the pressure of direct action.[6]

Or, as Veronique Dudouet at the Berghof Foundation articulated, "nonviolent struggle is a necessary component [to negotiation], by helping marginalized communities to achieve sufficient leverage for an effective negotiation process."[7]

However, the great twist in a negotiation between a movement and its political leaders—and the crux of the Big Trap—is that

a movement's leverage at the table is at a near-constant risk of waning. Movement power is by its nature fluid, and it is an undeniable reality that people will leave the streets. They will get tired, or frustrated, or even hopeful, and they will stop protesting. And as that direct action fizzles and disappears, so will the movement's ability to effectively assert its interests at the table. **Thus, a movement's ability to impose consequences should the other side say no can diminish as time goes on, while the other side's power remains largely static.** After all, a political leader's source of power is their mandate and position, rather than the number of bodies they can summon to the street. For that reason, movements don't only need power: they also need momentum.

> **PRINCIPLE**
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> Avoiding the Big Trap thus becomes a game of building momentum to get to the negotiation table, and then sustaining or increasing it throughout the negotiation process so the movement can reach the deal it wants. This is why negotiation can be crucial to a movement's success: at the height of your power, you can cement your position with a deal that gets you what you want before that momentum begins to wane.

So when should movements agree to negotiate? Experts at USIP have found that negotiation has the highest chances for success when movements are at the point where they have most closed the gap of power asymmetry between them and their political leadership. They attribute failure at the negotiation table to a sign that "power is not yet balanced or there is not enough awareness of the issues."[8] Gene Sharp echoed those sentiments, asserting that "opponents will make major concessions only after a considerable period of struggle. That is, after they have recognized the real power of the movement."[9]

But as any seasoned organizer who has waged one campaign after another knows, momentum does not simply rise, peak, and then fall. It sputters, it soars, it plummets, it stagnates. It is not enough to simply prescribe, "negotiate when you are the most powerful." Rather, **we suggest thinking of this question as a threshold: when do you have enough momentum such that you can sustain or increase it throughout the negotiation you will be entering?** Are the scales balanced enough? That is the goal organizers looking to negotiate must meet, and it is the question they must ask themselves every time they are contemplating accepting an offer to negotiate, at the risk of getting caught in the Big Trap if they are wrong.

PART II: GETTING CAUGHT IN THE BIG TRAP

As stated in Part I, building power and momentum is the key to both getting into the room and then remaining in a strong enough position to reach a deal that reaches your movement's interests. However, there are a variety of ways that political leaders may actually break that momentum either before or during a negotiation, thus catching movements in the Big Trap.

To be clear, those political leaders may do so intentionally or unintentionally. Just as there exists bad faith leaders who use (and abuse) negotiation as a tool to break a movement's momentum, an offer extended in good faith can do just as much damage if a movement does not have momentum on its side, or is simply not prepared enough when they reach the table.

In our research, we identified a few key ways that the political leadership can either unintentionally or intentionally break a movement's momentum through negotiation, and thus diminish the leverage the movement needs to get a satisfactory deal. Below we outline what those momentum-breaking tactics may look like, along with a few case studies on how movements have either fallen prey to them or actually turned them to their advantage.

Tactic I: Slow-walking. As stated above, time is not often on a movement's side. In any policy negotiation, the normal wind and grind of turning bill into law may take longer than the attention spans of an organizer's supporters, especially if the movement suffers from problems with legitimacy and commitment. Yet while the lengthy process of political change may be inevitable (and will need to be factored in as the movement decides whether and how to engage in negotiations), political leaders who are less inclined to negotiate in good faith with a movement commonly slow-walk a process to intentionally break the movement's momentum. One expert at USIP noted that it's often a goal of political elites to "demobilize the movement without actually giving up anything, and use simply the process of negotiation as a stalling tactic to break momentum."[10] Satisfied that the job was done, protesters may leave the streets confident that their interests will be met in the negotiation room. Meanwhile, the political leaders may delay and obfuscate with the organizers until they finally leave the table in frustration, forced to rebuild their power on the streets.

Tactic II: Attaching Strings. Organizers should be wary of preconditions that may break their momentum, especially a seemingly enticing offer that may have strings attached. These strings can come either as preconditions to negotiate, or as preconditions to an agreement. Continuing with the example above from Charlotte, a jail support group had long operated on the same block as the city's jail. Organizers co-founded Jail Support after a round of protests in 2016 following the police killing of Keith Lamont Scott in front of his wife and daughter. Jail Support's presence immediately drew the ire of the sheriff's department, which repeatedly dismantled their support headquarters outside of the city's jail. However, its growing popularity in the community had so far allowed it to reconstitute each time. One of Jail Support's co-founders (they/them) recalled how Charlotte officials once reeled in them and

other Jail Support members into a negotiation by promising $500,000 to the group's work. However, once they and the other members sat down to negotiate, the officials changed course and stated that Jail Support could only have the $500,000 if the group moved into the jail itself and ceased their 24/7 operations—a precondition to agreement in direct conflict with both the values and mission of Jail Support. Feeling betrayed, the Jail Support members left the table. However, Jail Support's rejection allowed the city officials to smear the group as unreasonable, and it gave the sheriff a new mandate to attempt to dismantle them.[11]

CONNECTION POINT

Even the Civil Rights Movement was not immune from falling prey to accepting preconditions to enter into a negotiation that ended up bearing little fruit. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. recalled in his *Letter From a Birmingham Jail,* in which he recounted his efforts to negotiate with the business community in Birmingham, Alabama:

> In the course of the negotiations, certain promises were made by the merchants—for example, to remove the stores' humiliating racial signs. On the basis of these promises, the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and the leaders of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights agreed to a moratorium on all demonstrations. As the weeks and months went by, we realized that we were the victims of a broken promise. A few signs, briefly removed, returned; the others remained.[12]

CASE STUDY: VENEZUELA

This exact dynamic happened over and again in Venezuela. In Venezuela, the government would often offer to negotiate with the opposition, which had mobilized an enormous protest presence on the street. However, as a precondition to negotiation, the government would require the opposition leaders to agree to stop the protests. After the leaders called off the protests and people left the streets, the government would ensure that any talks dragged on and on, making it impossible for the opposition leaders to hold onto their momentum.[13]

Another example of a common precondition to negotiation that the political leadership may ask is for a lack of transparency. They may demand that a negotiation be off the record, or that the negotiators sign non-disclosure agreements. Organizers should be wary of these requests if it does not meet their interests. For instance, an organizer may wish to hold that political leadership accountable for what was said in the meeting itself. If they make a particularly outrageous ask, organizers cannot bring that statement back to their movement to help sustain the pressure on the political leadership if they have agreed to staying silent.

The Sunrise Movement's tactics during the Biden presidential campaign's climate roundtable demonstrate why transparency may be an important interest for a movement. When the Sunrise Movement's co-founder Varshini Prakash was asked to attend President-elect

> *"One ought not to agree to the opponent's demands for a major restriction of the resisters' activities before negotiations. For example, some opponents may demand a halt to protests or resistance, or even to calls for resistance, as a precondition for negotiations."*
>
> *Gene Sharp, How Nonviolent Struggle Works*

Joe Biden's roundtable, she began a practice of reporting back every day to the movement what was said over a mass Slack channel. By doing so, the movement was able to express its outrage or dissatisfaction in real-time about particular proposed policies, or about certain negotiators in the room whose policies were out of step with the movement's. They were actively holding the roundtable's participants accountable, day-by-day. That could not have happened if Varshini had to sign a non-disclosure agreement.[14]

Tactic III: Divide and Conquer. Another way that political leadership can break the momentum of protest movements is by attempting to divide and conquer the movement's different coalition members, if the movement is composed of two or more groups. They can do so in three ways:

1. By attempting to delegitimize one or more coalition members, and then **choosing to negotiate with the groups** they deem most "palatable" or likely to meet their interests.

2. By agreeing to negotiate with all coalition members, but then using negotiation to **pit those members against each other**.

3. By **coopting coalition member leaders** to their side with financial and/or political enticements.

CASE STUDY: DISINCENTIVIZING COOPTATION

In some fraught contexts, coalition groups that worry the other side may attempt to coopt specific negotiators or a group within the coalition through offers of political positions or financial incentives have created internal mechanisms within the coalition that would prevent such defections. For example, in one country context, negotiators for a prominent coalition signed a terms of reference stating that none of them would be able to hold political office as a result of the negotiations. By doing so, the negotiators expressly built into the structure of their coalition a safeguard against cooptation.[15]

Tactic IV: Inclusion in Name Only. Like the Safe Communities Committee above, protest movement leaders invited onto a group, commission, or other project in the name of further negotiation should be wary of its actual power to enact change. It's not unlikely that such a project may, either by happenstance or design, end up having less power than the movement initially envisioned it would. And while protest movement leaders are busy working on that project, and then realizing its limitations, their actual leverage may fizzle out. Organizers should be sure that such a group will have the ability and power to achieve their goals before signing on.

Yemen's Technical Advisory Group (TAG) is an example of such a risk. In Yemen, women led the country's 2011 revolution. They constituted a clear majority on the streets, and they were a powerful force in the country's National Dialogue Conference meant to draft a list of principles that would be consolidated into a final constitution. Despite that leadership, after war finally broke out in 2014 and the process broke down, women were largely sidelined. And while some groups to this day are still organizing to be given a seat at the negotiation table, others have agreed to join the UN Envoy to Yemen's Technical Advisory Group (TAG). The TAG was pitched as a direct line to the UN Envoy for women and youth, yet some have expressed concerns that the group has never found a foothold in the Envoy's ear.[16]

In each of these instances, the political leadership either by accident or intention broke the momentum the movement they were negotiating with. As a result, the organizers were left in a lose-lose scenario: they could no longer get the deal they wanted, and they had to return to a less powerful movement that now needed more time and resources to regain its momentum. Organizers should look out for these warning signs whenever given an offer to negotiate and ask: do I run the risk of sacrificing my momentum such that I'll no longer be effective? Are there preconditions, strings, or other structural disadvantages that I must get rid of before engaging in negotiation?

PART III: AVOIDING THE BIG TRAP

This chapter has talked at length about how to get caught in the Big Trap—how negotiation can slow the very momentum that got a movement into the room in the first place, sometimes aggravated by bad actors looking to abuse the process. This section outlines a few ways movements can avoid getting caught in that trap. We've already mentioned a few—the importance of identifying whether a movement has enough momentum to withstand negotiation, or how to identify signs the other side may be using negotiation to break that momentum—but this part will be diving into the specifics of how to do so.

PRINCIPLE

Our core finding is that much of avoiding the Big Trap involves doing the right preparation work before the negotiation, so that your momentum can be maintained during the negotiation.

By preparation, we don't mean simply reading up on the issues you'll be negotiating or on the party you'll be facing across the table—although doing so is certainly important, and we mention it briefly below. Rather, negotiation theory and practice both implore negotiators to actively improve their position at the table before they even sit down. This can mean shoring up and expanding a coalition, crafting a media campaign to turn public opinion towards the proposals you are going to put forward in the negotiation, or cultivating allies close to the other side who can help push the political leadership towards the deal you want. Negotiation experts like Harvard Business School Professor James K. Sebenius have termed this preparatory legwork "zoomed-out" negotiation—it is about moving the pieces on the chessboard in your favor even before you sit down to play.[17]

Moreover, preparation is all the more critical for movements, who often have less time on their side, fewer resources to lean on, and more to lose from not reaching a deal than the political leaders they'll be facing across the table. The right preparation helps minimize the amount of time spent at the negotiation table and maximize the chances that the deal the movement walks away with is one that meets its interests. And crucially, it can mitigate the ability of bad actors to manipulate the process and catch movements in the Big Trap.

In short, preparation gives movements the ability to walk in with the strongest hand possible. It's why history's best strategists—from seasoned US diplomats to Sun Tzu—emphasize over and over the importance of making moves away from the table.

We have broken down the preparatory work movements can do before a negotiation into three categories:

Don't just skillfully play the negotiating game you are handed; change its underlying design for the better.

–James K. Sebenius, Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School

Every battle is won or lost before it is ever fought.

–Sun Tzu, The Art of War

Tactics at the table are only the cleanup work. Many people mistake tactics for the underlying substance and the relentless efforts away from the table that are needed to set up the most promising possible situation once you face your counterpart. When you know what you need and you have put a broader strategy in place, then negotiating tactics will flow.

–Charlene Barshefsky, former US Trade Negotiator

1. How a movement can **maximize its own BATNA** and minimize the other side's;

2. The critical **internal preparation** work that must be done within the movement to shore up strength from the inside-out; and

3. How to actually **set up the negotiation** to the movement's advantage.

The section below will expand on these three categories in turn.

Building Your BATNA (and Weakening Theirs)

Building Your BATNA. As stated above, a BATNA in negotiation parlance is your "Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement." It is your best course of action if you don't reach a deal. In the context of community organizing, a movement's BATNA is continued struggle, it is going back out to the community to continue organizing actions that will once again pressure the political leadership to agree to the movement's demands. As such, the strength of a movement's BATNA will depend on how well it can move those political leaders from the streets, versus from the negotiation table. If a movement's public support or presence on the streets or coalition collapses in the course of the negotiation, so does its BATNA. It has gotten caught in the Big Trap.

This is where the preparation comes in. Organizers should take a hard look at their movement's structure and strengths and evaluate: what are the ways that my movement best pressures my political leaders to say yes to an ask? Is it the number of people I can summon to the streets in a direct action, or my relationship with the press? Is it my support among the voting public, or my relationships with other leaders in the community or political leadership?

After identifying those core advantages, movements should actively work before a negotiation to strengthen and expand on them. One example from a movement in Houston can prove instructive on how exactly to go about doing this:

CASE STUDY: BUILDING BATNAS IN HOUSTON

Alán de León, an organizer with MoveTexas in Houston, has had trouble moving a city council in which the vast majority of power is vested in the mayor's seat, who retains sole ability to put items on the council's agenda. To get into the room to propose legislation—and to make sure the mayor listens—Alán has not only demonstrated his community's strength through protest and direct action, but through coalition-building. Alán has brought on board a web of city and county officials who support his policies, who belong in the mayor's inner circle, and who can push the mayor behind closed doors to come to Alán's side on an issue. He has effectively been able to access rooms that were previously closed to him via allies close to the mayor. In his words:

> "Having city council members basically be activists with you is a good way to build power because it makes you more serious, makes you look like you've done your due diligence . . . [s]o when you're in a meeting with Mayor Turner, city council member A is in favor of [your policy], member B is in favor. It makes your community look bigger and more powerful, it includes not just community voices but public officials."

Alán's strategy also reflects a finding in Dispute Systems Design literature, that in situations of great power asymmetry, convincing the more powerful side that

"their perception of the organization is incorrect" can be an effective way to level the playing field between the two actors. By cultivating relationships with the people and organizations the mayor trusts and respects, Alán is in part demonstrating to him that his perception of the policies and of Alán's organization isn't entirely accurate. Alán is thus leveling the playing field and improving his BATNA in the process.[18]

Alán was able to build his BATNA by cultivating key relationships with people in City Council—he boosted his credibility, gained access to doors that were previously closed, and most importantly, he gained key supporters he could go back to should the negotiation with the mayor break down. And when the time came to sit down with the mayor, he knew that Alán was not just advocating for himself; he had the robust support of City Council behind him.

Of course, cultivating key relationships like Alán did in Houston to build your BATNA is just one of the many preparatory strategies organizers can take before sitting down to negotiate. Others can be (but are not limited to):

1. *Preparing for the worst.* Organizers can prepare a direct action specifically for the scenario that the other side says no. Doing so will get all of the logistical and organizing legwork out of the way so that the movement can deploy that action immediately after negotiation. It also reframes the negotiation for the organizer's supporters from a "win," to a potential launchpad into further direct action. The movement is essentially setting up its ability to say in the room: "give us a yes, or there will be ten thousand people at your doorstep tonight."

2. *Going public.* Organizers can prepare a media strategy to generate public backlash—and political consequences—in case the political leadership says no. In doing so, they should think through: what and where can I get my message out that will impose the biggest consequence? How can I best generate public backlash for saying no?

3. *Preparing to change the players.* It's possible that there are other political leaders who could give organizers what they want, or who can push the political leaders they need to say yes. Preparing to change the players is building a BATNA because it's giving the organizer the ability to say: ok, if not them, then this other person can get me what I want without having to go back to the streets. Organizers should ask before going into a negotiation: who else can I talk to and negotiate with that can get me the policy I want, or can pressure that political leader to change course? And how can I build that relationship beforehand?

4. *Preparing to expand the base of support.* It's likely that there are community members who are invested in the reform the movement is negotiating for, but who are not yet engaged in the movement itself. Organizers can use a "no" to activate those who would be outraged at the political leaders for refusing to a deal. Organizers should ask: who would be potentially angry that this political leader seems to be dug in on not doing what I want? How can those people and organizations be reached ahead of time in order to make sure they are watching what the political leadership does?

Of course, these are not the only ways organizers can build their BATNA in preparation to negotiate. Just this year we have seen a staggering number of innovative and creative tactics coming from protests around the world, and

linked resources to classic and new tactics can be found on this report's webpage.

Weakening Their BATNA. In the example given above, Alán and MoveTexas did not just improve his movement's BATNA; he successfully weakened the mayor's BATNA in the process by making his alternative to reaching a deal less attractive. By gaining support from City Council members, he was also taking their support from the mayor, leaving him more isolated than he started. As Alán 's strategy demonstrates, closely related to the work to building a BATNA is to work to weaken the other side's BATNA as well.

Looking to the other side of the table, the strength of a political leader's BATNA depends on the consequences they will face from their constituents for saying no to a deal. If political leaders see that the movement is not strong enough to successfully imperil their reelection prospects, to turn public opinion against them, or impose some sort of other political headache, then they have a fairly strong BATNA—as in, they can just afford to say no to a deal and move on with their regular business.

So how can organizers go about weakening the other side's BATNA in advance of a negotiation? In the literature, experts recommend starting with an evaluation of the other side's "**pillars of support**," and then developing a strategy to undermine them. We define "pillars of support" as the organizations, entities, individuals, and actors that provide the political leadership with the knowledge, skills, and/or resources to maintain and wield power. In short, they are the groups and individuals upon which the political leadership relies for its mandate, and for its literal ability to function.

> *By themselves, rulers cannot collect taxes, enforce repressive laws and regulations, keep trains running on time, prepare national budgets, direct traffic, manage ports, print money, repair roads, keep food supplied to the markets, make steel, build rockets, train the police and the army, issue postage stamps or even milk a cow. People provided these services to the ruler through a variety of organizations and institutions. If the people stop providing these skills, the ruler cannot rule.*
>
> *–Statement from a movement in Serbia*

Community organizing theory often prescribes this strategy as a general framework to go about power-building. As Peter Ackerman and Jack Duvall of the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict put it, "At the heart of developing a campaign strategy is analysis of the opponent's sources of support . . . and then the application of tactics to weaken and splinter these regime pillars." However, we think a strategy to attack the pillars of support can also be an instructive and important part of the preparatory strategy for a negotiation.

There are a variety of ways to attack a regime's pillars of support, no matter how entrenched. The most common form of course is the theory of **noncooperation**: for protesters to identify the ways they themselves are complicit in a regime's pillars of support, and to then withdraw their participation in that support. Tactics like strikes and boycotts fall into this category.[19]

And while noncooperation tactics like economic boycotts have been in the organizer's toolbox since the Montgomery boycotts and Gandhi's salt protests, organizers are innovating for the digital age. In Hong Kong, protesters have developed a mobile phone app that color codes grocery store products as coming from "yellow" pro-democracy businesses or

"blue" pro-government businesses.[20] Belarus has developed a similar app, so supporters of the movement can protest with their wallets. [21]

In Alán's case, for example, part of the mayor's pillars of support was the express or tacit support of his agenda by the City Council. By bringing City Council members to his side, and by turning some into vocal supporters for cite and release, that legitimation the mayor relied upon in part had been taken away from him.

We've also seen from international cases how protest and direct action before and during a negotiation can be leveraged to weaken the other side's pillars of support, and thus its BATNA:

CASE STUDY: ATTACKING THE PILLARS OF SUPPORT IN SUDAN

In Sudan, months of sustained protests that spanned the country beginning in December 2018 finally led the military to oust the country's longstanding dictator, President Omar al-Bashir, in April 2019. However, the military initially refused to hand over power to the protesters to form a democratically elected civilian government, instead opting for a Transitional Military Council (TMC). Instead of leaving the streets after achieving their initial goal of removing al-Bashir from power, protesters immediately organized a mass sit-in outside of the military headquarters on April 11th, easily the largest sit-in protest the country had ever seen. Protests also continued throughout the country beyond the capital.[27]

At first, the TMC ignored the protester's primary demands and refused to cede power, instead hoping to wait them out. When ignoring them did not dissipate the movement, the military then cut off cell towers to stop the protesters from rapidly sharing and growing their efforts; however, the protesters just began organizing across neighborhoods on foot and passing out flyers. When the cellular and internet blackout had obviously failed, members of the military resorted to its last tool. On June 3rd, military officials stormed the sit-in in the middle of the night, killing hundreds of protesters and injuring even more. However, even their violence could not stop the protesters, and largely only fueled their resolve. By June 30th, the protests had swelled into the millions. Finally, after months of attempting to wait for the protests to wane, the TMC offered to negotiate.[28]

While the protest's leadership, a broad coalition of civil society organizations, unions, political parties, and neighborhood committees under the banner of the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) agreed to negotiate, they did not declare victory. In fact, the protesters remained on the streets expressly for

the purpose of sustaining the pressure on the military and the power of their leadership while they were negotiating for a power-sharing arrangement. They were preparing for the moment when they needed to use their presence and the sit-in to ramp up the pressure on the military to agree.

Moreover, the FFC were keenly aware of the direct power at their backs. Whenever the military gave them an unfavorable counteroffer or rejected their demands, the FFC delegates would leave the military headquarters, physically go to the sit-in just outside its doors, and tell the crowd that the military had refused to cooperate. The crowd would then respond with outrage at the military's intransigence, chanting and demanding their cooperation. That physical, visceral leverage of their bargaining power allowed the FFC to negotiate a power-sharing arrangement for a transitional government from April to August 2019 that largely met their core demands.[29]

The staying power of the protesters—and their deep engagement and commitment to the process—demonstrated to the military that the only way they could get the protestors off the streets was to reach a deal with the protesters' representatives. In short, they had a terrible BATNA, because the protesters had undermined the other pillars of support they had attempted to use to disperse them. They found alternative methods to get around internet blackouts, and the crackdown created such a backlash that even the military's ranks began to fracture. During the June 3rd massacre, some younger military officers reportedly even turned their own guns on their fellow soldiers to protect the protesters from harm.

That ability to withstand such tactics—and the backlash their use generated—sent the military one, resounding message: **those tools you normally rely on to control us aren't as strong as you think they are.**

This is the power of building your own BATNA and weakening the other side's, often at the same time, in preparation to negotiate. It can flip the script on who has the stronger position at the table, switching from the mayor to MoveTexas, and from the military to the might of a million protesters.

However, it takes organizers thinking carefully about (1) where they can build up their own unique strength as a movement, and (2) which pillars on the other side they are capable of eroding. The strength of each side's BATNA also deserves careful evaluation when movements are deciding whether or not to negotiate at all. If an organizer knows that the movement may not be able to withstand months of lengthy policy talk, or that it could not actually impose the consequences it needs to on the political leadership it's negotiating with, then that is a strong red flag that negotiation may not serve a helpful purpose at the moment—and that it may even be a trap.

Internal Preparations to Negotiate. As we discuss in Chapter 2, "Coalitions and Allies," modern movements are often decentralized, they rely heavily on intersectional support, and

their underlying structure may only be organized around various loose coalitions of different organizations, if that. While such decentralization brings with it several benefits—one being mass mobilization—that type of structure runs into trouble when the time comes to negotiate. Movements may not need a head on the streets, but a table can only handle so many seats.

That's why, especially in this current era of movement structure, organizers need to do extra preparation work to figure out (1) their representation in the room, and (2) whether those representing them in the room are actually prepared to do the technical work of negotiating policy and dealing with the players in the room.

Representation in the room. While we touch on the question of representation and structure more in the chapter, "Coalitions and Allies," it deserves a brief mention here. As movements prepare to negotiate, they must think carefully about the following set of questions and considerations:

1. **Who is representing them**. Are there particular parts of the coalition that must be in the room? Are there member organizations that would leave if they weren't given representation, or who are especially sensitive about being given a voice? And how might the representation be selected such that more traditionally marginalized voices, like women and people of color, are given as much of a voice as others?

2. **On what issues those representatives can commit**. Movements must think carefully before going into the room about what they are authorizing their representatives to commit to agreement on. Do you want to give your representatives a chance to say yes to a deal on the spot? Do you want them to have to come back to the larger movement first before saying yes? Are there some issues that are just no-go's, and some that they can concede? These are all critical questions the movement must answer for itself before stepping into the negotiation room—not doing so is a recipe for disaster if the representatives commit to a deal the larger movement is outraged by and would refuse to accept.

3. **Whether the movement has a unified negotiation strategy**. One of the great liabilities of a decentralized movement structure is that the various members, organizations, and leaders making up that movement may have many different ideas about how to approach the negotiation itself—think one movement, thirteen different proposals for how to structure a cite-and-release ordinance. Not only would the movement be rendered incapable of actually negotiating as a bloc, that disorganization is something savvy political leaders can take advantage of, as discussed above. It is absolutely essential that before walking into the negotiation room, the movement is unified around one idea for what exactly it wants, and how exactly it is going to go about negotiating for it.

4. **How those representatives will deliberate**. If there is more than one person in the room from the movement—say five—how will they come to agreement on a proposal? Will they vote? Does it need to be by consensus? Does one person have final say, and the rest are just advisory? And moreover, it may be that the movement wants to be kept in the loop about what is happening in the negotiation—or in fact might want to be consulted on particular issues. How are those representatives going to communicate back, on what topics, and for what level of commitment?

CASE STUDY: EGYPT'S CRISIS

Like the other revolutions during the 2011 Arab Spring, Egypt's protest movement was largely decentralized and leaderless, an organically grown outpouring of outrage and hope for a better future after President Mubarak's fall. However, after Mubarak stepped down and transition negotiations began, the movement suffered from what has been called "a deep crisis of political representation." The protesters could not agree on who would represent them or what their goals were. That crisis fractured the movement into a variety of competing visions, dismantled the collective strength of the protesters, and ended up creating a vacuum through which more organized political entities like the Muslim Brotherhood were able to slip through.[30]

As noted briefly above, figuring out these issues of representation and strategy are particularly important. Showing vulnerability on this front leaves open an avenue for the political leadership to use the divide and conquer techniques mentioned in the previous part. If they find that one faction is more open to a proposal than another, or more inclined to be coopted into a formal role within the institution, a savvy political leader is going to take advantage of that weakness to break the movement's momentum.

Preparing to meet the issues and players. It may sound like an obvious suggestion, but it is absolutely fundamental that negotiators for the movement go into the room understanding the issue and the players inside and out. We are raising the issue anyway, however, because in our research and in the literature we realized that movements do not always do this crucial preparatory work. Here are the two most important places to start:

The Issues. One area to prepare for is of course the issues being negotiated themselves. Experts have named a troubling dynamic that when movements get into the negotiation-room, or the time comes to work with other groups or more established political parties, a movement's negotiators can often be put at a disadvantage by those who are more adept at negotiating and writing policies those organizers were originally pushing for. As one expert at USIP explained, "a lot of activists who are incredibly skilled in developing mobilizing frames, don't also have the skillset or training or experience to now sit down and have an in-depth negotiation about what new political institutions or new laws are going to look like. And so in the negotiation phase, you see a lot of activists tend to be sidelined at that phase" by the political elites who know what to push for and how to get it passed.[22] And once those elites coopt the process, that movement will likely not see the transformative change it originally advocated for, because the actors now involved in the negotiation phase may not share the same interests as the movement. To this expert, and across the literature, there is a plea that organizers make sure to always be the biggest expert in the room, no matter what that room is.

The players. As much as the negotiators need to know the issues, they also need to know the actual players in the room. And most importantly on this front, negotiators for the movement must have a deep understanding of the other side's interests: what they want, what they don't want, what they would accept instead of what they want. Having that information is the bedrock of any negotiation—it *will* go nowhere if neither understands what the other wants. Period. This also includes a deep understanding of the other's pillars of support—what is keeping them from saying no? Why do they feel confident in their ability to walk away, and how might the negotiators undermine that confidence in the room by leaning on their own BATNA?

As stated above, if a movement's representation lacks a deep understanding of both of these elements, organizers should take pause and reevaluate whether or not they are truly prepared to walk into the room with the strongest hand possible.

Structuring the Table. In addition to building (or weakening) BATNAs, and preparing to negotiate internally, organizers can also walk in with a stronger hand by structuring the table to their advantage. A negotiation table's structure includes a few key elements: the organizations, interests, and institutions represented in the room; the actual individuals serving as negotiators, who bring with them their own knowledge levels and temperaments; the timing of the negotiation, including breaks and set number of sessions; the agenda; the ability to communicate outside the room; any concessions already made; and any rules already established that govern how the negotiation will proceed.

There are already a good number of books and articles that have covered the ground on how best to set up a table. In particular, Harvard Business School Professor James K. Sebenius and David A. Lax have provided significant contributions to the practice of manipulating a negotiation's structure away from the table, calling it the "third dimension" of negotiation.[23] However, these tactics' importance is such that we have provided an outline of their and other's main takeaways below:

Preconditions are an effective way to get something out of the negotiation before negotiators even go in. It's a "win" that you can secure without having to spend the time in the negotiating room to get it. Here are just a few of the preconditions we have heard being used around the world and in the US in the course of our research:

1. In Sudan, the protesters demanded that the military agree to investigate the June 3rd massacre mentioned above before any negotiation on transitional governance takes place. The military agreed to investigate, and the protesters commenced the negotiations.

2. Jail Support in Charlotte has demanded that any city official who wants to talk to them first work a shift at the jail support itself, in order for them to see through the organizers' eyes the problems and challenges they face every day.

3. In Belarus, the Coordination Council formed to lead the opposition to President Lukashenko has demanded that he release all political prisoners before they sit down to any negotiation.

Preconditions can also be a powerful communications tool. They can show resolve, clarify a movement's priorities, and help counter any narratives that the protesters are being unreasonable. By putting political prisoners first, for example, the Coordination Council in Belarus—the main group attempting to negotiate President Lukashenko's exit from power—is signaling both to its constituency and to the world that it is committed to the freedoms and liberties it said it wants to promote.

Framing the negotiation is important to setting up the story or narrative you are telling both yourself and your movement about what this negotiation is about, and about what your goals are. Organizers can frame these talks as simply the beginning of a process, emphasizing the need to remain on the streets to put pressure on the political leadership, rather than negotiation as the end goal itself. Gene Sharp, in his seminal work, *How Nonviolent Struggle Works*, urges organizers to have a basic strate-

gy for a nonviolent struggle ready should negotiations break down, and to frame that strategy as the consequences for the other side not agreeing to an ultimatum. As he put it, "The ultimatum may be part of a plan of escalation of resistance. The ultimatum may also be intended to demonstrate that the nonviolent group made a final effort at a peaceful resolution, and give it an aura of defensiveness, even as it prepares for militant nonviolent struggle."

Organizers should also look to establish a framing with the other side that is aligned with their overarching goal for the negotiation. As Harvard Business School professor Deepak Malhotra put it:

> The frame, or psychological lens, through which the parties view the negotiation has a significant effect on where they end up. Are the parties treating the interaction as a problem-solving exercise or as a battle to be won? Are they looking at it as a meeting of equals, or do they perceive a difference in status? Are they focused on the long term or the short term? Are concessions expected, or are they seen as signs of weakness? Effective negotiators will seek to control or adjust the frame early in the process—ideally, before the substance of the deal is even discussed.

Setting the agenda is another way to structure the negotiation table to your advantage and make sure that the issues you care most about are given their due time and consideration. To Sebenius and Lax, simply creating a list of unresolved issues and ticking them off one at a time is guaranteed to leave value on the table. Instead, they suggest setting up an agenda that allows you to work with your counterpart to facilitate trades—as in, you get favorable treatment on the issue you care most about, in return for giving favorable treatment on the issue the other side does. That way, everyone is able to maximize their interests.[24]

Setting the table is also a way to structure a negotiation to your advantage even before you sit down at the table, because who is actually at the table can make a world of difference to the outcome of a negotiation. Some officials may be more willing to take a collaborative stance towards the negotiation, more able to see potential for trades and less dug-in about maximizing their value at all cost. Organizers who have the power to dictate which officials they want to work with—and don't want to work with—should push hard to get their preferred people at the table. In the Sudanese negotiations, for example, FFC negotiators have successfully pushed to remove negotiators from the military's side whom they saw as harmful to the process's success.[25] Organizers who are doubtful about particular individuals' intentions and abilities to successfully negotiate in good faith should consider refusing to negotiate until that person is swapped for someone else.

Moreover, organizers should make sure that their own side of the table is set up as advantageously as possible. Sebenius and Lax have found that negotiators who can bring broad coalitions to the table are able to weaken the other side's best alternative to a negotiated agreement, or BATNA. Moreover, if all partners in a coalition are given a voice in the room, they are likely to feel more ownership over any outcome reached.[26] One way to set the table in a coalitional space is to use quotas: each partner could be given an equal allocation of seats, or perhaps an allocation according to size or strength. Doing so can also help give traditionally underrepresented voices more space in the room. In Yemen, for example, women were enormously influential in the National Dialogue Conference mentioned above because the political parties involved had to include at least 30% women in their delegations.

EXPERT NOTE: 3-D NEGOTIATION

Setting the agenda and the table are two ways to play on Sebenius and Lax's "third dimension" of negotiation, but their central message is much broader: "Don't just skillfully play the negotiation game you are handed; change its underlying design for the better."[31] They propose that negotiators structure a negotiation that will allow you to claim more value for your side, but also create value for all sides. They urge negotiators to find complementary parties and issues and ask: "What uninvolved parties might highly value elements of the present negotiation? What outside issues might be highly valued if they were incorporated into the process?"

Flip the script. One tactical idea from Gene Sharp was to intentionally go into a negotiation knowing that the power structure will most likely negotiate in bad faith. Movements can then use that bad faith action as a way to delegitimize the regime and reveal its true colors as an uncaring and distant power worth mobilizing against. One way to do this is to highly publicize an ask to negotiate. As Sharp put it, negotiations can "help to put the opponents in the wrong in the eyes of all concerned and bring sympathy to the nonviolent group." Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. coined this strategy as forcing the leadership into a "decision dilemma": you make the political leadership either agree to a reasonable ask to negotiate, or say no and reveal itself as unreasonable.

CONCLUSION

As we have noted, there are quite a few benefits to negotiation. However, it is also a tool that can be abused by the political leadership to break a movement's momentum. If extended an offer to negotiate, organizers must think carefully about the potential risks, and to act accordingly to make sure that if they walk into the room, they can viably walk out of it with both a win and their movement intact.

Endnotes

1 Based on interviews in the course of our research.
2 From an interview with that organizer.
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4 Wanis-St. John and Rosen, *supra* note 2 at 7.
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30 James K. Sebenius and David Lax, 3-D Negotiation: Powerful Tools to Change the Game in Your Most Important Deals (2006).
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COALITIONS AND ALLIES

"Freedom, peace, justice, and revolution are the choice of the people!"
– protester chant during the 2019 Sudanese Revolution

As the classic organizer's saying goes: "The only antidote to organized money is organized people." That fundamental rule of organizing has held true throughout the decades. People are the building block of a movement's ability to get the power necessary to move their political leadership to action. The fact is, one person alone cannot change the power structure within a government, but when united with others, they can move political mountains, reimagine systems of government, even topple regimes. Organizers cannot on their own pass new laws, ordinances, or policies, but with the support of people around them, they can move leaders to

make those changes for their community. The natural first question facing organizers wishing to build people power of course is: how exactly do you actually structure them such that they are able to push for that change in the most effective way possible?

In our assessment of movements advocating for political change in the US and around the world, we have found that, **by and large, decentralized structures are well-suited for building power through rapid and mass mobilization to the streets.** At the same time, decentralization has its limits. And nowhere is that tension felt more strongly than in considerations of coalition-building and allyship. We have found that as decentralized movements form coalitions, build their power together, and then reach a point where they are in a position to negotiate with the political leadership, there can arise real disputes around the strategy of how to achieve their shared goals. Within those coalitions, there may be stakeholders who want to stay on the streets and take a harder stance against the political leadership. Others may be more willing to negotiate as the situation may demand. These types of disagreements can lead to fragmentation that undermines—or even extinguishes—the power and momentum of a movement.

This chapter will dive deep into that fundamental tension arising from a decentralized movement structure and address: what decentralization can give to a movement, when and how it stops being as useful, and what to do about it. It will first discuss the benefits of a decentralized, but organized movement structure and explore a few solutions to the tension between decentralization and the demands of negotiation. It will then evaluate the opportunities and challenges of coalition-building and end with a discussion of building allies.

As you read, we suggest keeping these questions at the top of mind:

1. How should people be organized to achieve your movement's goals?
2. Which groups of people do you need on your side to make the change you want to see?
3. Do you need representation? And if so, who represents you? Where do they represent you, and how?

PART I: DECENTRALIZATION AND POWER-BUILDING

Alán de León, an organizer from Houston, Texas and his colleagues at Move Texas, were hoping to push the mayor of Houston to pass a cite-and-release ordinance that would give police officers the option of giving someone who commits a low-level crime a citation instead of jailtime. Thankfully, there was energy and momentum around the idea: tens of thousands of people were marching in the streets of Houston to protest the murder of George Floyd, and alongside them were non-profit organizations, community groups, and even city councilmembers who had long wanted to see change in the city. The different people, interests, and organizations were great for the movement, but with so many involved and no one group or leader in charge, Alán and his colleagues had to figure how to (1) structure themselves, (2) figure out a common negotiation strategy, (3) identify who would actually represent them, and then (4) do the actual work together to proceed toward their collective goal.

As Alán's story demonstrates, having buy-in from a wide-reaching and diverse part of the population is a necessary, but *insufficient* first step to getting in the negotiation room, and then getting a deal that meets a movement's interests. **It is essential for organizers to also figure out how to actually structure their people power in order to reach their movement's goals.** This section will explore the benefits of decentralization, as well as its limitations, especially in the context of coalition-building, structuring a movement, and then trying to negotiate with the political leadership. We will come back to Alán's story periodically throughout this chapter as we provide some suggestions about how best to structure the people in a movement into the best position possible to get the changes it is looking for.

As a final note, one reason why we're focused on decentralization in particular is because we have observed in the literature and our own research that modern protest movements—both in the US and around the world—are overwhelmingly and increasingly decentralized and leaderless, with social media and the democratization of digital tools making mass mobilization easier than ever before. While having more tools to facilitate even greater turnout on the streets brings with it new and exciting avenues of power, there are also drawbacks that organizers must be aware of and prepare for. Below are some of those benefits and the costs to a decentralized movement structure.

Power-building and the Benefits of Decentralization. As Dr. Maria J. Stephan, Director of the US Institute of Peace's (USIP) Program on Nonviolent Action explained, "Today's movements increasingly rely on leaderless resistance — or, perhaps more accurately, a diffuse structure with many leaders organizing in smaller pockets."[1] In our research, we observed that movements have found a decentralized structure advantageous for three different reasons:

1. It is much harder for the political leadership to repress the movement through divide-and-conquer tactics, because **the success of the movement does not hinge on the presence of one person.**

2. Joining the cause is easier, which leads to **more individual agency and quicker mass mobilization**--especially in an era where almost everyone has access to Facebook or Twitter right in their pocket.

3. A decentralized movement helps to generate a sense of **popular legitimacy**.

Below we have briefly expanded on each of these reasons, using examples and case studies from how movements in the US and around the world have leveraged these benefits to their advantage.

Reason 1: The Difficulty of Defeating a Leaderless Movement. From Hong Kong and Chile, to Algeria and Sudan, leaderless movements in the past year have proven why it can be so difficult for the political leadership of a government or regime to repress them—by their nature, the political leadership cannot defeat that movement by imprisoning, killing, or coopting a few individuals.[2] For example, in the ongoing protests against President Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus, despite the fact that the regime has tried to attack and silence opposition leaders, the movement has continued to effectively coordinate logistics on where, when, and how it will protest. The movement hasn't died, no matter how many people the regime murders or detains, because no one person is the leader of that movement.

Moreover, protests have become more adept at coordinating their actual movements on the streets to avoid dispersal and repression. With apps like Telegram, popular Belarusian blog-

gers and movement leaders—some living in exile in neighboring countries—can tell protesters in real-time where specific police forces are headed, literally directing them down streets as they march. From a tactical perspective, it is more difficult to disperse and end such protests, not only because a leader does not exist, but also *the person leading the protest may not even be in the protest itself.*

CASE STUDY: THAILAND

In Thailand, the protests speaking out against the monarchy in the latter half of 2020 have been "youth-based, centered around Bangkok's elite universities, and are largely leaderless. Yet, they have grown steadily bigger and more focused since they began earlier this year and have become difficult for the Thai government to suppress. While the Thai government has arrested many individuals it identified as leaders, this has not been enough to end the protests.[3]

In sum, in making it difficult to identify one sole key leader of a movement, the protests can sustain themselves long enough to compel the political leadership to the negotiation table.

Reason 2: Ease of Joining the Cause. Another benefit to decentralization is that it lowers the bar to entry into the movement—people looking to join just simply can. That decentralization lent itself heavily to the Sunrise Movement's rise, which has been lauded for its ability to rapidly mobilize startlingly large numbers of supporters. Part of the reason Sunrise grew to be so large rests on the fact that they made it as easy as possible to join the cause, create your own Sunrise hub, and connect with chapters and branches nationwide. To join Sunrise, supporters only need three or more individuals and to agree to twelve core principles, which include talking to their communities, remaining nonviolent, and uniting with other movements for change.[4] Once a Sunrise hub is created, it receives guidance and support from the larger movement organization, along with its fellow chapters. This low bar to entry has helped the movement make a name for itself as a powerful mass mobilizer.

However, as the example above demonstrates, organizers need to actively create those opportunities. Without these easy access points to the movement, would-be supporters may not be as inclined to participate. And to be clear, these access points can involve more than simply joining a protest. Movements are not just sustained by protesters on the streets. People can get involved by raising money to bail out protesters in jail, by cooking food for protesters, providing medical care, babysitting kids for parents and family members wishing to protest, or simply sharing posts on social media. However, again, that all depends on the imagination of the organizer to think of and then implement those entry points.

One enormously powerful tool organizers now have at their disposal to lower the bar to entry is technology, and in particular social media. Organizers have created groups on social media to coordinate protests, communicate key movement information, and mobilize supporters. In the US, organizers have used technology to share petitions, coordinate phone- or text-banking, and to mobilize the public around one cause or symbol that shares the movement's values. This energy can also

translate into support for protests offline as well. Organizers can use digital tools to direct supporters to specific actions held nearby, and to coordinate logistics on when to show up, where, and how. Organizers looking to mass mobilize should think of the ways they can open their own entry points as much as possible, both on- or offline.

Reason 3: Generating Consensus. Leaderlessness and mass mobilization can also help generate a sense of popular legitimacy that organizers can leverage at the negotiation table. When, for example, the Movement for Black Lives can point to the fact that the 2020 summer protests were the largest in American history, they can convincingly say to the political leaders they're trying to move that they represent the interests of the people. In essence, the mass mobilization that a decentralized structure helps to create can also help send the resounding message to the political leadership that a consensus of the population is on the side of the movement. As one pro-democracy activist participating in the ongoing Belarusian protests put this phenomenon, **"the idea [of mass mobilization] is to create a critical mass of people filling out the streets and to demonstrate the new majority."**[6]

The Limitations of Decentralization Just as Alán experienced in Houston, decentralization can help organizers rapidly mobilize their movement to the streets, but it has its own drawbacks. Namely, that decentralization can become a liability once it comes time to nego-

CASE STUDY: BUILDING CONSENSUS AND LEGITIMACY IN SUDAN

Sudan's 2019 revolution is a great example of where a decentralized structure helped demonstrate consensus. During the revolution, the Sudanese people had two goals: (1) remove longstanding dictator, President Omar al-Bashir, from power and (2) transition to a democratic government. Sudan is a diverse country, made up of a spectrum of ethnicities, languages, and histories—and moreover, President al-Bashir had spent much of his 30-year reign exploiting those fault lines to pit Sudanese against each other, so that they could not unify against him. As was to be expected, when the revolution began in December 2018, the different organizations that had developed in the wake of those fault lines—with their own interests, philosophies, and constituencies—wanted to have a voice and representation in determining the future of their country.[7]

However, rather than fall into old grievances, these disparate organizations set aside their differences for the sake of their overall goal—ousting President Bashir. Hundreds of informally organized neighborhood committees, a collection of "ghost" trade unions subverting the regime's official professional associations, civil society groups, opposition political parties, university professors, and student groups all joined hands under one banner, the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC), to demand with a single voice that Bashir finally leave power. That ability to mass mobilize vast swaths under one, decentralized hub signaled to the regime that there was an unbreakable unity among the Sudanese people, and that they wanted change.[5]

tiate with the political leadership, just because there are so many agendas, interests, individuals, and organizations whose voices need to be taken into account. In Alán's case, while the energy and interest from large portions of the Houston community helped mass mobilize people to the streets, focusing the passion of so many organizations and movements into one negotiation strategy presented enormous challenges. As Alán and his coalition faced down a meeting with the mayor (who had sole power to bring a cite-and-release bill to the floor), they had to figure out exactly what their shared goals were, who would represent them in the room, how they would actually negotiate, and what they would do if they got a "no."

The Sudanese movement mentioned above also faced a similar dilemma. The FFC represented an enormous swath of Sudanese society, and as a consequence there were internal fissures the organizers had to resolve: the various blocs and representative groups within the FFC had a spectrum of opinions on matters such as leadership of the FFC, principles, decision-making processes, and what counted as a satisfactory outcome. While often contentious, these internal negotiations were necessary to ensure that the different moving parts of the movement were on the same page. In consolidating their voice in this way, they were able to avoid the challenges that arise when too many different groups try to negotiate with one political leader.[8]

CONNECTION POINT: EGYPT'S FAILED PROCESS

Unfortunately, other movements have not been able to resolve their internal differences as effectively as the FFC. In the aftermath of Egypt's Arab Spring revolution, which ousted longtime dictator President Hosni Mubarak the protesters could not agree on "who could represent the movement and what the aims were" during the negotiations to transition the government to democratic governance.[9] That "deep crisis of representation" led to a fracture in the proposed visions for the country, dismantled the collective strength of the protesters, and ended up creating a vacuum through which more organized political entities like the Muslim Brotherhood were able to slip through.[10]

So what can organizers do if their movement has a decentralized structure, but would like to negotiate? For one, when a movement has reached this point of its life cycle, we think it becomes paramount that organizers work to consolidate their coalitions before stepping into the negotiation room. Doing so can bring with it several benefits: It can

1. Demonstrate **unity and strength**;
2. Help mitigate the risk that the other side

will try to **divide and conquer** the movement;

3. Build the movement's **legitimacy**; and

4. Underscore that the movement has the **support of the people**.

To be clear, consolidation of a decentralized movement in preparation for a negotiation doesn't simply require bringing together coalitions under one slogan, strategy, or interest. It also means *creating a leadership structure*. The tactical move of consolidating different groups into a coalition within a movement to create a coordinated group can be the difference between reaching your objectives or not.

However, consolidating a movement into a tighter leadership structure is easier said than done—doing so can raise difficult questions of who exactly leads the movement, which organization or individual gets the final say, and what power should be reserved (or taken away) for the rest of the movement's supporters. In order to resolve these and other internal tensions, we have found in the literature and our own research the following factors to be key:

1. **Representation**. It is paramount that all the different groups within a coalition that want to be are (or at least feel) represented and have a voice when it is time to start negotiating. By way of a few examples, movements can consider using a quota system to ensure representation of certain key groups, mandate consensus before any major decision is made, or even set-up an executive committee for the coalitions. In taking representation into consideration

CASE STUDY: TESTING THE LIMITS IN BELARUS

As of November 2020, Belarus seemed to be experiencing a similar challenge around transitioning from a decentralized movement structure to a more consolidated arrangement. Since August, Belarusians have taken to the streets in the largest protests in the country's history, demanding that President Alexander Lukashenko step down after blatantly rigging an election in his favor this past August. It was predicted by informal polls that, against his opponent Svetlana Tikhanovskaya—the wife of a presidential candidate President Lukashenko jailed in the run up to the election—he would only take home about 3% of the votes. After fleeing the country for fear of her life, Tikhanovskaya and a cadre of other opposition figures established the Coordination Council, with the express goal of creating a central hub from which to direct the protests and negotiate with Lukashenko.[11]

However, with most of its leaders jailed, in exile, or dead, the Coordination Council has struggled to be the voice of the movement, and it is widely accepted that Svetlana Tikhanovskaya—who has spent most of her life as a housewife and schoolteacher, and stands as more of a symbol than political leader—is not the best candidate for the top job. While the Coordination Council still operates within the country, and Tikhanovskaya is attempting to lead from exile in Lithuania, the crackdown has severely weakened their ability to coordinate. According to Franak Viacorka, fellow at the Atlantic Council, Lukashenko's strategy was to "do everything to split the opposition and not let all forces and parties unite around Tikhanovskaya. The biggest fear of Lukashenko is Russia and the West opening talks with his opposition. So he is doing his best to paralyze it." As of this writing, it remains to be seen whether the Coordination Council can consolidate its power and voice.[12]

early, you can avoid the trap Egypt fell into during its own negotiation progress, where a representation vacuum ultimately derailed their ability to form consensus.

2. **Preparation**. One way to work against the tensions that come from coalition-building is through careful preparation. Organizers should: (1) identify the coalition's goals for the negotiation and make sure that everyone on the team, including various coalition members, is on board; (2) dig deep into the technical issues of how those goals can be translated into real policy, thinking deliberately about what options the negotiators are willing and able to propose to the other side; and then (3) jointly devise a strategy ahead of time on who will speak, with what tone, and on which issues. For more on preparation for negotiation, see Chapter 1, "The Big Trap: When (and When Not) to Negotiate."

3. **Continuation**. 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, and that civil resistance must continue. Organizers should think: if I get a "no," what next? What are my next five steps if I walk out of the room? Do I go back to the streets? Try to find another person to negotiate with? Try to expand my base of supporters? And how can I do that now, so that I'm not scrambling to figure out my strategy when I'm on the backfoot? This specific type of preparation helps those in the coalition be ready for all eventualities and retain momentum, even if things do not fall in their favor. Otherwise, with momentum lost, and no clear plan of action, a political leader looking to break a movement's momentum will have an open field to take advantage of its indecision and lack of clarity.

PART II: BUILDING AND OPERATING COALITIONS

We've noted above that key to a decentralized movement is a grassroots infrastructure often connected by loosely formed coalitions, which we are using here to describe a collection of distinct people, parties, organizations, or other entities engaging in joint strategic action under one group or organization. The importance of those coalitions to the success of a movement's mobilization efforts cannot be understated. **Coalitions not only strengthen the position of the movement for all the reasons stated earlier in the chapter, but they also weaken the power of the political leadership the movement are hoping to negotiate with.** Due to their importance to the underlying structure of a movement, the formation and operation of coalitions deserves a deeper dive.

Building coalitions creates the opportunities and conditions necessary to then build movements, which can get the attention of the political leadership and a subsequent invitation to negotiate. As Harvard Kennedy School Professor Erica Chenoweth has written, "Movements that engage in . . . coalition-building prior to mass mobilization are more likely to draw a large and diverse following than movements that take to the streets before hashing out a political program and strategy." As she has found, "movements that grow in size and diversity are more likely to succeed."[13] Relatedly, coalitions are important to the success of a movement, because one small or independent group is often not strong enough to push for change on its own, especially if it has no line of communication to those with traditional sources of power.

In the literature and our own research, we have found that there is a spectrum regarding the different ways that coalitions may form, and thus different types of coalitional structures. This spectrum can range from a strict coalitional structure with established principles and hierarchies, to a much looser alignment of related groups, what we will call a coalition based on "**opportunistic linkages**."

On the stricter end, a more rigid structure can be useful when one, united voice is most needed to advance a movement's goals. For example, in Sudan the various groups leading the 2019 revolution were initially satisfied with a looser coalitional structure. However, when the revolution grew to such a size that the groups began to clash with one another over logistics, representation, and demands, they decided to come together to form the Forces for Freedom and Change. Twenty-two different organizations and groups signed on to the charter that formed the Forces for Freedom and Change. The charter itself laid out three main objectives: (1) ending President al-Bashir's presidency, (2) forming a transitional government, and (3) protecting peaceful protesters and their freedom of speech and expression, in addition to ensuring justice for crimes against the Sudanese people.[14] While separately, the groups might have continued to successfully mobilize and withstand inter-group clashes, together they were able to organize, speak, and eventually negotiate as one.

Other coalitions may come together due to opportunistic linkages on a particular issue. While these coalitions have weaker organizational bonds, they can still be effective. We would often see this happen in the context of organizers in a city coming together to push a mayor to take certain policy steps on an issue. Different associations, organizations, and groups would coalesce around a specific policy goal, signaling to the mayor that it was a serious issue, although those individual groups would eventually return to their own strategies and agendas once that opportunity to collaborate has ended.

PART III: ALLYSHIP: HOW TO BUILD IT AND WHO TO BUILD IT WITH.

Forming alliances both with people that you like (and sometimes with people that you may not) can be the difference that tips the scales in your favor. And they're important because just as one individual alone does not make a movement, often one community can't either. As criminal justice reform leader Glenn E. Martin once said, "those closest to the problem are closest to the solution, but furthest from the resources and power."[15] Martin was naming a fundamental paradox in community

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: GUIDING QUESTIONS

All of this raises the question of which groups and individuals should be at the negotiation table, and which should perhaps take a backseat to the negotiation. This will vary from situation to situation, but as coalitions attempt to consolidate in preparation for negotiation, these questions can help guide organizers as they go about thinking how to build their coalitional structure:

1. Which group(s) are most affected by the issues being discussed?

    (a) Does everyone who is equally affected also need an equal spot at the table?
    (b) Should disproportionately affected communities or individuals be given a louder voice?

2. Have any other group(s) built power in such a way that not including them would make the negotiations appear to be (or actually be) illegitimate?

    (a) Are there fears of important stakeholders rejecting the process if a certain organization, group, or individual is not included?
    (b) How can organizers reach into their networks to make sure everyone who should be at the table is included?

4. How will the coalition make strategic decisions in the room?

    (a) Are there groups/individuals who should have authorization to say yes on certain issues over others? Does the coalition need to agree based on consensus? Does one individual or group have ultimate say?
    (b) What type of agreement would those in the coalition, but not in the room, be alright with accepting?
    (c) Who will guide the actual conversation, set priorities on the issues, and offer options and proposals to the other side?

5. Which group(s) might help move a negotiation forward in ways not apparent at first?

    (a) Are there individual strengths of each group that could be leveraged in the room?
    (b) What other individuals or groups wield power on this issue that may not be already invited? How can their influence be leveraged to your advantage?

organizing: that those most affected by a policy an organizer is trying to change, the marginalized community he or she is organizing in, are often those with the least power to change it. This is where allies come in—these are the people and organizations and institutions that are closer to the sources of power an organizer needs to make the change the movement is advocating for. In the literature and our own research, we have identified two types of allies: (1) natural allies, and (2) strategic allies.

Natural allies are the parties that are ideologically aligned with and predisposed to agree on certain goals with a movement. One example from the US is the Sunrise Movement, which uses a strategy termed the People's Alignment Theory. Sunrise intentionally provides allyship to groups combatting white supremacy, class issues, racial injustice, and others, without demanding a say in their strategy or negotiation decisions. They made the strategic decision that in order to reach the goals that they have set, they would have to work as allies with other movements and groups in the hopes that those movements and groups would then work as allies with Sunrise. They realized that by joining forces with other organizations that also fight for social justice causes, they would be able to maximize not only their people power, but also that of movements whose values they share.

Strategic allies, by contrast, are the individuals, organizations, and institutions with traditionally more power in society, who may not automatically share the same grievances, injustices, or pains as the movement's main supporters. **The enormous benefit these allies bring to a movement is that they not only grow the power of the movement, but they can directly hit and weaken the prevailing political leadership, because they attack the pillars of support upon which the political leadership relies on** for legitimacy, for its political power, and even for its economic viability. As Veronique Dudouet at the Berghof Foundation noted, nonviolent action by "those whose active or passive collaboration [...] is needed for the oppressor to oppress" can be a great source of power for protesters and activists.[16] Thinkers and practitioners in community organizing call the strategy of cultivating strategic allies hitting at the political leadership's "**pillars of support**," because by doing so the movement is sapping the entities and individuals upon which the political leadership relies upon to maintain and wield power.

CASE STUDY: SUNRISE AND ALLYSHIP

The Sunrise Movement's People's Alignment Theory follows a growing dynamic in inter-movement relationships: that of an increasing emphasis on intersectionality. In the literature and our research, we have seen how movements are centering their strategies more and more on intersectionality. Movements are more aware than ever that their individual struggles are actually deeply connected to the issues other movements in their community are tackling. Organizations that are pushing for environmental justice are thinking more about the outsized impacts of climate change on communities of color. Movements centered on racial inequities are increasingly emphasizing the need for economic, as well as racial empowerment in disenfranchised communities. More and more, organizers working in diverse communities understand the need to build alliances that cut across religious, cultural, and socioeconomic lines. And the literature backs them up. Scholars in intersectionality studies emphasize that "intersectional prisms can inform connections across privilege as well as subordination to better facilitate meaningful collaboration and political action."[17]

CASE STUDY: STRATEGIC ALLIES IN BELARUS

The Belarusian protesters have excelled at attacking President Lukashenko's pillars of support by cultivating strategic allies, most notably the country's army of factory workers.[18] Throughout his reign, Lukashenko has relied heavily on the political and economic support of the country's factory and industrial worker class. However, when Lukashenko initially cracked down on the protests in the fall of 2020, much of those factory workers—already enraged at the economic downturn of the country and by the administration's failure to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic—abandoned both Lukashenko and their posts. Mass strikes broke out across the country, with factory workers refusing to go back to work until Lukashenko releases the hundreds of political prisoners in detention and steps down.[19] One plant that went on strike, Belaruskali, accounts for a fifth of the world's potash fertilizer and is the country's top cash earner.[20] These factory protests are not only an economic hit to the regime—constituting over half of the country's total economic output—but also a deeply symbolic one. They stand for the reality that Lukashenko has truly been abandoned by the entirety of Belarus.[21] They also remain a symbol of the resolve of the Belarusian people—as state-run factory workers, these men and women are putting their livelihoods on the line in a very real way.

Lukashenko's response to their protests have demonstrated just how devastating their defection really is. The only times he has shown a willingness to concede or negotiate has been with industrial and factory leaders, who he sees as crucial to maintaining power. When the workers' strikes began in mid-August, he floated the idea of a referendum and pledged to release detained protesters.[22] He staged a televised meeting with construction industry officials, but it did not appear to be a serious negotiation. And he told factory workers on August 17 that an election could be organized after the adoption of a new constitution (but then reversed that position just hours later).[23]

At first glance, the factory workers would have been the most unlikely allies of the protesters on the streets of the capital—historically, those in the rural working industrial class have hated and derided those in Minsk, whom they believe to be part of an aloof and distant elite. However, the nature of the situation was such that factory workers felt compelled to participate by their side.

Strategic allies can also help a movement literally sustain itself on the street. During the 2019 Sudanese Revolution, the military personnel who felt increasingly more loyalty to the protesters than to President al-Bashir became a core strategic ally. The Sudanese protesters achieved these defections by intentionally cultivating members of the military to their side. As just one example, one of the main chants that the Sudanese protesters shouted at the military was: "can your salary afford the price of bread?" By appealing to a shared interest—the crippling economic pain the entire country had been suffering, with the exception of al-Bashir's inner circle—the protesters were able to bring aboard a strategic ally that helped limit violence towards them. At one point, during a crackdown ordered by the regime, some members of the military literally turned their guns on their fellow soldiers in order to protect the protesters. Similarly, during the Black Lives Matter protests this summer, white protesters would often stand on the perimeter of a march, attempting to offer more protection to Black protesters in the face of police brutality. For more on sustaining a protest, please see Chapter 3, "Sustainability."

Organizers hoping to bring strategic allies over to their side must ask: (1) who in my community or country has the most power to influence the political leadership I'm trying to move; and (2) what overlapping interests can I appeal to that will help mobilize them to my side?

Morality, Allyship, and Negotiation. Underlying all of these questions of allyship are complicated ethical implications for organizers building relationships with potential allies they find questionable at best, or extremely problematic at worst. Where a person draws the lines of their moral principles is of course a deeply personal exercise, but this section will lay out a few scenarios that activists we interviewed have considered when deciding whether or not to engage with a particular political leader or potential strategic ally.

We spoke with one Syrian activist who had a strong relationship with a prominent conservative US Senator who supported the US's intervention in Syria, but who in the activist's opinion had questionable views on other subjects, such as the US's war in Iraq. However, the activist was willing to cabin the limits of his collaboration with the Senator to Syria-related matters, while also not glorify him on every other position he took. He realized that without this senator, he may not be able to make progress on his cause against the Assad regime. Moreover, before fleeing Syria as a refugee this activist had also been willing to engage with local security forces to coordinate on specific matters—including sometimes the same forces that had detained and tortured him—because of how dire the needs of his community were. For the activist, nearly any opportunity for engagement with different actors who could help his fellow Syrians and advance the goals of their cause should be capitalized on, no matter who the individuals were. In the activist's view, Syria had no hope of success unless the movement took advantage of every opportunity it could.[24]

However, other organizers and movements, depending on their contexts, have drawn harder lines. For example, an organizer who co-founded a jail support group in Charlotte told us that they were not willing to speak with city officials until the city had fulfilled certain preconditions. They wanted the city to see things from their point of view by literally coming down to Jail Support's headquarters and working a shift alongside the organizer and their fellow members. The organizer wanted the city officials to know and feel exactly what it was like to go through the criminal justice system. This organizer believed that if the city officials saw the devastating impact of the system from

their perspective, those leaders would legislate differently. Much of that reluctance came from past bad experiences with the city. After the city once arrested fifty Jail Support volunteers, mostly from marginalized communities, the organizer felt that they could not have a real conversation with the city until those officials could prove they empathized with Jail Support.[25]

On the other hand, one organizer from the Movement for Black Lives who helps organize protests against police brutality across the country bluntly stated: "we don't negotiate with terrorists," and was unwavering in that declaration.[26] This organizer felt unwilling to engage in any conversation where they felt they must defend their humanity and desire to be an equal member of society. The thought of opening any dialogue toward a resolution or partnership with a group that perpetrates violence against their community simply did not occur.

We cannot and will not suggest what an organizer's comfort level should be around when to engage with certain parties he or she may fundamentally disagree with. Every organizer must make that decision for themselves. But we will tell you that part of the consideration should be to take into account the different ways a movement can be successful, and which people the movement may not be able to be successful without.

CONCLUSION

Bringing structure to the people and groups in a movement is key to building the power necessary to achieve that movement's goals. While a decentralized movement structure allows the movement to mobilize more people, creating leverage at the negotiation table, it also has its drawbacks when the time to negotiate actually comes. Before sitting down at the table, organizers must consider how they can consolidate the various interests within a united coalition and think about other allies they may need in order to reach their movement's goals.

Endnotes

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SUSTAINABILITY

"If we really want to get this revolution popping, we need more of us—we need more people, more bodies, and more minds." –Jamie Marsicano, co-founder of Charlotte Uprising

One of the biggest challenges organizers in the US and around the world named in the course of our research was how to sustain their protests: how to get people to the streets, and then how to keep them there. Many of the organizers involved in the summer 2020 Black Lives Matter protests recalled feeling their awe at the initial turnout of the protests fade into dismay and disappointment as those protests fizzled, leaving them with far less power to demand policy changes from their political leaders at the city and state level.

As their diminishing ability to push for change later in the summer demonstrates, in the world of negotiation, a movement's power can be conceived of as their *leverage*

at the negotiation table—and if that power is derived primarily from direct actions like street protests, then that leverage waxes and wanes with the size and impact of the direct action. A protest of ten thousand strong in Houston may send councilmen and women in City Hall reeling and fearing for their election prospects next year, but if that protest fizzles out a week later, those officials may think: well maybe I'm actually safe, and maybe I can get away with not working with these folks.

This is why sustainability is absolutely critical for organizers seeking to negotiate with their political leadership. **Sustaining a protest means sustaining the leverage and power that organizers need to push their political leaders to say yes to a deal.**

As nonviolent resistance expert Veronique Dudouet puts it, movements must reach a point of power and leverage such that "the balance of forces is shifting against [the political leadership], and find it politically wiser to negotiate, because it is cheaper and easier than holding firm."[1] This is what this chapter is about: **how to sustain direct actions long enough to make the cost of not negotiating—and moreover, not reaching a deal—too high on the political leadership an organizer is trying to move.**

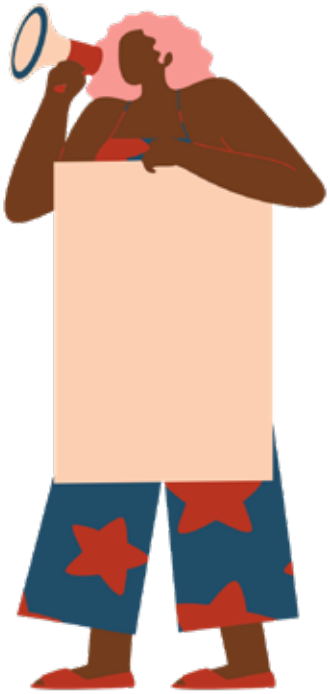
As an opening caveat, this chapter will largely focus on direct actions, and specifically protest. Our attention to protest is not meant to imply that they are the most important form of nonviolent struggle, or that they should be the only actions used. In fact, a growing body of research warns that too much focus on direct actions like street protests distracts from other, potentially more effective tactics like economic noncooperation.[2] Additionally, we urge organizers to think of ways they can deploy the direct actions we will discuss alongside those we do not, and we have included links to lists of hundreds of tactics—both classic and refurbished for the era of social media—on this report's webpage.

However, we think it's important to focus on protests for two reasons:

1. They are increasingly the dominant form of nonviolent resistance in the 21st century;[3] and

2. Many of the most seminal ideas on protest sustainability were written and developed in the 1960s and 1970s, well before the rise of the internet.[4] The Digital Age of the 21st century has brought with it new opportunities and challenges to sustaining a presence in the streets. We see this chapter as both a supplement and a way to offer new ideas on how to meet those challenges.

This chapter is divided into two sections. It first provides a brief outline of the theory behind sustainability and negotiation. It then describes the main factors involved in sustaining a protest, and thus sustaining the leverage organizers need to get to—and then stay at—the negotiation table.



PART I: THE THEORY OF SUSTAINABILITY AND NEGOTIATION

Before diving into the specifics of sustaining a protest, we think it's useful to start off with a brief theoretical outline of how exactly organizers can think about the relationship between their protest and its implications for negotiation.

As we noted above, in the context of negotiation, **power-building can be conceived of as leverage-building—it is building up your hand at the negotiation table so that you can successfully assert your interests and get the deal you want.** And experts on civil resistance note that a movement's biggest source of leverage is its ability to impose political costs on the leaders it wants to extract concessions from—stopping the protests is the thing that political leaders want in exchange for policy change, and it is further protest that is hanging over their heads as a consequence to saying no to a deal.[5]

As scholars at the US Institute of Peace (USIP) put it:

> The path to negotiation is paved with leverage gained through civil resistance. What can be called the fundamental bargain in civil resistance cases comes about because actions taken by civil resisters impose costs on and erode the legitimacy of opponents, who in turn may be persuaded to talk and make changes to a policy or institution in return to relief from the pressure of direct action.[6]

EXPERT NOTE: BATNAS

Roger Fisher and William Ury in Getting To Yes termed the consequences a party will experience as a result of not reaching a deal as a "BATNA," or the Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement. In other words, each side possesses the ability to walk away, and the best outcome they can reach by walking away is their BATNA. The party with the better no-deal situation thus has the better BATNA. In negotiation theory, the party with the better BATNA will be able to reach more of their interests at the negotiation table, because the other side is more eager to reach a deal and avoid their BATNA than the other side. Thus, power-building can also be understood as BATNA-building—a movement is building its BATNA by sustaining or increasing the power it started with, while also decreasing the other side's BATNA by increasing the consequences of saying no to a deal.

Or, as Veronique Dudouet at the Berghof Foundation articulated, "nonviolent struggle is a necessary component [to negotiation], by helping marginalized communities to achieve sufficient leverage for an effective negotiation process."[7]

However, **the great twist in a negotiation between a movement and its political leaders is that a movement's leverage at the table is at a near-constant risk of waning.** Movement power is by its nature fluid, and it is an undeniable reality that people will leave the streets. They will get tired, or frustrated, or even hopeful,

and they will stop protesting. And as that direct action fizzles and disappears, so will the movement's ability to effectively assert its interests at the table. Thus, its ability to impose consequences should the other side say no can diminish as time goes on, while the other side's power remains largely static. After all, a political leader's source of power is their mandate and position, rather than the number of bodies they can summon to the street. **For that reason, movements don't only need power: they also need momentum.**[8]

PRINCIPLE

This is where sustainability comes in. In situations in which protest is the dominant form of pressure placed on the political leaders to negotiate, sustaining a protest will keep up the momentum that negotiators need to get in the room, and then have sufficient leverage to make sure their interests are met at the table.

Of course, whether a protest can be sustained or not is not all up to the strategic genius of the organizer. There are some background ingredients that help turn people out into the streets: among others, a widely felt injustice that spans gender, age, race, religion, and other divides; a precipitating event that crystallizes the true agony of that injustice and activates outrage; and a broad recognition of personal stake in the outcome of whether or not that injustice is rectified.

These are the "ripeness" ingredients, those exogenous conditions that can't necessarily be created—however, they can be taken advantage of.[9] For example, it just so happened that someone was able to catch on video and share George Floyd's murder, during a historic economic recession, and in the middle of a pandemic where people had more flexibility than ever to join a protest during the work week. But the Movement for Black Lives and other grassroots organizations had been working in their communities and building their institutional power to get people on the streets for years—and the movement itself had years of protest organizing experience that gave them the expertise to capitalize on the moment. The conditions were "ripe," but that preparation for such a moment was what allowed the protests to swell to the biggest turnout in the history of the country.

We have seen this over and again in our work: **protests that look like they sprung up from the ground were actually growing from roots that had been spreading for months or years.** For instance, Sudan's most recent revolution officially started in December 2018, but the resistance committees that helped lead the mass protests to overthrow President Omar al-Bashir were secretly founded back in 2013.[10]

Another key "ripeness" issue that is largely out of the control of the organizers—but is nevertheless crucial to factor into any strategy—is the shape and structure of the political leadership that the organizer is trying to move. One expert at USIP noted that in more open political structures in which the elite feel at least somewhat accountable to their represented communities, it may take less time and effort to get in the room to negotiate. However, in less open political structures, "those systems aren't set up to take into account the preferences of those outside the elite. So the elite may have to be more or less dragged to the table by the threat of a movement being able to impose heavier costs in the future if they don't negotiate."[11]

And there are situations in which the political leadership is so uncaring, and so cruel, that organizers simply cannot sustain a movement

large enough or long enough to make its elite care. Activists in Syria, for example, noted in their reflections that they knew even before the internal armed conflict broke out that President Bashar al-Assad's regime would do everything it could to squash them—there was never any chance to negotiate with a government that bombed its citizens so heavily it once ran out of mortar shells. Experts have termed leadership structures like Assad's regime "**extremely ruthless opponents**,"[12] and they have questioned the ability for civil resistance movements to succeed against them. As a result, less open political structures may not allow protesters to successfully sustain their movement, even if other "ripeness" factors may be present.

CONNECTION POINT

Many US activists we interviewed in the course of our research expressed the same sentiments. As one activist we spoke to put it: "The government has to invite you to the table. So it depends on who is in the government. The government can ignore you and not invite you to the table and just wait until the protests are over and continue."

PART II: SUSTAINING THE PROTEST

So how do you sustain a protest? What is within an organizer's control when trying to get people onto the streets, and then keep them there? In our research, we identified five key ways that protests can increase their sustainability, both by internally encouraging people to stay out on the streets and responding to external attempts to undermine or extinguish the protests. Below we outline what those factors can look like, with case studies from the US and around the world of protests that have either successfully or unsuccessfully deployed them.

PRINCIPLE: FIVE FACTORS FOR SUSTAINING A PROTEST

1. DIVERSE PARTICIPATION
2. THE USE OF COMMUNITY AND LOVE
3. A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY
4. COMMITMENT TO THE CAUSE
5. THE USE OF TACTICS DESIGNED TO EVADE DISPERSAL AND REPRESSION

Factor I: Diverse Participation. Harvard Kennedy School Professor Erica Chenoweth and USIP Director for the Program on Nonviolent Action Dr. Maria J. Stephan introduced in their book, "Why Civil Resistance Works" a now-famous statistic: that "no government has withstood a challenge of 3.5% of their population mobilized against it during a peak event."[13] While recent movements have demonstrated that large numbers are not always sufficient to bring about political change—one of Hong Kong's marches alone included about 27% of the population by organizers' estimates[14]—their finding represents an important rule of organizing: that successful protests require the massive and diverse participation of citizens.[15]

EXPERT NOTE: THE 3.5% STATISTIC

Some have called into question the validity of Chenoweth and Stephan's 3.5% statistic after the George Floyd protests yielded such broad participation—with estimates rising to around 8% of the American population joining a protest at some point—yet very little national changes to the US criminal justice system.[16] Chenoweth and Stephan have emphasized in their writing that 3.5% is merely a correlation, and that it should not be conflated with having a causal effect. In short, 3.5% is not a magic number for success, and a variety of other factors determine movement success.[17] That note of caution echoes our own—that while mass, diverse participation is certainly an important factor, it is not the only one by far that organizers must think about when trying to sustain their protests.

Diverse, mass mobilization does not matter for sustainability because of its sheer numerical force. To name just a few benefits, diverse participation sustains a protest by increasing the tactics a movement is able to deploy, by decreasing the ability of the state to use its police power to disperse the protest, by generating a sense of legitimacy that can in turn shore up the protesters' commitment to the cause, and by creating multiple entry points for those closest to the regime to join the movement, further weakening the regime's BATNA. As Professor Chenoweth puts it, "a mass uprising is more likely to succeed when it includes a larger proportion and a more diverse cross-section of a nation's population." **Diverse participation "provides numerous openings through which they can bring about defections, pulling the regime's pillars of support out from under it at decisive moments."**[18]

Creating Diverse Participation. One way to create such a broad coalition is to think about the minimum overlapping interests needed to join that coalition, and then to clearly establish that overlap as a baseline to entry. In other words: what must a potential participant absolutely believe in, and what principles must they be willing to comply with, in order to join the protest? And which are not required for entry?

The Sunrise Movement has leveraged this strategy quite effectively. A relatively new protest movement advocating for bold policies to combat the climate crisis, Sunrise has emphasized that since one of its movement's main goals it to use protest and mass turnout to elect supporters of the Green New Deal into office, rather than to negotiate for that deal with existing officials, they want to make it as easy as possible for people to act under its name. For that reason, Sunrise allows anyone to begin a chapter as long as they have three people and agree to a set of twelve principles. Sunrise chapters have thus been able to rise up across the country relatively rapidly while maintaining a leanly staffed central team.[19]

"We may not agree on everything, but the things we do agree on we're going to stand firm on those things. There are people in the movement who believe Black lives matter, but who don't believe in access to abortion. Now we're not going to argue about that in this Black Lives Matter march, we're here to say their names. . . . part of organizing is finding what you do share, those shared values and working from there."

–Kristie Puckett-Williams, ACLU Organizer

Organizing Diverse Participation. When mobilizing such a broad and diverse population, it's important for organizers not to lose sight that just because a protest may be large or decentralized does not mean that it should also be disorganized. We have seen across the literature and in our own research that **the most successful protests are broad and decentralized, but organized**.

As experts on nonviolent resistance at USIP put it:

> "While street protests and demonstrations tend to attract the most media attention, most of the critical work to build movements happens quietly, behind the scenes, in the form of building coalitions, developing strategies, and resolving internal conflicts."[20]

And in her work, Professor Chenoweth has found that "movements that engage in careful planning, organization, training, and coalition-building prior to mass mobilization are more likely to draw a large and diverse following than movements that take to the streets before hashing out a political program and strategy."[21]

In short, a sustained protest is also an organized one. People do not just come to the streets on their own. They are encouraged to do so by their families, their colleagues, their churches and their friends. People show up when those they are affiliated with show up, and especially when those organizations then coordinate with each other on logistics, strategy, and goals. And when they are tired, or frustrated, or sick of coming out each day, it's those organizational and personal affiliations that keep them turning out. Sudan's 2019 revolution proves an instructive example of just how important an underlying organizing infrastructure is to the sustainability of a movement:

CASE STUDY: DECENTRALIZED, BUT ORGANIZED IN SUDAN

In Sudan, the 2019 revolution was able to topple the country's longtime dictator, President Omar al-Bashir, in part because the protests were highly decentralized, engaged much of the Sudanese population domestically and abroad, and yet were still organized. Local neighborhood "resistance committees" had quietly built power and support since 2013, and when the nationwide calls to protest began, they were able to mobilize quickly across the country. Resistance com-

mittee after committee began organizing protests one after another, all over the country at once. After awhile, the regime's security forces simply could not keep up with the frequency, geographic diversity, and ferocity of the protests.[22]

As the movement grew, those resistance committees entered into a coalition with the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), a coalition of professional trade unions and respected academics, under the Forces for Freedom and Change. Together, the Sudanese revolution was born and led by a broad coalition of women, civil society groups, neighborhood committees, professional trade unions, students, and Sudan's enormous diaspora community.[23]

But at its core, what stitched Sudan's protests into the unbreakable web it became—withstanding brutal crackdowns, including live fire—were the hundreds of resistance committees, these informal groups bonded together in friendship and family. Those organizational affiliations, the bedrock of the protests, provided each protester the logistical support and the willpower they needed to stay on the streets. They went out to the streets each day because their best friend was out, or their schoolteacher was out, or even their grandmother was out.[24]

Organizers looking to do the same should evaluate for themselves: how are the people who are turning out to my protest—or who I want to turn out—bonded together? Do they have schools or mosques or neighborhood associations that I can organize together to push them to the streets?

For more on creating coalitions and designing decentralized organizational structures, see Chapter 2, "Coalitions and Allies."

Using Diverse Participation. Working to build diverse participation not only can help mobilize people in large numbers to the streets; it can also protect them once they're out there. We have seen across historical examples and contemporary cases that those most marginalized by society are also the easiest for the regime to brutalize and terrorize off the streets without political cost—and in turn, it becomes much harder for the regime to successfully crack down on a movement when those with traditionally more power join in. We call these people "**strategic allies**," because of their outsized role in simultaneously growing the power of a movement and sapping the power of the prevailing political leadership.[25]

During the Civil Rights movement in the US, for example, police forces mercilessly deployed water cannons, bully clubs, and tear gas against protests that were majority-black, but then backed off those tactics noticeably once white protesters began to join the demonstrations.

As such, the protests were able to stay on the streets longer and with less bloodshed than they otherwise would have. Sixty years later, we saw this same tactic play out across the US once again, with white protesters forming the perimeter of marches and sit-ins in order to insulate people of color from attacks by the police during the protests this summer.[26] And in a similar vein, during Egypt's 2011 revolution Muslim protesters volunteered to surround their fellow Coptic Christians as they prayed, so that security forces could not launch an attack during the service.[27] For a more thorough discussion of strategic allies, see Chapter 2, "Coalitions and Allies" of this report.

Factor II: Use of Community and Love. When we asked activists in contexts as varied as Sudan and Belarus, to Venezuela and Tunisia, about how they were able to stay in the streets day after day, we often received a similar answer: that they felt deeply in community with their fellow protesters. There was some transcendental "X factor" to the protest that gave the movement a spirit and a life, that injected it with joy. **The organizers had created a communion on the streets that not only made the protests bearable, but beautiful.**[28] There is certainly no one-stop shop for creating community within a protest, but throughout the course of our research we compiled examples from around the world of times when it has happened, either intentionally or organically.

EXAMPLE 1: ART AND COMMUNITY IN SUDAN

After the military finally turned on President al-Bashir in April 2019, it initially refused to negotiate with the protesters to form a transitional government. In response, the protesters launched a prolonged sit-in outside the military's headquarters until the military finally agreed to negotiate. Despite crammed quarters and long lines for food, many activists who took part in the protest remember it fondly as an expression of unbridled joy and unity. Here are what they remember as contributing to that sense of community:

1. **Artist corners** sprouted up along the periphery of the sit-in, where open-air galleries showcased work from around the country. The galleries also became a way to educate the protesters on the full pain and tragedy that had occurred throughout the country during Bashir's reign. Sudanese activists recalled hearing about the genocide in Darfur for the first time through exhibitions that showcased the atrocities.[29]

2. **Street art** also became a way to grapple with the immense toll that the revolution had taken on the protesters. Graffiti artists and painters often painted the faces of Sudanese who had died throughout the course of the protests on walls and the sides of buildings. Their families described seeing these memorials as a profoundly cathartic experience.[30]

3. **Speakers and young leaders were given designated speaking areas,**

where they could stand up and share ideas, express their passions, and teach others about their stories. One young leader now serving as a minister in the transitional government recalled finding her voice and a renewed sense of empowerment at her area.

4. **Music** was also an important—and constant—feature of the sit-in. Each night would feature music circles or even concerts put on by reggae artists, pop stars, a violin orchestra, and even a soldier with a saxophone. One protester in particular kept up a Sufi-inspired drumbeat for almost the entirety of the protest; a Sudan Advisor at Freedom House described his drumbeat as creating "some sort of spiritual connection, particularly among the people. The protesters became like a family, it bridged a gap, created connections beyond just the protest."[31]

Art's presence during the sit-in also served two organizing roles in particular. One, dates and times of protests would often be painted into murals to give protesters important logistical information. And two, it helped crystallize for the movement what exactly its collective vision was. As one nonviolent resistance expert at USIP put it: "Art can provide a unifying center for the many different specific goals and agendas . . . Few people may read a movement's hundred-page manifesto, but everyone can recognize the colors, songs, and images that movements draw upon to tell their supporters who they are and what they want."[32]

EXAMPLE 2: POETRY AND POST-MARCH DINNERS IN BELARUS

During the ongoing protests in Belarus to oust longtime dictator President Alexander Lukashenko, the protesters have similarly been surprised by the community they built during the movement. While the heart of Sudan's community lied in the sit-in, in Belarus it has been built from apartment to apartment. Belarusians recalled meeting their neighbors for the first time on the streets of the protests, even though they may have lived alongside them for years. From building to building, small communities began to pop up within the context of the protests. Many Belarusians have started hosting post-march dinners in their apartment bloc courtyards with each other, holding poetry readings or holiday decoration parties, along with concerts and musical nights. The use of poetry in particular has struck a poignant chord for many Belarusians, who are famous for expressing themselves through the medium. They were able to take a beloved national pride and retrofit it as a means of protest and community-building. From apartment to apartment, they are keeping each other and the movement alive.[33]

One of the most powerful uses of love and community in protests, as shown above, was best articulated by Howard Thurman, a theologian and mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. According to Thurman, the most powerful application of community and love in a movement was its ability to allow a movement to imagine for itself a new reality beyond the world they are currently struggling to change. As Wake Forest Professor Corey D. B. Walker put Thurman's philosophy, engaging with the "discourse of love within the register of the sacred" allows the "opportunity to creatively think love and by extension open the terrain of thought to new possibilities of thinking the world and human experience."[34]

While the examples above can help set the tone for what is possible, for organizers wishing to create that same sense of community and love, we suggest looking inward first. Think about:

1. Who are you in community with?
2. What do you do together that brings you joy and vitality? Is it poetry or music, humor or the visual arts, prayer or sports? And
3. How can those moments of joy and community be injected into the protest to create that communal love?

Like we said, sometimes that community simply happens organically—there may just be some magic moment where someone strikes a chord that resonates, and others pick up that song. But at the same time, organizers can help set the tone, create the space, amplify the message, and help facilitate those expressions of love and joy. As another of Saul Alinsky's rules on power tactics goes: "A good tactic is one that your people enjoy. If your people are not having a ball doing it, there is something very wrong with it."[35]

"If a human being dreams a great dream, dares to love somebody; if a human being dares to be Martin King, or Mahatma Gandhi, or Mother Theresa, or Malcom X; if a human being dares to be bigger than the condition into which she or he was born—it means so can you. And so you can try to stretch, stretch, stretch yourself so you can internalize, "Homo sum, humani nil a me alienum puto." I am a human being, nothing human can be alien to me.

–Dr. Maya Angelou

Factor III: A Holistic Approach to Sustainability. Most of this section so far has talked about how to mobilize people to protest, and then what to do with them when they're on the streets. However, there's another component to keeping a protest movement alive: the actual mechanics of keeping potentially millions of people physically able to remain on the street.

By protesting, citizens have decided to step outside of their normal relationship with the government and their society; they have ruptured the social contract, and as such the services and benefits normally given to those citizens by the state are now denied. To put it in more concrete terms, a woman who chose to join the

sit-in in Sudan has, as a consequence, decided to no longer go to her job, to make money to buy food or shelter, to have access to health insurance, medical care, or even bathrooms. There is an entire universe of *things* that she will need in order to participate, and it's the job of an organizer to provide them so that she can remain active in the sit-in. That organizer, in a way, must set up a viable alternative society within the protest itself. As Professor Chenoweth put it, "movements have gained civic strength when they have developed alternative institutions to build self-sufficiency and address community problems that governments have neglected or ignored."[36] And Gandhi coined this tactic the "constructive program," considering it as important to a movement's success as noncooperation.[37] While these are certainly not the only ones, below is a checklist of the ways organizers have provided an alternative to the services that a protester would normally receive but now needs in order to remain actively demonstrating.

A CHECKLIST OF ALTERNATIVE SERVICES

- ☑ **Defense from the State**. Protesters will predictably come into contact with the state in one form or fashion during a protest, and they will often need support—both financially and professionally—to deal with its fallout. In Charlotte, a jail support group was started after the 2016 police shooting of Keith Lamont Scott, a Black man. It not only provides bail money to protesters arrested in the course of the demonstrations that ensued, but also case assistance by public defenders and free housing while appearing in court.[38]

- ☑ **Physical nourishment**. In Sudan, protesters mobilized to freely provide water, regular meals, medical assistance, and sleeping provisions to the entirety of the sit-in outside of the military headquarters. In one kitchen alone, which took over a university building, the protesters made 250 pounds of beef, 220 pounds each of lentils and fava beans, along with 16,000 loaves of bread a day. And in some cases, the medical tents were better stocked with drugs and doctors on call than in Sudan's actual hospitals, thanks to donations from the vast Sudanese diaspora.[39]

- ☑ **Safety**. The Sudanese protesters also made sure that the protests stayed overwhelmingly nonviolent. The organizers established checkpoints in the perimeter of the sit-in, where volunteer patrols would frisk anyone who entered and confiscate weapons.[40]

- ☑ **Financial support**. In Belarus, companies and individuals have banded together to help with the protest's financial fallout. Tech companies in Minsk have started offering salaries to police officers who quit their jobs in protest. Protesters have directed each other to visit restaurants whose owners have been beaten or threatened by the police as a result of donating meals. One flower shop owner was tortured for handing out free

flowers to women during a protest—the next day, there was a line around the block of patrons waiting to buy flowers in solidarity. And in Sudan, the sit-in was largely financed by professionals in the community with extra savings and by Sudan's diaspora, who donated enormous sums from abroad.[41]

- ☑ **Mental health**. Activists we spoke to have suffered a variety of mental and emotional consequences as a result of repression by the state, from insomnia and depression, to post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety. One cultural activist in Belarus put her country's mental health state bluntly: "we are all on pills." While this report will stay away from prescribing advice or treatments, it is important to acknowledge that mental health is a factor that organizers must be aware of and should think about providing resources for. Some movements have explicitly provided access to mental health professionals. Others have simply created support groups or just encouraged each other to talk and name what they have been feeling.[42]

- ☑ **Family support**. In Belarus, neighbors have begun taking turns looking after each other's children in order to allow their parents to go protest. They have also made plans to take care of and/or hide each other's children should their parents be arrested or the juvenile police come to take the children away in retaliation for protesting.[43]

Factor IV: Commitment to the Cause. As has been gestured to above, sustained protests are enormously costly on those out in the streets. It can take their liberty, their livelihoods, and their lives. Activists around the world have been tortured, imprisoned, placed on house arrest, threatened, beaten, brutalized, and murdered for attempting to freely expressing their beliefs.[44] A Syrian activist we spoke to suffered two rounds of torture before eventually fleeing the country as a refugee. Another interviewee in Belarus had to hide with her young son in the back of a McDonald's to evade a search party of police for hours—they were eventually smuggled out through the basement, and she remains so terrified that she no longer leaves the house.

Protesters in the US have similarly felt the economic and physical brunt of protesting. No matter if you live under a freely elected government or brutal regime, **sustaining a protest takes enormous commitment—if protesters do not feel an intense loyalty and devotion to the cause, they will likely not see continuing it in their interests.** In our research, we heard over and over again in places like Belarus and Sudan that part of what kept people in the streets was the profound belief that living in a world without regime change would be far worse than torture or detention. One activist in Syria noted that he and his friends felt that death was preferable to life under President al-Assad.

One element that researchers and experts have found crucial to generating commitment is perceptions of the movement's legitimacy. As two experts in nonviolent resistance noted:

> "A movement perceived as legitimate encourages greater mobilization because the population is attracted to its values and goals; fear of the consequences of disobedience begins to transform into enthusiastic commitment when people see their fellow citizens participate and share in a movement's risks, dangers, and rewards."[45]

They note that perceptions of legitimacy can create a "virtuous cycle of mobilization," by which the more the movement gains legitimacy, the greater its numbers grow, thus increasing its legitimacy, and so on.

Like building community in a protest movement, it's impossible to write a recipe prescribing exactly how to generate legitimacy, and thus commitment—however, it is certainly something that can be evaluated, and that organizers can take as a warning sign that the health of their protest movement may be in trouble should they find those elements lacking. As one expert at USIP emphasized, organizers must constantly question for themselves: "how serious are the participants, and how willing to continue to push for their goals are they, even when it's costly to do so? Have movement members continued to engage in action even when there has been repression? Even when there is personal, significant levels of cost, do they continue to engage?"[46] If the answer to these questions is no, organizers may have to plan for the day when their protest wanes sooner than they may like.

Factor V: The Use of Tactics Designed to Evade Dispersal and Repression. Another crucial element that can make or break a movement's ability to stay on the streets is the actual tactical choices that its organizers make. Activists around the world told us stories about how **they were the most successful at remaining on the streets when they were able to deploy tactics that disrupted the state's traditional methods of dispersal or repression.** Or, as Saul Alinsky put it in his third rule of power tactics: "wherever possible, go outside the experience of the enemy. Here you want to cause confusion, fear, and retreat."[47] Those innovative and creative tactical choices have allowed activists to evade detention, mitigate violence, confound state forces, and thus remain in public and on camera in force.

Moreover, carefully choosing such tactics has never been more important. Just as activists around the world have innovated ways to build power, so have their governments become savvier about stymying those efforts. Repressive regimes around the world have learned the hard lesson that outright violence, torture, and purges can often lead to more backlash than it's worth, and that subtler forms of repression may be more effective in the end.[48]

Organizers must look out for the steps that their governments are taking to impede their movement's efforts, and to generate tactics to combat them. While there are countless examples of protest tactics that can achieve that goal—and links to them are included on this

report's webpage—we have chosen to include some below that highlight the most interesting features of successful protest tactics in the 21st century.

Physical Decentralization. Perhaps the most widely discussed, and replicated, recent innovation in protest tactics comes from Hong Kong. Pro-democracy Hong Kong protesters have become famous for a type of decentralized protest they describe as "moving like water," by which the protest itself moves fluidly throughout a city or neighborhood. Directed in real-time by organizers using platforms like Telegram, where one channel alone can gather up to millions of followers, protesters will seemingly pop up, demonstrate, and dissolve at random throughout the city. Their ability to move spontaneously, dissolve on command, and pop up at locations dropped only minutes before over social media has allowed them to evade the police and stay on the streets for hours on end.[49]

Going Online. When the government's tactics finally became too brutal for Hong Kongers on the street, they did what has only become possible in recent history: they went online. And quite innovatively, one of the places they went to was a "protest island" on the video game Animal Crossing.[50] While online and alternative protest spaces like the protest island may not be as viscerally overwhelming, they can still hold a strong command over the public's attention—think thousands of black squares "blacking out" Instagram feeds in the US over the summer symbolizing solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives. Hong Kong's protest island, for its part, finally became so irksome to the Chinese regime that the game is now officially banned in China.[51]

Sudanese artists similarly used digital media as a means of protest during the 2019 revolution. One notable campaign was called "Blue for Sudan," which would turn users' profiles blue to show solidarity with the killing of activist Hashim Mattar during the June 3 massacre.[52] And in Thailand, Facebook has become a central coordination hub for the ongoing protest movement. In fact, a Facebook group of 1 million Thai followers dedicated to discussing the monarchy and calling for political change enraged the Thai government so much that it demanded the company take it down.[53]

As one important caveat, we have found in our own research and in the literature a wariness on leaning too heavily on social media as an organizing tool. As Dr. Maria J. Stephan put it in

CONNECTION POINT: MOVING LIKE WATER IN BELARUS, TOO

Belarus's ongoing protests against President Lukashenko has notably taken up Hong Kong's innovation. Via Telegram, a media group called Nexta—which is run almost solely by a 22-year-old Belarusian blogger out of Poland—has facilitated much of the protest's movements as it is happening. Nexta will drop a location and time perhaps just a half-day before the protest is set to begin, and as the protest progresses Nexta will update the marchers with the locations of the police, where best to turn in the city, and where to find safe houses and lawyers should the protest be dispersed. It also sets community guidelines for the protests, emphasizing nonviolence or sometimes telling the protesters to wear all white or carry flowers and balloons.[59]

her article, "Five Myths about Protest Movements:"

> [W]hile Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have made protesting easier and mobilization faster, social media has not necessarily helped activists build durable organizations or foster long-term planning. These structures were critical to helping the Polish Solidarity movement endure martial law in the early 1980s, and more recently, grassroots organizing helped the Sudanese popular movement survive violent crackdowns by government forces and paramilitary groups. Movements that lack such attributes are vulnerable.[54]

Movements that rely too heavily on digital tools are also vulnerable to crackdown by more repressive regimes, who have proven willing and capable to shut down social media sites, or even the Internet altogether.

In all, protesting online through social media is important, but it's not a shortcut. There is no replacement for doing the organizing legwork needed to build a durable, structure on the streets.

Artistic Expressions. In addition to building community, using art as protest can be an effective way to tactically help the protest sustain itself on the streets. Belarusians have used mass poetry readings, concerts, and public art reveals as ways to protest, while also confounding the police. The police forces have notably been more reluctant to break up such expressions because they aren't sure whether what is happening in front of them is a rock concert or a demonstration against the government—or, usually, both.

In one infamous instance of protest art from Serbia's Otpor movement in the 2000s against the country's dictator Slobodan Milosevic, protest leaders set up a barrel with Milosevic's face painted on it and encouraged passers-by to hit it. A crowd of angered Serbs formed to hit the barrel, eventually attracting the eye of the police. Hitting a barrel was not technically illegal, but the police felt that they needed to do something to stop it—*so they arrested the barrel*. Photos of the arrest were so outlandish and absurd that the story rocketed around the world, humiliating the police and bringing new vigor to the protests.[55]

Gender-Specific Tactics. Of the many reasons why it's important for women leaders to be at the helm of protest movements—including the fact that women have organized more nonviolent campaigns for peace in the past decade than any other group[56]—it also allows for a greater diversity of tactics. In Belarus, the ongoing protests against President Alexander Lukashenko have featured dedicated protests for grandmothers and pensioners every Monday,[57] along with protests dominated by women wearing white and carrying flowers and balloons.[58] Both have been notably met with very little resistance by police forces. And back in the US, the protests this summer were speckled with "Moms against police violence" marches. Especially in patriarchal societies, women have been able to subvert the narrative placed on them as precious and fragile things to be protected for the sake of their movement's sustainability. To put it in blunt terms: no police officer wants to beat an old woman if he can avoid it.

PRINCIPLE: A BRIEF NOTE ON TACTIC DIVERSIFICATION

As we noted earlier, even though this chapter focuses predominantly on protests and other forms of direct action, there is reason to be wary of leaning too heavily on such tactics. In the wake of this era of mass mobilization enabled by social media and other digital technologies, experts have begun cautioning against an overreliance on marches, demonstrations, and other forms of direct action. To Professor Chenoweth:

> In the digital age, such actions can draw participants in large numbers even without any structured organizing coalition to carry out advanced planning and coordination communication. But mass demonstrations are not always the most effective way of applying pressure to elites, particularly when they are not sustained over time. Other techniques of noncooperation, such as general strikes and stay-at-homes, can be much more disruptive to economic life and thus elicit more immediate concessions. It is often quiet, behind-the-scenes planning and organizing that enable movements to mobilize in force over the long term, and to coordinate and sequence tactics in a way that builds participation, leverage, and power.[60]

As her note of warning suggests, it has become clear just how crucial it is to deploy a diverse array of tactics, sometimes at the same time. As Alán de León, an organizer with MoveTexas in Houston, put it:

> Everyone is looking for opportunities to do something, and it's the organizer's job to create those opportunities. Maybe one person is willing to sign a petition, someone else is willing to show up at the mayor's house. You have to create those opportunities. . . . opportunities that fit people and their interests and how they want to get involved. And as you're doing that, you're building community power and strength that's needed to get strength and [the] respect of community officials.[61]

Per Alán's insight, when thinking about sustainability, organizers must create a variety of opportunities for mobilization. Protesters may no longer be willing or able to show up on the streets day after day, but they might be willing to cook meals or donate to bail support programs.

Experts at USIP identified this very dynamic as one of the key reasons the 2019 Sudanese revolution succeeded: "The protesters diversified tactics and alternated between methods that concentrated people in large numbers (sit-ins, marches, demonstrations) and marches that were spread out and dispersed (strikes, boycotts, stay-aways). Dispersed tactics made it more diffi-

cult for the Bashir regime to repress the movement."[62]

Central to the organizers' strategy was a *willingness to reimagine what was possible for their protesters to do*. For instance, when the military finally agreed to negotiate with the protesters to transition to civilian rule, the protesters began acting as de facto investigators to determine which soldiers they found to be adequate negotiators—if they found that one soldier in particular had a particularly egregious track record or was not actually committed to the revolution, they would pressure their leaders to refuse to negotiate until that soldier had been blacklisted.[63]

CONCLUSION

Mobilizing a protest is a complex, difficult, and treacherous exercise—sustaining one is an even steeper climb. However, there are some general principles and tools organizers can use to (1) keep their protests alive for as long as possible, and then (2) leverage the power of that protest to build a long-term, sustainable organizing apparatus that will give them the heft they need in the negotiating room to successfully assert their interests. Doing so requires careful planning, an understanding of both the movement and the political leadership's relative capabilities and interests, and an eye for opportunity.

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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

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THE BIG TRAP

When (and When Not) to Negotiate

A ONE-PAGER

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

What is the Big Trap? Over and over in our research we saw a troubling dynamic emerge when movements agreed to negotiate with the political leadership they were trying to move: that the agreement to negotiate, or the act of negotiating, could break the movement's momentum, thereby diminishing the very leverage it needed to successfully assert its interests at the table. Without sustained pressure on the political leadership to agree to the movement's demands, those negotiations would then break down.

Why does this matter? Negotiations can be a core part of a movement's organizing strategy. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Saul Alinsky, one of the fathers of community organizing, advocated using direct action and protest for the express purpose of sitting down at the negotiation table across from the political leadership with a strong enough hand to get what you want. The Big Trap stands as a cautionary tale: not all offers to negotiate should be pursued or accepted.

Why does this happen, and what should organizers look out for? Sometimes movements simply don't yet have the long-term, durable power to withstand what can sometimes be weeks or months of policy negotiation. But other times, the political leadership a movement is trying to move may use an offer to negotiate as a means to break its momentum. Organizers should look out for signs of intentional slow-walking; offers with strings attached; signs that the offer to negotiate is simply a divide-and-conquer tactic; and signs that an offer to join a government commission, group, or project would just be inclusion in name only.

How do I avoid the Big Trap? In short, preparation. But not in the way you might think. We suggest doing everything possible in the run-up to a negotiation to (1) strengthen your hand at the table and (2) weaken theirs. We suggest doing three things in particular:

1. **Build up your ability to walk away** with little consequence (and weaken theirs).
2. **Prepare internally to negotiate.** Figure out: who is representing you? On what issues can they commit? Do you have a unified negotiation strategy?
3. **Structure the table to your advantage.** Think about how you can set preconditions, the agenda, and even the parties to maximize the chances of negotiating a deal that meets your interests.

COALITIONS AND ALLIES

A ONE-PAGER

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

Why should movements choose a decentralized structure? Movements with decentralized structures are well-suited for building power during the early stages of a movement, because they can enable mass mobilization to the streets. No one is waiting around for a leader to say, "go here, and do this." People are able to join how they want, when they want, and in the ways they want to help sustain and maintain the movement's power. However, a decentralized structure can become a liability if movements wish to negotiate, exactly because of its leaderlessness and loose bonds.

So what should movements that want to negotiate do? when a movement has reached this point in its strategy, we think it becomes paramount that organizers work to consolidate their coalitions before stepping into the negotiation room.

Why are coalitions important? In short, greater numbers on the street means greater power at the negotiation table; protests and other direct actions like it can be a visceral and effective way to demonstrate a movement's popular legitimacy, its sheer people power, and the potential for that movement to levy consequences on a political leader should that leader walk from the negotiation table. And when it comes to getting people to the street, building coalitions with other organizations is essential.

How should a movement think about allyship? Forming alliances both with people that you like (and sometimes with people that you don't) can be the difference that tips the scale in your favor. And they're important because just as one individual alone does not make a movement, often one community can't either. In short, movements need allies. Here's how we suggest thinking about which ones you'll need:

1. **Natural allies**. The people who understand your cause and are sympathetic to it. They're the easiest to build support in, mobilize out onto the streets, and engage in other tactical actions. Basically, they're your buddies.

2. **Strategic allies**. These individuals and groups, by contrast, are closest to the political leadership, those who help prop it up the most. They may not naturally overlap with all of your interests, but it's absolutely essential that you peel them off, because it saps the power of the political leadership and gets you new power that you might not otherwise have.

SUSTAINABILITY

A ONE-PAGER

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

Why is sustainability important? It is a long-held truth of protests that for them to be effective, they need to have sustained, mass mobilization. And in the world of negotiation, sustaining a movement means sustaining the leverage and power that organizers need to push their political leaders to say yes to a deal.

For that reason, for movements relying heavily or solely on protest, it's crucial that organizers keep up their momentum not only to get into the negotiation room, but throughout the negotiation itself.

How do you keep your people on the streets? We identified five factors that can help protesters stay on the streets, avoid repression, and grow the protest's numbers:

1. **A commitment to cultivating diverse participation** across all sectors of society. Bringing a diverse cross-section of society into the action increases the tactics you can deploy, decreases the state's ability to repress you, generates a sense of legitimacy, and increases the entry points into the movement, among others.
2. **Building community and love within the protest movement.** Art, music, and other forms of expression and joy not only keep your people on the street. They can make your protest a party that people never want to leave (literally).
3. **A holistic approach to sustainability**. People going out into the street every day means they're probably not working. If the movement wants to keep them there, they must literally sustain their bodies, and their wallets, in addition to their joy.
4. **Commitment to the cause.** Protesting is hard, and it can be dangerous, and it takes grit. Organizers must make a persuasive case to their people for why they should withstand weeks, or months, of potential economic, emotional, and physical harm.
5. **The use of tactics designed to evade dispersal and repression.** In other words, what tactics step so outside the realm of the police force's normal playbook for dispersal, such that they no longer know what to do?

Will this ensure my movement's success? No. Sometimes, the issue simply isn't "ripe," or the political leadership is so "closed" that even the largest and longest sustained movements couldn't move them. However, these factors can increase the odds that your movement is able to sustain a direct action like a protest as long as possible.

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.