



PROTEST RESILIENCE TOOLKIT





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NOTE TO USERS

The information contained in this toolkit has been sourced from a combination of published reports, existing toolkits and interviews conducted with activists and members of civil society from around the world. Please note that the documented tactics and strategies may be context dependent: what works in one country may not work in another. Please consider your national context before implementing protest tactics and strategies and, where possible, seek guidance from other protest movements, civil society organisations working on issues related to the right to protest, or human rights lawyers.



CIVICUS is a global alliance of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society throughout the world.

We were established in 1993 and since 2002 have been proudly headquartered in Johannesburg, South Africa, with additional hubs across the globe. We are a membership alliance with more than 4,000 members in more than 175 countries.

Our definition of civil society is broad and covers non-governmental organisations, activists, civil society coalitions and networks, protest and social movements, voluntary bodies, campaigning organisations, charities, faith-based groups, trade unions and philanthropic foundations.

Our membership is diverse, spanning a wide range of issues, sizes and organisation types.

This toolkit was prepared and compiled by CIVICUS, assisted by Rebecca Slip and Michael Power and Brynne Guthrie from [ALT Advisory](#).

The toolkit is available both in PDF format and in an evolving interactive online platform [here](#).



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YOUR RIGHT TO PROTEST

In terms of international law, the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and expression are recognised in various treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (see [here](#)). Together, these rights constitute the right to protest. To better define the right to protest, the United Nations and regional mechanisms, such as the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, have developed international standards, which include 10 general principles that apply before, during and after a protest.

HUMAN RIGHTS MUST BE RESPECTED WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION

As a starting point, states must respect and ensure that the human rights of protesters are protected, without discrimination on the basis of any prohibited ground in law such as race, skin colour, gender, sexuality, language, religion or social origin. Additionally, where ambiguity exists in the text of domestic laws relating to the right to protest, the ambiguous provisions must be interpreted in favour of allowing protests to take place. In ensuring

that the right to protest can be fully exercised, states must provide the necessary support to, and sufficient oversight of, the police and any other authorities involved in managing protest, at all levels of government (see [here](#)). States are also responsible for the conduct of non-state actors such as private security service providers that may manage protests on the state's behalf.

EVERY PERSON HAS THE RIGHT TO PROTEST

In terms of this principle, every person has the inalienable right – a right that cannot be taken away – to take part in a protest, provided that it is peaceful.

DID YOU KNOW?

The United Nations Human Rights Committee, which is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, is currently preparing a General Comment on the Right of Peaceful Assembly and will ask the public to comment on it. The General Comment, once finalised, will provide definitive international guidance on the right to protest (see [here](#)).

All protests should be presumed to be lawful and a broad interpretation of the term peaceful should be afforded to protesters. Protests should be facilitated within sight and sound of their target and no person should be held criminally, civilly, or administratively responsible for the mere act of organising or participating in a protest (see [here](#), paragraphs 18–27). The right to protest is a right that applies to individuals but which has a collective element. Where a protester or a group of protesters are engaging in acts of violence, those protesters should be removed from a protest and the broader protest should be allowed to continue.

ONLY LIMITED RESTRICTIONS MAY APPLY

As a general rule, the right to protest should not be limited in any way. However, the exercise of the right to protest may have an effect on the exercise of the rights of other people who are not involved in a protest, such as the right to the freedom of movement. Any restrictions imposed on a protest must comply with international standards, and restrictions should be limited to the greatest extent possible. Any restrictions to the right to protest must be lawful, necessary, proportionate and applied without discrimination. The onus of justifying a limitation of the right to protest rests with the imposing authority, such as the police. Where a limitation has been imposed, protesters must have the right to judicial or administrative review of the decision to impose the limitation in a prompt, competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal in order to vindicate their rights (see [here](#)).

STATES MUST FACILITATE PROTESTS

Central to the right to protest is the obligation on states to facilitate the exercise of the right. There is a positive obligation on states to ensure that the right to protest is

“PROTESTERS SHOULD NEVER BE CHARGED A ‘PROTEST FEE’ TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHT TO PROTEST.”

facilitated and promoted. This obligation includes the provision of basic services, such as traffic management, medical assistance and clean-up services. Protest organisers should not be held responsible for the provision or costs of such services and should never be charged a ‘protest fee’. Charging a fee to protest equates to a state demanding payment for the exercise of fundamental human rights, and this should never be permitted. Additionally, the stop-and-search or arrest of protesters must not be arbitrary or violate the principle of non-discrimination (see [here](#), paragraphs 37–48).

FORCE SHOULD ONLY BE USED IF STRICTLY UNAVOIDABLE

The use of force, such as arrests, or the use of less-lethal weapons, should not be imposed against protesters unless strictly unavoidable. If force is applied by a state it must be done in accordance with international law. States are obligated under international law to respect and protect, without discrimination, the rights

“THE USE OF FORCE MUST ALWAYS BE LAWFUL, PROPORTIONATE AND NECESSARY, AND LEAST INTRUSIVE AND LEAST VIOLENT FORCE MUST FIRST BE APPLIED.”

of all protesters, as well as protest monitors, bystanders and journalists, including citizen journalists. The use of force can violate this obligation. If force is used, the principle of legality requires states to develop a domestic legal framework for the use of force, especially potentially lethal force, that complies with international standards. Additionally, the use of force must always be proportionate and necessary, and least intrusive and least violent force must first be applied. States must establish effective reporting and review procedures to address any incident during a protest in which the potentially unlawful use of force occurs (see [here](#), paragraphs 50–66).

EVERY PERSON CAN OBSERVE, MONITOR AND RECORD PROTESTS

In order to ensure accountability and promote the rights to freedom of assembly and expression, every person enjoys the right to observe, monitor and record protests, whether or not they are part of the protest itself. This right includes the right to record law enforcement operations and to record a police officer who is filming you. The right to record or report on a protest does not apply only to accredited journalists. Citizen journalists and members of the public can record protests, without any need for accreditation or permission. Human rights violations against monitors, bystanders and people recording or reporting on a protest should be fully investigated and, where necessary, prosecuted (see [here](#), paragraphs 68–71).

THE COLLECTION OF PERSONAL INFORMATION MUST BE LAWFUL

The collection and processing by states and policing authorities of personal information, such as through recording devices, closed-circuit TV and undercover policing, must comply with all protections against arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy. Legislation and policies regulating the collection and processing of information relating to protests or their organisers and participants must incorporate legality, necessity and proportionality tests. Mass or indiscriminate surveillance of protesters online and offline should be prohibited. Restrictions applied to online access or expression must be necessary and proportionate and applied by a body independent of any political, commercial, or other unwarranted influences (see [here](#), paragraphs 73–77).

EVERY PERSON HAS THE RIGHT TO ACCESS INFORMATION

In order to be fully informed about the right to protest and to encourage civic empowerment, the public should have easy, prompt, effective and practical

access to information related to protests, including policing policies and guidelines relating to the use of force, data collection and retention and the recording of assemblies. Legalisation facilitating such access should be based on the principle of maximum disclosure, establishing a presumption that information is always accessible and subject only to limited exceptions. Exceptions, which must always be justified, should only apply where it is not in the public interest for the information to be disclosed (see [here](#), paragraphs 79–81).

THE RIGHT TO PROTEST IN PRIVATE SPACES

With the increasing privatisation of public space in many contexts, protests in privately owned spaces that are accessible to the public or fulfil a public purpose, such as shopping centres or private prisons, should be permitted, in line with the full enjoyment of the right to protest. Equally, businesses have a responsibility to respect human rights, including the right to protest. This requires that businesses avoid causing or contributing to human rights violations through their activities. States have a duty to take appropriate measures to prevent and investigate human rights violations by businesses and provide effective remedies for violations. This applies to private security service providers and other non-state actors (see [here](#), paragraphs 83–87).

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2012, the United Nations stated that the “same rights that people have offline must also be protected online, in particular freedom of expression, which is applicable regardless of frontiers and through any media of one’s choice” (see [here](#)).

“PROTESTS IN PRIVATELY OWNED SPACES THAT ARE ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC OR FULFIL A PUBLIC PURPOSE, SUCH AS SHOPPING CENTRES OR PRIVATE PRISONS, SHOULD BE PERMITTED.”

ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE RIGHT TO A REMEDY

States are obliged to provide people whose rights have been violated in a protest with adequate, effective and prompt remedies for human rights violations, including violations of the right to protest. Remedies, such as release from unlawful detention or compensation, should be determined by a competent and independent authority, such as a court. States must ensure that any remedies determined by the authority are implemented. Liability for human rights violations should extend to police officers with command-control of a protest, when they have failed to exercise effective command and control. Reparations must be provided by states to victims or survivors of acts or omissions that can be attributed to the state and that constitute gross violations of international law (see [here](#), paragraphs 89–95).



TACTICS FOR OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

In closed civic spaces, often civil society organisations and protest movements face numerous challenges that hamper their ability to organise and hold protests and deal with the aftermath of protests. These challenges include the outright banning of protests, violence experienced during protests and the arrest and detention of protesters. Protest movements need to be strategic and creative to overcome these challenges. Based on the previous experiences of movements and protesters, there are numerous tactics that can be used to minimise the detrimental effects of these challenges.

OPENING CLOSED PROTEST SPACES

States where the space for civil society (civic space) is closed often ban specific civil society organisations or prohibit protest completely (see [here](#)). However, protest is a crucial way of expressing dissatisfaction with the state and social conditions. It is often the only mechanism through which people who are living in poverty or are otherwise marginalised or vulnerable can express their dissent and make their voices heard. Bans make it difficult for people to organise and participate in protests and mean that those who do risk arrest and police

DID YOU KNOW?

The social uprising against Serbian dictator, Slobodan Milosevic, continued for nearly four years before he was eventually ousted in 2000. Over such a long period of time, the movement leading the uprising, Otpor!, faced countless challenges, including the sheer military might of the government but persevered nonetheless. Leaders said that “[we] were small and powerless in the beginning, compared to the regime. We couldn’t use force on someone who . . . had three times more force and weapons than we did. We knew what had happened in . . . Tiananmen, where the army plowed over students with tanks” (see [here](#)).

brutality. In conditions of closed civic space, often civil society organisations cannot hold meetings, rent office space or openly spread their messages. It is important to act strategically to ensure that dissent can occur without individuals having to open themselves up to harm and face state reprisals.

GRASSROOTS PARTNERSHIPS

In Azerbaijan, where civic space is closed (see [here](#)), protest movements often start as grassroots movements that lobby local authorities to address specific concerns. These movements are generally not banned as they are not formalised and they do not generally express their dissatisfaction through conventional protest methods as they do not have the numbers to do so. Rather, they use knowledge of local pressure points to get their grievances across. Civil society organisations and concerned individuals can support these grassroots movements by spreading their messages and stories on social media and amongst their networks. Such actions may not be deemed as unlawful because they generally do not violate domestic laws that restrict civic space.

LAWFUL INNOVATION

Where it is formally prohibited to advocate for banned causes, there may be lawful ways that messages can be spread. For instance, in Azerbaijan, members of civil society organisations nominate their members to run for political office during local and national elections. In campaigning for office, these members are able to spread the message of their movements lawfully. This can happen on large and small scales. Progressive messages can form part of formalised campaigns and, over time, candidates may be elected to office. Candidates also sometimes go door-to-door attempting to convince people to sympathise with or join civil society organisations and movements.

“WHEN PROTESTS ARE BANNED, IT MAY BE NECESSARY TO TURN EVERYDAY LIFE INTO A PROTEST.”

attention and express dissent. For example, when New York City authorities started re-enforcing a 1920s anti-cabaret law to close live music venues in the 1990s, dance flash mobs were organised in protest (see [here](#)).

When protests are banned, it may be effective to turn everyday life into a protest. Spontaneous performances of everyday acts can catch people’s



MASS ACTION

Sometimes the conditions in states necessitate mass protest even when such actions are deemed illegal by domestic laws. While such so-called illegal action may cause repressive state responses, it is clear that if such protests occur, they should be carried out peacefully and in large numbers to ensure their effectiveness. It is difficult to arrest all of the protesters in a mass movement. This means that a unifying issue should be chosen to ensure that as many people as possible join the protest. For instance, in Azerbaijan, where protests are banned, the main mass protests were about military conditions. This was a unifying issue as military service is compulsory in Azerbaijan. Similarly, in Sudan, mass action has taken place in 2019 to demand an end to military rule following the repressive and extended dictatorship of former President Omar Al-Bashir. In Hong Kong, mass action has been used in 2019 to protest against a proposed law that would allow Hong Kong citizens to be extradited to mainland China, given the real risk that this mechanism would be used for political reasons. At the

time of writing, reports estimate that more than 200,000 protesters have participated in mass action against the proposed law (see [here](#)).

HOLOGRAM PROTESTS AND USE OF ONLINE SPACES

Where people are prohibited from protesting in specific locations, it may be possible to use technology to protest in these places. In Spain, a law was passed in 2014 prohibiting protest outside government buildings (see [here](#)). In response, projectors were used to beam holograms of people protesting outside the buildings. A similar strategy was used in South Korea by Amnesty International when some protest actions were banned. This tactic can send an important message to governments and draw attention to such bans, helping to fuel public pressure against them (see [here](#), page 31.) Equally, online protest is increasingly occurring in the wake of global restrictions on civic space and, depending on the state of online freedoms, can be a viable tool to express dissent against restrictive regimes.

NOTIFICATION

Many states require that protesters notify the state and its policing authorities of proposed protest actions. Despite recommendations by international institutions such as the UN, some states either explicitly require that prior permission is sought for protests or use the notification system as a guise for requiring permission to protest. Protesters, in terms of international law and standards, do not require permission to exercise any fundamental rights, including the right to protest. Notification is generally justified by the needs of states to put in place proper health and safety and traffic procedures, but when it is used as a proxy for requiring permission, it can stifle the rights to protest and expression (see [here](#), page 49). Where true notification requirements apply, it is recommended that these procedures be complied with. However, where notification systems are abused by states and their policing institutions, there are strategies which can be used to avoid having to notify the authorities of protests.

“IF A NOTIFICATION SYSTEM IS IN PLACE, IT SHOULD ONLY BE USED TO ENABLE FACILITATION OF PUBLIC GATHERINGS.”

SPONTANEOUS PROTESTS

Notification procedures often do not apply to spontaneous protests, and spontaneous protests are recognised in international law. For instance, in South Africa it is not a crime to attend a protest for which no notification has been given, but you are not allowed to convene such a protest without notification, unless the protest arises spontaneously. What constitutes a spontaneous protest is not fully defined. This is a defence that is often used to avoid having to notify the authorities, but should not be used where it is obvious that a protest was not spontaneous (see [here](#)). In Armenia, protesters in the 2018 Velvet Revolution used these tactics. They planned to stop their cars at a specific time to create massive traffic jams and when asked why, stated that their cars had broken down and could not be moved.¹

NON-LOCATION SPECIFIC PROTESTS

It is possible to be disruptive and express dissent without holding a formal mass gathering, march or sit-in. Single acts of dissent carried out by individuals that cumulatively disrupt the functioning of states are not location specific and do not require prior notification or permission from states. This is because it is generally accepted that the actions of an individual do not constitute a protest (see [here](#)). For instance, in Armenia, at a specific time all drivers were asked to hoot if they supported the opposition. Similarly, people who disliked the government were asked to bang on pots and pans at a particular time. These individual acts combined to create a huge amount of noise, which made it difficult for business to carry on as usual and led to more pressure being put on the government. The communication about this strategy took place on social media.² Similar strategies, such as an individual worker go-slows, are often employed by labour movements.

SURVEILLANCE BY POLICE

States regularly undertake overt and covert surveillance of protesters. This helps states track the movements of protesters, intercept their

¹ Based on an interview with a member of a Protest movement in Armenia.

² Based on an interview with a member of a Protest movement in Armenia.

communications and act on knowledge gained this way to undermine protesters' plans. It also enables states to monitor the movements and actions of protest leaders and protest movements, outside of protests, which can create a chilling effect on the right to protest and other fundamental rights. All these state-employed tactics can fuel an environment of fear that discourages people from participating in protests and makes it difficult to communicate effectively on the scale needed to organise large-scale protests (see [here](#), page 86).

SECURE COMMUNICATIONS

Protesters should ensure that communications within their movement and with members of organisational networks is done using fully end-to-end encrypted methods of communication (see [here](#)). End-to-end

DID YOU KNOW?

Members of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in the USA note that one of the biggest challenges they face is constant state surveillance. It is claimed that the federal government has been monitoring protesters since the Ferguson protests in 2014. ZeroFox, a private security company, has also been exposed as carrying out surveillance of protesters and labelling them as 'threat actors' (see [here](#)).

Telegram as this is considered to be a secure communication platform. Signal, accessed through a virtual private network (VPN), has also been used effectively in Ethiopia, The Gambia and Zimbabwe, among others, including during internet shutdowns to ensure continued communications. Careful thought and research should go into deciding which platform is most appropriate in each particular protest's context.³

SECURE CONNECTIONS

Members of protest movements and civil society organisations should also ensure that they use VPNs to create a secure and encrypted network while using less secure infrastructure, such as the public internet. For more information check out:

- [Take Back the Tech Toolkit](#)
- [Our Data Our Selves](#)
- [Data Detox Kit](#)

MOVING MEETINGS

Surveillance of members of protest movements often allows the police to interrupt public and secret meetings held in person, which may violate the right to the freedom of association. This challenge is particularly prevalent in places with closed civic spaces. For instance, in Azerbaijan, meetings have been regularly interrupted and broken-up by the police. In response, the movement did not have any specific office space or location that

it used regularly. Instead it constantly moved its meeting points. Meetings about particularly sensitive topics were held in neighbouring countries to ensure the safety of attendees and protect the secrecy and security of conversations held at meetings. During #FeesMustFall protests held at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, students believed that their meetings were being monitored by private security services on campus. In response, they moved their meetings to various public places around the City of Johannesburg, including Constitution Hill, where private security services had no mandate.

DID YOU KNOW?

During the 2019 protests against Omar Al-Bashir in Sudan, domestic media houses had their credentials removed if they reported on the protests, and social media sites were blocked. Protesters used VPNs to allow them to access social media sites despite them being blocked and used social media to spread crucial information about demonstrations, police violence and political developments (see [here](#)).

³ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Armenia.

INTERNAL DISAGREEMENT OVER APPROACHES AND POLITICS

While dissatisfaction may unite many different people, conflict can occur within movements fighting for the same cause. Members may have strong feelings about the kinds of tactics that should be used, the legitimacy of the use of violence, the political underpinnings of a movement, or who a movement chooses to partner with. While civil society will always be characterised by discussion and debate, conflict and division are difficult to manage as they can split and weaken movements and can cause significant disruptions to the championing of a cause.

UNITY IN TIMES OF PEACE

Mass protests are often made up of multiple movements that band together for a common cause. It is difficult to create relationships based on trust between these movements at the height of protests. Instead, relationships should be built in times of peace when tensions are lower. For instance, the 2011 student protests in Chile were largely successful because they brought together student movements from different universities regardless of the political affiliations of the movements. The same was true of the South African #FeesMustFall student protests in 2015 and 2016. Success was only possible because relationships had been created between the movements in less active times when student movements provided humanitarian assistance during a mining crisis and in aid of cleaning staff. The relationships of trust that had been built during these collaborations were carried through into the student protests.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

There is room within a single movement for people with different political opinions. While focus is often placed on mass action, movements may need to employ a number of strategies to ensure their sustainability. Movements should have both long-term advocacy strategies and short-term protest strategies. Within this framework it is possible to have different interest groups within a movement working towards different aims and lobbying

different external interest groups. It is important that leaders emphasise the purpose of all these strategies and the fact that they can coexist. This conflict management strategy should give every person a role in a movement that suits their political affiliation or level of activism as closely as possible.

CORE MINIMUM STANDARDS

While it is possible to house people with conflicting political values in a single movement, it is crucial that a movement establishes a set of core minimum standards that cut across political opinions and to which all members subscribe. An example of such a standard could be that members will not resort to violence. In this instance, violence must be properly defined, with clarity about whether it includes controversial aspects such as damage to property or responding to violence from the police. Where members fail to meet minimum standards, disciplinary processes should be implemented and public relations should be managed to ensure continued



public support, if possible and where part of a movement's strategy. This works best with formalised civil society movements or established protest movements.

INEXPERIENCED PROTESTERS

Many protest movements, particularly those that represent youth or student causes, are made up of people who have never participated in protests before. It is important to plan for this inexperience to ensure the safety of members of a movement and the efficacy of protests.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

It is important to hold mass meetings to discuss the procedures involved in protesting and to circulate 'know your rights' information and other such useful information. Protest organisers should ensure that everyone knows the route that a protest march will take, what safety measures are in place and how to react if the police are violent or deploy teargas or similar weapons. For instance, because many protesters were participating in mass action for the first time in the Chilean student protests, leaders printed educational material explaining the procedures and safety protocols and held meetings to discuss the details of these. In South Africa, civil society organisations created a hotline for protesters staffed by lawyers called the Right2Protest project (see [here](#)). In Brazil, civil society organisations often hold lunchtime seminars on how to protest and protect yourself from the harmful effects of less-lethal weapons, including appropriate clothing and exit strategies.

MARSHALS AND SAFETY STAFF

It is important to have specially designated staff who can carry out first aid, mark out the route that a protest march is following and provide protection to protesters, where necessary. Staff can be made up of members of a movement who have the relevant expertise, volunteers or hired professionals, where a movement has resources for this. The Chilean student unions paid to hire people to fulfil these roles during the student protests in 2011. Such staff make the environment safer and

decrease the likelihood of inexperienced protesters engaging in unlawful activities or experiencing 'protest panic'. Panic in crowds can be dangerous as it often leads to stampedes or violent responses from the police. In Brazil, ancillary social movements that monitor and record protests and provide first-aid have been established to support and empower protest movements.

SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND TARGETING OF THE VULNERABLE

The inequalities that plague society in general are present in protest movements too. This means that people who are vulnerable or marginalised generally face struggles as members of movements and when trying to communicate a movement's message. Equally, movements may have gendered dimensions requiring specific attention. For instance, women are often the targets of sexual assault by fellow protesters or the police (see [here](#), page 99). Further, as is the case in Chile, movements representing the interests of indigenous people have less social and political capital than movements made up of groups that enjoy certain privileges, such as urban students. Equally, policing responses are often more repressive towards groups or movements that represent people or causes that have faced historic disadvantage.

AWARENESS

It is important for movements to evaluate constantly the demographics of the people who form their membership. This evaluation should be accompanied by a critical reflection on the social struggles that different groups face and a conscious effort to avoid the perpetuation of behaviours and attitudes of exclusion within a

"THROUGHOUT LATIN AMERICA, WORKERS AND MARGINALISED GROUPS ALSO SUFFER UNEQUAL AND DISCRIMINATORY RESPONSES IN THE CONTEXT OF PROTESTS. THIS INEQUALITY IN RESPONSES BY SECURITY SERVICES REINFORCES THE LACK OF TRUST THAT THESE COMMUNITIES HAVE TOWARDS MEMBERS OF THE SECURITY SERVICES."

movement. This can be done by ensuring that members undergo sensitivity and implicit-bias training and that there are proper reporting mechanisms that allow members to report instances of abuse or discrimination.⁴

COLLABORATION

Movements must ensure that they support members who are particularly vulnerable or movements that represent the interests of vulnerable groups. However, it is crucial that this is done through collaboration. This involves reaching out to excluded groups to establish their needs and the assistance or partnership they seek. A decision to help other movements and their members should be based on mutual respect and cannot be taken based on preconceptions that privileged groups have of the needs of those who experience inequality.⁵

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Because of their privileged position in society, some movements or people are less likely to face violence or repressive responses from states than others. It is important that movements and networks of movements think carefully about who is best placed to make demands and use this to tailor their advocacy approaches. For instance, in Chile, universities in rural areas that cater predominantly to indigenous people faced similar funding struggles to universities in more privileged urban areas. However, the members of movements from urban universities were less likely to be abused if they held mass protests than their counterparts in rural areas. The movements collaborated to ensure that urban universities furthered

DID YOU KNOW?

During the Standing Rock protests in North Dakota, USA in 2016–2017, more than 300 tribes of indigenous people came together to support each other and stand in opposition to the expansion of oil pipelines on their traditional land. This collaboration was complemented by international media attention and support from prominent non-indigenous figures and civil society organisations (see [here](#)).

the cause of rural universities during their mass protests, without the indigenous protesters having to put themselves at unnecessary risk.⁶

POLICE BRUTALITY

Police brutality affects many members of protest movements. Police officers are often not properly trained to deal with large crowds or are not taught the need to respect the fundamental rights and integrity of those participating in protests. Violent reactions to protests from the police lead to injuries amongst protesters and often the escalation of violence as protesters act to defend themselves (see [here](#), page 54).

ADVOCACY AND TRAINING

It is important that states develop proper training procedures for police officers to ensure that human rights are protected during times of protest. All crowd-control measures should be evaluated to determine their compliance with human rights standards before they are deployed (see [here](#), pages 54–56). Protest movements and civil society organisations should arrange advocacy campaigns around this issue (see [here](#)). Civil society organisations should develop training materials and offer to assist states in properly training the police to deal with mass gatherings. Numerous civil society organisations are indeed doing this (see [here](#) for examples).

DID YOU KNOW?

Amnesty International has verified instances of police brutality against the 2019 Anti-Extradition Bill protesters in Hong Kong. An Amnesty International representative stated that: “In the footage Amnesty has verified, police officers appear out of control, placing peaceful protesters who posed no threat in danger of serious injury.” The violence used includes beatings of subdued protesters, the unprovoked firing of rubber bullets and the use of teargas against protesters who were trapped in confined areas with little opportunity for escape (see [here](#)).

“ALL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS MUST RECEIVE ONGOING AND CONTINUOUS TRAINING ON POLICING ASSEMBLIES.”

⁴ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Chile.

⁵ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Mexico.

⁶ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Chile.



POSITIVE RELATIONS AND HUMANISATION

In certain contexts, recognising that police officers are just people who have been given a job and are often afraid when doing this job humanises them. Once the police have been humanised, it is easier to see that they can be brought on board with a cause that a movement is protesting for. In Armenia, protesters in 2018 gave sweets and flowers to the police and attempted to befriend them. As a consequence, during the Velvet Revolution there was only one instance of police brutality and it was met with condemnation from all sides. It is unlikely that police will engage in violent reactions when they empathise with a cause and are treated well by protesters.⁷

HUMAN SHIELDS

Depending on the context, the police may be less likely to use violence against prominent people, out of fear of reprisals. For instance, journalists, celebrities and high-ranking officials are likely to be treated with caution

because of the influence they possess. Protesters should attempt to form good relations with these people so that they will assist in preventing brutality and arrest. For instance, at the Standing Rock protests in the USA, military veterans acted as human shields to prevent violence against protesters (see [here](#), page 10). Similarly, at many South African universities, white students, being less likely to be targeted by police violence than black students, formed human shields to prevent the arrest of black students during the 2015 student protests at the University of Cape Town (see [here](#)).

RECORDING THE POLICE AND COLLECTING EVIDENCE

To mitigate abuses of force and brutality by the police and gather evidence for potential prosecutions in the event of police criminality, protest movements may consider deploying people to record protests and any policing operations during a protest. The right to record is firmly entrenched in international law and standards, and includes the ‘right to record back’, which occurs when a protester records a police officer who is recording a protester. Alongside photo and video evidence, protesters should document and collect any other evidence, including of weapons and munitions, that may be useful for prosecuting misconduct by the police or counter-protesters. Additionally, evidence collected may lead to different and additional forms of advocacy. For example, teargas canisters have multiple identifying marks that should be recorded. In protests in Bahrain in 2014, a teargas canister produced by a South African arms manufacturer was allegedly discovered as a result of its markings. This resulted from an earlier awareness campaign called ‘Stop the Shipment’ that sought to prohibit the export of teargas to Bahrain. Scrutiny of weapons exports is one example of an action to address social ills that may lead to different forms of advocacy and protest against different targets (see [here](#) for more information about evidence collection).

AVOIDING PROTEST FATIGUE

In contexts where police brutality is prevalent or protest movements have protested for extended periods of time, protest fatigue – where protest leaders no longer have the energy or mental or physical strength to protest

⁷ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Armenia.

further – can often weaken movements. Members of movements should be aware of the difficulties associated with protest fatigue and ensure that suitable mechanisms, such as psycho-social support, are accessible and that debriefings take place after protests, especially where violence has occurred.

COUNTER-MOVEMENTS

Sometimes movements form to counter a cause or change for which an organisation or movement advocates. This is most common when the issue underlying a movement relates to a value-laden or moral question, rather than an issue of service delivery or government failure. For instance, in 2019 protests against Alabama's new anti-abortion legislation there were protest movements that were both for and against abortion (see [here](#)). Movements and counter-movements often clash with one another and provoke violence that can delegitimise both (see [here](#)).

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Sometimes it is possible to identify the issue that underlies conflict between two movements and create partnerships with other organisations to tip the scales in your movement's favour. For instance, the Armenian government wanted to pass a Bill that would criminalise domestic violence and protect domestic violence survivors, but faced protest from traditionalists who believed the Bill would undermine family values. Movements that supported the Bill formed a strategic partnership with children's rights organisations and relied on the high value most people place on the need to protect children to counter arguments against the Bill. As a result, the Bill was successfully passed.⁸

USE OF THE MEDIA

It is important that both mainstream and social media are used strategically to defend against counter-movements and counter-narratives. Information about protests should be spread on social media to help recruit protesters and persuade the public about a specific cause. Mainstream media should be requested to livestream protests rather than recording and editing content

before broadcast because this allows the public to understand the true nature of all of the movements involved.⁹ Movements should also seek to discredit the ideology underpinning counter-movements. Public debates that are broadcast on TV or radio, in which both sides are asked to engage critically with each other, often offer an effective way to illustrate logical gaps or bigotry that may characterise counter-movements.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Members of movements must be made aware that counter-movements may seek to provoke them into violence. It is important that members of movements are trained in de-escalation strategies and warned of the potential consequences should they respond rashly to provocation.¹⁰

POLICE ASSISTANCE

While states and policing authorities are often painted as the enemy of protesters, in some circumstances the greater threat comes from potentially violent counter-movements. Where



DID YOU KNOW?

The livestreaming of protests has become an indispensable tool to ensure that the public understands the true circumstances in which protests occur. Livestreaming has been used effectively during protests, including those during the 'Arab Spring', the Occupy Movement and the Standing Rock protests (see [here](#)).

⁸ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Armenia.

⁹ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Armenia.

¹⁰ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Mexico.

possible, protesters should work to get the police on their side and ensure that their right to protest is facilitated. In Armenia in 2018, protesters gave police officers flowers and sweets to endear themselves to them, and to encourage the police to help in preventing violence and protecting protesters should it become necessary.¹¹

ARREST OF PROTEST LEADERS

Particularly in conditions of closed civic space, the arrest of protesters and protest leaders is a significant challenge and is often used as a tactic by policing institutions, even where a criminal offence has not been committed

(see [here](#), page 61). The arrest of members of civil society organisations harms the morale of other members and movements and helps create a culture of fear and intimidation. Often, arrests hamstring the operations of movements and force them to focus on the release of members rather than the cause for which they were established.¹²

DID YOU KNOW?

In early July 2019, the Sudanese Military Council arrested two prominent leaders of the Sudanese Professionals' Association, the opposition group that led pro-democracy protests that started in December 2018. These arrests came just two days after protesters took to the streets in numerous cities to demand that the military hand over power to a citizen-led body (see [here](#)).

“MASS AND ARBITRARY ARRESTS DURING AN EVENT VIOLATE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND ARE LIKELY TO ESCALATE TENSIONS AND UNDERMINE PUBLIC TRUST IN POLICE.”

of bail applications and appeals against convictions. Some organisations may represent arrested protesters for free. For instance, in South Africa,



the Legal Resources Centre, a public interest law firm, assisted students who were arrested during the #FeesMustFall protests in 2015 and 2016, representing the students for free. Additionally, a group of South African civil society organisations established a WhatsApp group to communicate and share information about arrests in order to instruct lawyers to assist. Legal organisations will also often refer people in need to other organisations that can assist them if they are unable to. Protest leaders should prepare and distribute ‘bust’ cards – credit card-sized materials that detail the contact information of sympathetic lawyers in the event of an arrest.

EXTERNAL PRESSURE

Many states are less concerned about internal pressure than they are about external relations with other states. It is important to reach out to foreign diplomatic missions and international institutions, such as the United Nations, and appeal to them to put pressure on states to stop the unlawful arrest of protesters. In Azerbaijan, members of civil society organisations have realised that the state is responsive to external condemnation of arrest

¹¹ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Armenia.

¹² Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Azerbaijan.

practices. As such, members of movements travel to form international and regional relationships with other states with the aim of encouraging international pressure to force the state to release prisoners and stop unlawful arrests.¹³

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

It is important to educate members about their rights and entitlements should they be arrested. Movements should prepare guidebooks for members that detail the way that arrests may lawfully take place, who arrested people should call for help – including the provision of ‘bust’ cards that give contact details of sympathetic lawyers – and their rights in terms of how long they may be lawfully detained and where. This document should be accessible and easily portable so that members can keep it with them at all times. In Chile, during the student protests in 2011, leaders compiled these guidebooks and conducted training before the protests to ensure that everyone understood their rights in the event of arrest.¹⁴ Additionally, movements may rely on applications that assist with locating a protester in the event that a protester is detained at an unknown location.

LEADERSHIP CONTINGENCY PLANS

Protest movements can be crippled by the arrest of their leaders. This is both because the people who come up with strategic insights are no longer present and because movements channel their limited resources towards ensuring the release of members. For instance, in Azerbaijan, one movement had five of its leaders arrested and lost its reputation as a protest movement because it then spent years using all its energy to ensure the release of its leaders. It is important that movements have organisational contingency plans in place. These should include plans to ensure the release of leaders but also detail the actions to be taken to continue the work of the movement in the event of arrests.¹⁵



¹³ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Azerbaijan.

¹⁴ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Chile.

¹⁵ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Azerbaijan.

STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE PROTEST

Protest movements strive to convey a message effectively, exert influence over states and other forces and bring about positive change. These are not easy goals to achieve, but based on the experiences of protest movements, there are a number of tactics that can be followed that make the achievement of these goals and the sustainability of movements more likely. Check out the following resources:

- [Beautiful Rising Toolkit](#)
- [Handbook for Non-Violent Campaigns](#)
- [Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict](#)

MULTIFACETED STRATEGIES

The most effective protest movements have strategies for spreading their messages that are multifaceted and target different groups of people in

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:

“Anyone who claims to have uncovered the best way to protest non-violently probably doesn’t know what they’re talking about. Except for wacky corners of Twitter, there is more or less a consensus among the current generation of protesters that non-violent action is best. Beyond that, though, there’s very little agreement; rather, there’s a perpetually noisy conversation going on about the best ways to protest” (see [here](#)).

different ways. This is important as it involves numerous interest groups in a movement, all of which bring with them different resources, influences and ideas. This diversity increases the likelihood of a movement sustaining momentum in the long term.

SETTING SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM AIMS

Depending on the cause, it may be important for movements to set

clear short-term and long-term aims or goals. This involves creating a vision that extends beyond the immediate issues that gave rise to a movement and looks for practical ways to transform society. By setting short-term and

long-term aims, movements are prompted to think about and take action to ensure the sustainability of their cause. The creation of these aims should be done collaboratively and representatively to ensure that members believe in them, and they should be clearly framed. Clearly stated aims help movements to measure the successes and failures of actions and campaigns. Many movements are successful in the short term but dissipate once short-term aims have been met, despite the potential they may have had to make lasting change. Similarly, the failure to meet short-term goals does not necessarily minimise the impact a movement can have in the long term. For instance, during the Chilean student protests, the short-term goal was to increase state support to students through scholarships and subsidised lunches and transport. However, the movement was less successful in achieving its long-term aim, which was to reform a political system still based on a constitution written during the Pinochet dictatorship. However, because of the short-term successes, many members of student movements were able to garner enough public support to start their own political parties and run for elected office. Those parties went on to hold around 20 per cent of the seats in parliament and thus may in future be able to achieve the long-term aims of the movement and ensure sustained change.

DIVERSE CAMPAIGNS

There are a number of ways that movements can spread their messages and achieve their aims. However, no single way is always effective as different contexts require different strategies. It is important to consider all of the actors that are involved in bringing about change and design campaigns to target each of them. In Mexico, the growing disappeared movement, which arose in response to the tens of thousands of people who have been disappeared, uses an array of campaign strategies. The movement organises mass marches in multiple locations, particularly on special days such as Mother’s Day, and also carries out widespread advocacy and awareness campaigns in an attempt to gather information about the missing people. The movement partnered with the media to spread awareness about the situation on a local and global scale, and also physically carries out search

parties and digs to find mass graves. Each of these strategies targets a different segment of society in the hope that cumulatively they will lead to an improvement in the situation and the uncovering of the truth.

While carrying out protests, it is also necessary to develop a strategy to target reformers within government. Particularly in very repressive environments, these reformers provide an opening for citizens to express their grievances to sympathetic people with access to the levers of power (see [here](#), page 4).

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Partnership with established organisations that have similar goals is an important way of increasing public support for and credibility of a movement. Alignment can only be achieved if the movement seeking partners has clearly defined short-term and long-term aims and understands how creating partnerships would help to achieve these. For instance, during the Chilean student protests it made sense that in order to achieve the shorter-term goals of improving access to and state support of universities, different student movements partnered with one another. However, the students were also seeking long-term political change and, as a result, partnered with public sector workers' unions that had similar interests. This increased participation in marches and campaigns.

DECENTRALISED LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

A useful strategy for increasing the sustainability of a movement is to decentralise leadership and management structures to ensure that all voices in a movement are accommodated, decision-making is not centralised within a group of a few individuals, and the management responsibilities of a movement are spread across its membership to mitigate protest fatigue.

“ELITES AND GOVERNMENTS ARE OFTEN IMPORTANT ALLIES IN REFORM AND CHALLENGING THE ABUSE OF POWER. IN ESPECIALLY REPRESSIVE OR RESTRICTIVE CONTEXTS, IT IS SOMETIMES REFORMERS WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT WHO CAN PROVIDE OPENINGS FOR CITIZEN DEMANDS TO BE HEARD.”

Additionally, for larger movements, the establishment of various chapters or units across cities and jurisdictions can increase membership and develop additional buy-in from protesters with similar causes. For example, Extinction Rebellion, which was founded in the UK, has grown into a global movement protesting against climate breakdown, biodiversity loss and the risk of social and ecological collapse. In order to expand the movement, local groups have been established in various cities and jurisdictions (see [here](#)).

WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS

The angle that is used to convey a message impacts on how many people will relate to it and take action as a result. Historically, successful movements focus their messaging on issues that will personally touch people and encourage them to learn more about the cause underpinning the movement. Equally, a universally applicable message, such as prohibition against torture, climate change, housing, or access to basic water and sewerage services, can promote support for a cause and make it more relatable.

TUG AT HEARTSTRINGS BUT ENSURE SUBSTANCE

Messaging that is personal and relatable is effective messaging. This entails sharing information in a way that may make people realise how likely it is that they or someone they know will one day be affected by a problem, or how lucky they are not to be affected by a problem. This brings the message and the movement advocating it closer to home and makes it more difficult for people to dismiss the cause as too far removed from their worldview. In Mexico, the most successful and largest mass marches by the disappeared movement were organised on days such as Mothers' Day by the mothers of people who had disappeared. People can empathise with mothers who have lost children and feel some of the pain that these mothers experience at not knowing where their children are, particularly on special days celebrating those family relationships. Through these campaigns the movement has gathered supporters and resources.

Messages should be considered and contain substance to ensure that they are relatable and taken seriously.

EMPLOY HOPE-BASED MESSAGING

When movements are born out of dissatisfaction with a state or situation, it is easy to focus all messaging on shaming the people responsible. However,

“MESSAGING THAT IS PERSONAL AND RELATABLE IS EFFECTIVE MESSAGING.”

this strategy does not always garner public support and often fails to pressure the authorities into action, as they may be shameless, go on the defensive, or choose to surround themselves with supporters. Instead, movements should seek to mobilise hope. Linguists and psychologists have found that the best way to persuade undecided people to agree with a cause is by evoking positive emotions in them. This does not mean that bad situations should be sugar-coated but rather that sorrow should be acknowledged while simultaneously finding the hope in a story. Effective messaging is relatable. If you show people crowds, this can scare them. If you tell people about individuals who could be them, they are more likely to be compassionate. So instead of showing a prisoner in jail, a campaign could show a former prisoner who is rebuilding their life. Instead of a refugee at their lowest in a refugee camp, a campaign could show a refugee building a business and caring for their family. The message is to show people, and not just the suffering, and show the life that is possible if we mobilise and act (see [here](#)).

BE EMPATHETIC

As protesters it is important to show that while you are dedicated to your cause, you have not lost your humanity. It is important to understand that the campaigns of which you are a part may often cause inconvenience to people. Some inconvenience will simply be a by-product of a protest that

“WE NEED TO CONVINCe PEOPLE THAT ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE. VISIONARY IDEAS CHANGE THE WORLD, AND PEOPLE WHO PUT THEM FORWARD SET THE AGENDA INSTEAD OF BEING ON THE DEFENSIVE.”

people will have to be asked to deal with. However, it is important that campaigns do not cause unnecessary harm to bystanders. To avoid harm, you must be empathetic to the circumstances in which bystanders may find

themselves and be adaptable to those circumstances. For instance, during the Velvet Revolution in Armenia, protesters stopped traffic. This obviously caused inconvenience for some people. However, members of the movement walked amongst the cars to find out whether any of the drivers needed to be somewhere because of a genuine emergency. When such people were identified, the protesters helped them through the traffic and to the place they needed to be.¹⁶

UNIFYING MESSAGES

The way a message is crafted and publicised shapes the impact it has. The success of protests often relies on the number of people who support them. Based on the experiences of successful protest movements three key messaging tactics arise.

DID YOU KNOW?

Research shows that governments around the world have been shaken to their foundations, and often toppled, when a mere 3.5 per cent of their populations are organised in opposition (see [here](#)).

UNIFY YOUR AUDIENCE

It is important to focus the work of a movement around core issues that affect many people. This is the best way to ensure mass support for a movement. In Brazil in 2013, protests broke out against price increases for public transport in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The protests managed to gain mass support because so many Brazilians use public transport every day. Once their support had been gained, the movement expanded its aims to include issues such as state corruption. Similar transport-related protests took place in Armenia. Because of the large numbers of supporters, the protesters were able to set up a parallel transport system with volunteer drivers. This showed the government that even though many people rely on public transport, people could not be strong-armed into paying higher prices and would band together to create an alternative. The government decided not to charge the proposed higher prices as a result of these protests.¹⁷

¹⁶ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Armenia.

¹⁷ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Armenia.

DYNAMIC SPOKESPEOPLE AND INFLUENCERS

Celebrities and public figures with large followings and public support are often effective at spreading a message. Where appropriate, it is useful to partner with these people to assist in gaining support for an idea or a movement, particularly in a world that is increasingly reliant on, and influenced by, social media. Protest leaders in Argentina increasingly rely on celebrities, who are viewed as role models, to raise awareness about protest movements.¹⁸ Careful and strategic choices should be made about which celebrities to partner with. It should be clear that the person knows and cares about a cause and is not involved only for their own interests. For instance, Leonardo DiCaprio has become a spokesperson for the movement against climate change and has been dedicated to this cause for years (see [here](#)). Similarly, when the UK government wanted to pass a law taxing single-use plastics, they partnered with beloved nature journalist, David Attenborough, who helped persuade the public to support the law (see [here](#)).

CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS

Popular movements that seek to bring about political change are often led by a specific person or opposition political party. Where people can unify behind this leadership, leaders should ensure that they are broadcasting clear instructions and guiding principles for protesters. This should be done using mainstream and social media to ensure wide reach of communications and should establish the tactics that a movement endorses and the core values of a movement. During the 2018 Velvet Revolution in Armenia, the protests were led by the opposition party and, as such, the instructions of the leader of that party carried great weight. The leader put out calls for non-violence and respect on social media and this contributed to the success of the revolution without any bloodshed.¹⁹

MEDIA COVERAGE

Media coverage is a key factor that contributes to the success or failure of a movement. Media houses often report unfavourably and untruthfully about

protests, making it more difficult to garner public support for the cause underpinning these protests. It is important, therefore, to form strong relationships with journalists and media houses, and spend time advising journalists on a cause, why it is important and what rights protesters have. Media coverage tells people at home and all over the world about the campaigns that protest movements are mounting. Positive reporting about a protest lends itself to increased internal and external pressure to address a movement's demands.²⁰

LIVESTREAM AND PUBLICISE

Media houses that record and edit material often, intentionally or unintentionally, manipulate the situation that they report on in favour of particular political leanings. To mitigate this manipulation, the Occupy Movement in the USA partnered with two video-sharing platforms, Ustream and Livestream, and used these to disseminate live video content and images widely. These services allow protesters to create their own channels, such as Globalrevolution.tv, which countered potentially biased narratives from traditional media. Livestreaming allows the coverage of issues that mainstream media will not report on, and such coverage can then be disseminated on social media (see [here](#)).

DID YOU KNOW?

The Velvet Revolution in Armenia has been dubbed the 'Revolution of Love and Tolerance' because of the strength of the underlying values to which protesters subscribed (see [here](#)).

DID YOU KNOW?

Researchers have found that protests only have an effect on political actions if they are the subject of mass media coverage. Moreover, where the media labels the government 'majoritarian' or 'dictatorial' rather than 'consensus-based' or 'democratic', protests are more likely to influence political change (see [here](#)).

CREATE MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Journalists are always on the lookout for a new story or a new angle to a story. Allowing the media access to spaces from which they would generally be barred may get them on your side and can have mutually beneficial

¹⁸ Based on interviews with members of protest movements in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

¹⁹ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Armenia.

²⁰ All interviewees stressed this point.

results. For instance, in Mexico, the family members of people who have disappeared often go into the mountains to search for places that look like graves and dig up these graves to search for human remains. This is both a private practice and a dangerous one. Many people are attacked while doing this or are disappeared themselves. People formed relationships with journalists and asked them to travel with them in search of these graves. This gave the journalists a fresh angle on the story and provided searching families with protection as attacks were less likely when journalists, who would be missed if they disappeared, were present.²¹

A HUMAN FACE

It is important to have good relationships with the media as this allows protesters to influence the way that their movement is covered in the news. When media houses have relationships of some kind with protesters, they are more likely to invite them to give interviews or offer their side of the story. Protesters also feel they can approach these outlets with stories without the fear of the story being manipulated. Being involved in interviews and public debates that are organised by journalists helps to humanise a movement because instead of seeing a crowd on the news, the public sees a person with whom they can more easily relate.

CREATING A COMMUNITY FEELING

Protests do not have to take the stereotypical form of a march. Successful protests can be staged as occupations, sit-ins or any number of creative expressions. Regardless of the form, it is important to create a feeling that those participating are part of a community. This makes it likely that more people will join a movement and creates a space where people feel safe to participate for extended periods of time, which is sometimes necessary in mass movements.

PROTEST ART

Protest spaces are inherently creative as people seek to express discontent and imagine a better world. Art is often a feature of these spaces. During



²¹ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Mexico.

Armenia's 2018 Velvet Revolution musicians kept protesters and bystanders entertained by playing impromptu concerts.²² Performance art can be used to satirise politicians, involve people in a movement and avoid the police brutality that might often come in response to conventional protest methods. For instance, at the height of Serbia's Otpor! Movement in the early 2000s, protest leaders painted the face of the much-despised dictator, Slobodan Milosovic, on a barrel. The barrel was placed in a busy pedestrian street with a stick next to it. Passers-by were encouraged to hit the barrel if they felt the need. No one could be arrested for hitting a barrel but dissatisfaction was effectively expressed and the small humiliation of Milosovic gave people hope. Such creative expressions can shape the image of a movement and boost participant morale (see [here](#)). Art and photography can also be used to publicise injustices suffered during protests and often serve as snapshots of a protest that can outlast the protest message (see [here](#)).

INCLUSIVE PROTEST SPACES

It must be recognised that protest is often exhausting and time consuming. Many people cannot participate to the extent that they would like because of other responsibilities such as the need to work or care for families. Protesters should attempt to create spaces that are aware of this and are inclusive and accessible. The 2018 anti-gun violence protests in the USA involved a school walkout that resulted in almost one million school children and university students leaving their classrooms. The use of such tactics that enable different age groups to participate can be valuable, but it can also create additional childcare

DID YOU KNOW?

One of the most famous groups of protest artists is Russian feminist punk rock band and performance artists, Pussy Riot. They have dealt with various political themes such as feminism, LGBTQI rights, democracy, freedom of speech and opposition to President Vladimir Putin. Since their arrest and subsequent prison sentence in 2012 for an anti-Putin protest performance, they have become a symbol of the battle against Putin's regime (see [here](#)).

obligations for parents when children are at home when they would usually be at school. In response to these difficulties in Armenia, special childcare arrangements were established among neighbours and at sites of protest to ensure that parents could still attend mass meetings and marches.²³ Protest movements must be alive to the changing needs of their members and be willing to adapt accordingly and accommodate needs.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENTS WITH THE POLICE

The police are often the enemy of protesters. Antagonism between protesters and police often leads to violence, brutality and the possible delegitimisation of a movement. Violence presents a significant barrier to the achievement of a movement's goals. The potential for violence is something that must be addressed from the beginning of a movement. Some of the most successful protest movements have avoided violence altogether by neutralising antagonism before mass marches start. In Armenia in 2018, protesters presented the police with sweets and flowers. They tried to speak to them about their personal opinions of the regime and showed how the protests were in the best interest of the police officers. It is less likely that someone will react violently when they are not provoked, and even less likely when you have been friendly to them. The protesters relied on the police not wanting to hurt people who they liked and went out of their way to form these strategic alignments. In the entire protest, which lasted more than a month, there was only one instance of police violence.²⁴

APPEAL TO THE DIASPORA

Numbers are important in protests. In states that have experienced extended repression or unrest it is likely that there will be a large portion of the population who have left the state in search of safety and better opportunities. By appealing

DID YOU KNOW?

A strong diaspora network made up of Ethiopians around the world works tirelessly to publish videos, photos and articles in international media to dispel what they claim are inaccurate reports about the unrest in the Oromia region (see [here](#)).

²² Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Armenia.

²³ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Armenia.

²⁴ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Armenia.

to this diaspora to return to lend support, protest movements can increase the number of people present and draw international attention to the cause, thereby increasing pressure on the state. During the #ZumaMustFall protests in South Africa against the former president in 2017, South Africans living in London and Sydney protested in solidarity and extended support messages for the movement on social media. During the 2018 Velvet Revolution, Armenians from around Europe flew back to Armenia because the revolution was portrayed as a change that people wanted to be a part of. This was encouraged through the creation of a community feeling, the inspiring discipline of protesters in adhering to principles of non-violence and clever positive messaging campaigns.²⁵

STRATEGIC LOCATIONS

While it is strategically important to select the various forms of protest that a movement will use, choosing the location of a protest is no less vital. A protest in a strategic location is often one that causes sufficient inconvenience and disrupts ordinary business and as a result puts additional pressure on a state to meet the demands being made.

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE

Because states rely on certain industries to sustain themselves, finding a location that impacts on the functioning of these industries is likely to urge states into action. The first step is to identify a location that is key to the running of this industry. The next is to devise a protest strategy that shuts

down this location and best disrupts it. This plan should be non-violent and take into account the constraints of a movement, such as the number of people who are likely to participate in the protest. In South Africa in 2015, a small community in the township of Majakaneng had been without water for an extended period of time. They realised that by blocking the national highway, which was used by trucks transporting platinum, one of South Africa's primary exports, from the mines in the north west of the country to the economic hub of Johannesburg, they could disrupt the key industry as a whole. Despite there only being a small number of protesters, the pressure this protest put on the state resulted in water being restored to the community (see [here](#)).

GROWING YOUR CAMPAIGN

If the location at which a protest is held is strategically chosen, it can lead to increases in membership and growth of support. For instance, in the UK in 2019, Extinction Rebellion chose their main protest locations based on the routes that Londoners take to get to the city centre. Protests on Oxford Street, which attracts a lot of foot traffic, and Waterloo Bridge, one of the main commuter routes from South London, meant that thousands of people passed the protests, saw what a good time the protesters were having – there were activities such as music performances and group yoga sessions – and discussed the cause with protesters. Leaders claimed that this not only increased awareness but also influenced many people, who would ordinarily not have gone out of their way to join a protest, to join this one (see [here](#)).

²⁵ Based on an interview with a member of a protest movement in Armenia.



FOSTERING COLLABORATION

Networks made up of a number of protest movements that share the same goals and vision can play an important role in enhancing the sustainability and efficacy of individual movements. Networks often allow movements to pursue campaign strategies and achieve gains that are not possible alone. Networks can enhance the power and influence of citizens' voices in advocating for policies and improving governance, and provide a platform for knowledge and resource sharing. Civil society networks have become partners of choice for many international development agencies seeking to maximise the reach, scale and impacts of their programmes (see [here](#), page 1). For more information:

- [New Tactics in Human Rights Tactical Mapping](#)
- [Vuka: Coalition for Civic Action](#)

CHOOSING THE TYPE OF NETWORK

DID YOU KNOW?

In October 2015, Tunisia's civil society National Dialogue Quartet was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its work in building democracy and peace following the 2011 Jasmine Revolution. The Quartet brought together four different, established civil society networks. They developed a road map for agreeing to a constitution and holding elections, and forged a new, alternate process of dialogue (see [here](#), page 10).

There are numerous ways that protest movements and civil society organisations can come together to form networks. Deciding what form of network you would like to join or start requires a careful consideration of what your movement wants to achieve through collaboration with other organisations and movements. Networks may be formed for at least five distinct reasons and each comes with different levels of commitment to coordination.

TO EXCHANGE INFORMATION

This requires a low level of interdependency and limited joint decision-making as the network is essentially made up of informal relationships between organisations or movements. Usually information is shared when one organisation convenes a meeting for partners (see [here](#), page 16).

FOR THE COORDINATION OF POLICIES, PROGRAMMES OR ACTIVITIES

This requires limited interdependence but some joint decision-making. As this form of network is really about finding ways that different movements or organisations can complement each other in their individual actions, coordination is generally done by the leaders of the various movements (see [here](#), page 16).

TO OBTAIN COMMON FUNDING

Funders may require that certain targets be met by the organisations they support. One organisation or movement may not have the capacity to meet all of these, but can achieve this when they partner with others. A network of movements or organisations formed for funding purposes often requires joint decision-making on finance issues, and often must be legally registered. This kind of network requires joint project management and finance teams to ensure that all organisations in the network work together to meet the funder's targets and funding obligations (see [here](#), page 16).

TO CREATE NEW JOINT VENTURES

The creation of new joint ventures such as advocacy campaigns or service delivery programmes can require a significant amount of joint decision-making focused on programme action and strategy. Members of such a network may decide that it is necessary to establish a new coordinating organisation made up of members from the different founding movements. This is likely

“NETWORKS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE WHEN THEY ALIGN THEIR SHARED PURPOSES WITH A NETWORK STRUCTURE THAT IS BEST SUITED TO THEIR LEVEL OF INTERDEPENDENCE.”

when coordination is envisaged as necessary in the long term rather than for a single campaign. Alternatively, the network may be an alliance hosted by one organisation for a specific limited-period advocacy campaign (see [here](#), page 16).

TO CREATE A LONG-TERM COMMON IDENTITY

This requires high levels of joint decision-making. Movements work to create a new common organisation, with a vision, codes, policies and leadership structure separate to that of its member organisations and sometimes legal registration as a new entity. This form of network often hires permanent staff and uses formalised procedures such as leadership elections. It can be effective for longer term causes and campaigns (see [here](#), page 16).

CHOOSING PARTNERS

Choosing which organisations and movements to partner with in a network must be done after careful consideration of a movement's needs. Factors such as whether a movement requires meeting space, greater numbers of supporters, expert information, social credibility, or international awareness may for instance influence why particular partners are chosen. The most effective networks are those that have a clear purpose and collaborative strategies to achieve it. Partners must be chosen based on an alignment of purpose and needs (see [here](#), page 20). Based on the nature of your movement and the purpose for which you want to establish a network, there are a number of partners you may wish to approach.

“THE MOST EFFECTIVE NETWORKS ARE THOSE THAT HAVE A CLEAR PURPOSE AND COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE IT.”

movements easier and led to these movements becoming key drivers of democratic change (see [here](#), page 4). Grassroots movements are often seen by many as far more representative of communities and aware of the problems they face than formalised civil society organisations. They are also generally more diverse in terms of their demographics and more

creative in their approaches to protest (see [here](#), page 2). It is important that grassroots movements form networks with each other, that formalised civil society organisations network with them and that funders work directly with grassroots movements. Grassroots movements are often organised around specific issues that affect people's everyday lives. These issues are not always unique to a particular community and collaboration between different grassroots movements experiencing the same issues may increase pressure to resolve them. Grassroots movements often represent the people who are the most vulnerable, marginalised and excluded from society. For instance, grassroots movements in Latin America have often been the main representatives of indigenous interests.²⁶ The formation of networks of grassroots movements, formalised civil society organisations and funders can enhance the reach, influence, relevance and ability to work effectively towards change.

FORMALISED CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Formalised civil society organisations, including those typically identified as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) regularly form networks with one another around particular issues. Traditionally, funders have been willing to form connections with formalised civil society organisations, often to the exclusion of grassroots movements, because of the institutionalised nature of these organisations and their ability to meet the accounting and reporting requirements for grants (see [here](#), pages 2–3). It can be very beneficial for movements to partner with formalised civil society organisations because they may have connections in government that enhance their ability to effect change, resources such as the ability to book venues and pay legal professionals, and regular staff who can carry out the day-to-day administrative tasks that go along with effective civil activism (see [here](#), pages 18 and 22). When selecting which formalised civil society organisations to partner with, it is important to establish whether they require that, in all circumstances, partners use the civil society organisation's branding and whether there is any flexibility in the way that resources provided can be

²⁶ Interview with a member of a civil society movement in Chile.

used based on changing contexts.²⁷ Civil society organisations that recognise that publicised partnerships can both legitimise and delegitimise protest movements depending on the context are good partners. Similarly, those that understand the way that needs can change in a protest context and do not place onerous conditions on the way their assistance can be used are effective partners.

NETWORK-BUILDING ORGANISATIONS

Organisations exist that are specifically set up to create networks between social and protest movements seeking to achieve the same aims. These network-building organisations generally specialise in particular issues and facilitate contact between protest movements working on these issues. Aside from facilitating this contact, many of these organisations work on capacity development for the movements they work with, to help ensure the sustainability of the networks they create. For instance, in Mexico, one network-building organisation that supports people working with families of disappeared persons also runs civil society schools that help equip activists with the tools they need to run their movements effectively. Such organisations may only assist you if you actively approach them for help and explain how your movement meets the overall vision they wish to support. The Mexican organisation, for example, only assists movements that have the goal of long-term transformation of the context that enabled the disappearance culture to develop.

DID YOU KNOW?

Protests in Algeria in early 2019 against President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's decision to run for a fifth presidential term began as a grassroots movement in several cities after anonymous calls appeared on social media for people to protest. The movement also partnered with formalised collectives including Mouwatana – a citizen-led movement that includes political parties, associations and individuals – to urge Algerians to take to the streets (see [here](#)).

INTERNATIONAL NGOS

While there is often distrust of international NGOs among activists, they can be useful partners. Organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Oxfam operate in a number of ways. While they are best known for providing humanitarian support to those affected by conflict or disaster, they also work to support protest movements. They can provide useful technical support, information and guidance on international legal and administrative frameworks (see [here](#)). The support that international NGOs give can be used to help create diverse, multifaceted campaigns based on good research that is difficult to dispute. This is the way that the Red Cross supported the disappeared movement in Mexico. The organisation was particularly useful in assisting with forensic analysis to identify human remains. This was used as a lobbying tool to support other protest strategies and lent support to the credibility of the movement.

UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES

The United Nations comprises countless agencies that work towards a range of goals. If an agency deals with the specific issue that your movement is interested in or a challenge that your movement is facing, partnering with a United Nations agency – often in an informal capacity – can be extremely useful. For instance, in Chile during the student protests, the police were particularly brutal towards protesting secondary school children. The student movement approached the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for assistance. UNICEF issued statements condemning this brutality, which increased international attention on the issue and international pressure to stop the violence against protesters. United Nations Special Procedures, such as the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of assembly and of association, may also be useful partners in investigating human rights abuses and reporting on human rights violations (see [here](#)).

FOREIGN STATES AND DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS

While forming partnerships with foreign states and diplomatic missions can be difficult because of the politics involved in supporting protest movements

²⁷ Interview with a member of a civil society movement in Armenia.

in other states, particularly when these movements are calling for democratic change, foreign states can be useful partners. Many states care little about the opinions of their own people but are concerned about foreign perceptions.²⁸ As part of a combined strategy, internal pressure

DID YOU KNOW?

Protesters in 2019 pro-democracy demonstrations in Sudan used particular hashtags on Twitter as repositories for news and videos, group chats on the communications platform Telegram and a few Facebook groups to organise and maintain the momentum of the protests (see [here](#)).

through protest coupled with external pressure, including in the form of sanctions, can effectively bring about democratic change. This was the case in South Africa, where pressure to end apartheid came from numerous sources both domestically and internationally (see [here](#), page 146). Protest movements in some states send

members abroad to lobby support from foreign governments and diplomats.²⁹ External pressure need not only be in the form of sanctions. It may also be about ensuring that states meet the obligations they have to the United Nations or regional human rights bodies in terms of international law and standards.

THE MEDIA

The media is a powerful partner for any protest movement. It is important that movements approach progressive media houses to conduct interviews with protest leaders, invite them onto panel discussions and if possible

“SOCIAL MEDIA IS SLOWLY BECOMING THE PLACE TO HOLD LEADERS ACCOUNTABLE, ESPECIALLY IN AFRICA.”

air documentaries about the situation that led to the protests. Radio, TV and print media are all potential partners, as are more contemporary forms of media

such as YouTube content creators. Examples of successful partnerships have included media houses setting up livestreams of protest activities and



favourably reporting on protests in Armenia.³⁰ Social media platforms are also important tools for protesters. Messages can be spread quickly and to a large audience, but members of protest movements can also use new media to write about their experiences, post videos of events as they happen and communicate with each other. A successful movement will ensure that they rely on both traditional and contemporary media, using different platforms to reach different groups of people, and using many platforms to amplify the voices of activists (see [here](#), page 11).

²⁸ Interview with a member of a protest movement in Azerbaijan.

²⁹ Interview with a member of a protest movement in Azerbaijan.

³⁰ Interview with a member of a protest movement in Armenia.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL NETWORKS

Successful civil society networks often share similar characteristics. They can be grouped into three broad areas: (1) history and external environment; (2) social aims and technical expertise; and (3) leadership, governance and management. None of these areas can be ignored when designing, establishing and assessing successful networks (see [here](#), page 11).

HISTORY AND EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

Successful civil society networks are often built on the historical relationships of individuals within different organisations. Networks of people and organisations that have worked together or interacted before are often the most effective. Networks of organisations that already have social capital and influence in society also tend to be effective as they are able to combine and compound their pre-existing power. The civil society National Dialogue Quartet in Tunisia is a good example of this. In 2011, this network was made up of four well-established organisations and together they were able to develop a roadmap for agreeing a new constitution and holding elections, and forged a new, alternate process of dialogue (see [here](#), page 10). It should be noted that in states that have very closed civic space, it is difficult to form successful networks because meeting and communication facilities are often limited by the state (see [here](#), page 12). In such instances, effective networks are often more informal and comprise partnerships with international actors rather than domestic ones.³¹

SOCIAL AIMS AND TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

The most successful civil society networks are generally those that mobilise around issues that are valued by the public. These are often issues that have already received a lot of attention in the media and are the subject of public scrutiny. A popular social aim is not enough, however. Networks need to have technical expertise to address these aims, including a wide range of knowledge, skills and other resources, from legal and media expertise to

social mobilisation and legitimacy through extensive research. Successful networks also establish exactly what is meant by expertise and use this to guide the additional, outside partnerships they form and the work they commission (see [here](#), page 12).

LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Networks work best when leadership, governance and management are relatively collaborative, relying on collective leadership, where leaders represent the vision of the whole and put aside individual egos; representative governance, which involves all members either directly or representatively and either informally or formally; and coordinating management, which establishes guides for voluntary actions and works on systems of trust rather than the relatively directive and hierarchical approaches common in single organisations. Collaborative systems for governance and management functions, such as record-keeping, communication, fundraising and financial management, are also important to a network's success, especially in larger, more institutionalised networks that must account to multiple members and funders (see [here](#), page 13).

ESTABLISHING NETWORKS

Once you have established the type of network that would be beneficial to your movement and identified the partners you would like to include in this network, it is important to consider how best to establish the network and maintain relationships between the movements or organisations that comprise it. The establishment of a network requires that the partners involved decide logistical aspects that may be complex, such as leadership structures if these are desired, campaign strategies and long-term plans, including those relating to potentially sensitive issues such as finance. The way that each of these matters is decided upon will depend on the context of a network and the parties that comprise it. However, movements that are members of effective networks have shared how they went about achieving this.

³¹ Interview with a member of a protest movement in Azerbaijan.

NETWORK BUILDING IN TIMES OF PEACE

Movements are best placed to establish connections and networks in times of peace. It is difficult to build relationships in the height of a protest because the environment is emotionally charged and fluid.³² Instead, the building of networks should be seen as a preparatory step before protests and campaigns begin in earnest. In Chile, in 2009, the three largest student movements organised a conference that was attended by student movements from both public and private universities, the education workers' unions and the unions' parent organisations. At this meeting, the various movements were able to form relationships and started sharing information. They established which movements were politically and ideologically aligned and which were not but could still share useful resources.³³ This meeting was the foundation of the collaboration between student movements in relief efforts to assist miners during the 2010 mining crisis and the mass student protests that achieved reforms in the university funding system in 2011.³⁴

MEETINGS IN PERSON

When establishing a network, and throughout a network's existence, it is important that member movements and organisations meet in person, if possible. Protest movement leaders in Azerbaijan have found that it is much easier to persuade organisations, particularly formalised civil society organisations, international NGOs and foreign states, when representatives plead a movement's cause in person. This enables potential partners to empathise with the struggles faced, ask any questions they may have and gain an understanding of the exact situation on the ground from first-hand accounts.³⁵ It is also important to meet in person regularly because personal motivations matter. The reason why individual movements and their leaders join and participate in networks may be constantly changing. Meetings in person make it easier to evaluate whether these motivations still align (see [here](#), page 90).

³² Interview with a member of a protest movement in Chile.

³³ Interview with a member of a protest movement in Chile.

³⁴ Interview with a member of a protest movement in Chile.

³⁵ Interview with a member of a protest movement in Azerbaijan.

GROUP AGREEMENTS

While many networks are established in situations of social conflict, it is also common that they will experience internal conflicts. This can be difficult to manage and can lead to the breakdown of a network. As such, at the very beginning of a network's life, members should draft a consensus-based group agreement that lists the underpinning values and commitments of the network. This should guide the functioning of a network and be used to mediate any internal conflicts. On a smaller scale, if networks have regular in-person member meetings, a group agreement could be compiled at the beginning of each meeting that details the values and commitments of the people present at the meeting. This document can then be used as a guide to deal with any internal conflicts constructively and respectfully, helping to ensure that conflict does not lead to the breakdown of relations in the long term (see [here](#), page 94.)

KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION SHARING

While some networks are established to meet a particular aim and then disbanded, others exist in the long term, and sometimes in different iterations (see [here](#), page 10). Even when networks disband after achieving a specific goal, knowledge sharing can and should continue. While this support may not be formalised, it helps to ensure the sustainability of relationships and movements in the longer term. One of the most important kinds of knowledge that can be shared is around other movements that partnered to achieve different goals and how the partnership was managed. Members of protest movements may know about movements or organisations that work towards the same goals that their ex-partners are now seeking to achieve.³⁶ Sharing this information can be invaluable and reduce the time it takes to establish a new network.

³⁶ Interview with a member of a protest movement in Armenia.

PROTEST PERSONALITY

To understand the needs of your protest movement properly, it is important to understand the theory that underpins civil society in general. When identifying partners, it helps to understand the various forms of civil society. Theory also points to gaps between formalised civil society organisations and those that are more grassroots in nature. Understanding these gaps, and what causes them, makes it easier to avoid these shortfalls when forming partnerships with other organisations and movements.

For more information: **Bridging the gaps: Citizens, organisations and dissociation**

CHARACTERISING CIVIL SOCIETY

Understanding what is meant by civil society is important. Broadly speaking, civil society is the area outside the family, market and state, and encompasses a spectrum of actors and entities with a wide range of values, worldviews, purposes, structures, working styles, types of organisation, membership and geographical coverage (see [here](#), page 8). Civil society functions as a realm of free association, a space that should be guaranteed by the state and international community through civil rights, but not directly controlled by the state and often in opposition to it. While the civil society space is home to many different views, it should function through inter-personal civility. Civility refers to a 'game without agreed rules' which depends on the ability to make appropriate moves and anticipate responses in a changing context based on implicitly understood codes of behaviour and social norms (see [here](#), pages 2–3).

DID YOU KNOW?

CIVICUS found that in Argentina, there are low levels of membership and volunteering in civic initiatives and formalised civil society organisations. Given that Argentina has seen recent waves of protests, the implication is that formalised civil society organisations have not been able to engage non-formal and individual activism sufficiently (see [here](#)).



Actors that make up civil society can include:

- Civil society organisations, including those classed as non-governmental organisations, that have an organised structure or activity, and are typically registered entities and groups;
- Online groups and activists, including social media communities that may in some way be organised but do not necessarily have physical, legal, or financial structures;
- Protest movements of collective action or identity, which can be online or physical;
- Faith-based organisations, faith communities and faith leaders;
- Labour unions and labour organisations representing workers;
- Social enterprises and social entrepreneurs employing innovative or market-oriented approaches to social and environmental problems;

- Grassroots and community associations and activists at the local level;
- Cooperatives owned and democratically controlled by their members.

This is not an exhaustive list, and the nature of civil society is constantly evolving (see [here](#), page 8).

CHARACTERISING YOUR MOVEMENT

One way in which civil society groups, including protest movements, can be characterised is the way they frame their campaign strategies. There are four broad categories that can be discerned, noting of course that some movements will use a variety of strategies that fall within multiple categories.

REFORMERS

Reformers pursue their objectives through official or mainstream institutions including parliaments, government agencies, courts and corporations. Effective reformers see their claims incorporated into official policies and scrutinise the implementation of their proposals. Outside of the Velvet Revolution, protests around transport and domestic violence legislation in Armenia are useful examples of effective reformatory movements as they worked within the law to achieve policy and legislative reforms. However, the risk is that ineffective reformers will promote and accept minor reforms, alienate their grassroots constituencies and identify more with power holders than their movement (see [here](#), page 1.)

REVOLUTIONARIES

While different definitions exist, revolutionaries are generally characterised as lacking the inclination to act within the constraints of legal or pre-established rules; sometimes ignoring conceptions of ‘civic responsibilities’ by using violent or confrontational protest methods. Understanding what violence means is complex and contested in the context of violence against public property and private property, and self-defence (see [here](#), page 179; note that the author uses the term ‘uncivil society’ rather than ‘revolutionary’.) Revolutionaries are often forced into this characterisation

by the closed nature of civic space in their country of origin or through an unwillingness of a state to engage. For instance, in apartheid South Africa, all actions taken by groups such as the African National Congress and South African Communist Party were revolutionary because the organisations were banned and could not pursue their objectives through lawful means.

REINVENTORS

Reinvention often comes when protest movements become overly formalised and institutionalised. Some movements adopt formal structures and move away from their grassroots origins. Members who are dissatisfied with such moves often break away and attempt to reinvent their movement using innovative and diverse means. Two examples of the tactics used by reinventors are online activism and cultural expression. Because these breakaway movements are often small, they tend to rely on the internet to spread their messages and ideas and organise supporters to conduct protests. The internet is the preferred method of communication because it is easier to access than mainstream media. Cultural expression encompasses an eclectic range of activist tactics, including graffiti and visual and performing arts. Often these are publicised on the internet. For example, Australian activists for migrant rights projected ‘boat people’ campaigns onto the Sydney Opera House, drawing national attention and debate (see [here](#), page 2).

ACTIVIST RESEARCHERS

This is a small category, which generally exists alongside one of the other groups. Activist research is a form of inquiry that involves working with activists to explore problems they consider important through research methods that they endorse. Researchers and activists collaborate to define problems, design and conduct the research, and interpret and apply findings (see [here](#), page 3). While the researchers themselves are certainly activists, the research they produce is regularly used to underpin conventional campaigns and protests. For instance, the Chilean student movements worked with policy researchers to produce a policy document that argued against commercialised education systems, and used this document as academic backing for their protests

against the government's tertiary education system. Similarly, the countless pieces of academic work sparked by the South African Student Fee protests, if harnessed and publicised correctly, could be seen as activist research that can assist movements in future.

GAPS BETWEEN FORMALISED CIVIL SOCIETY AND PROTEST MOVEMENTS

ARE THERE GAPS?

Recent experiences point to gaps between formalised civil society organisations and protest movements. These gaps can be characterised by a rise in citizen protest actions without proper or adequate support from formalised civil society organisations that have access to resources and expertise, and in closed civic space conditions where little formalised civil society is allowed to exist (see [here](#), page 3). Further, it appears that while globally, there is still significantly greater trust among the public in the actions of civil society organisations, as compared to those of the state and private sector, membership of civil society organisations remains low, funding is declining and the number of volunteers in organisations has decreased. There is likely a gap between the idea that people have of civil society organisations and the reality of those organisations (see [here](#), pages 42–43).

WHY ARE THERE GAPS?

There are likely countless reasons why gaps exist between civil society organisations and protest movements. Moreover, such gaps are informed by different causes depending on the location and focus area of the movement involved. There are, however, some general themes. First, it appears that formalised civil society

“IN CONDITIONS WHERE THERE IS LIMITED INSTITUTIONALISED CIVIL SOCIETY, PROTEST CAN FIND OTHER FORMS; IT ALSO SUGGESTS THAT THERE IS A CONSTITUENCY, AND POTENTIAL SOCIAL CAPITAL, READY TO BE MOBILISED WHICH FORMAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS HAVE HAD LIMITED CONTACT WITH.”

organisations may be perceived as urban, elitist, remote from people and disconnected from the values expected of them (see [here](#), page 40). In comparison, protest movements may be perceived as representative, responsive and diverse (see [here](#), page 5). Formalised organisations may have weak roots in the communities they claim to serve, face external influence and pressure from funders that place restrictions on the way that money can be used and have to struggle against states that place restrictions upon registered civil society organisations (see [here](#), page 4). Formalised organisations can be accused of becoming over-professionalised and of hiring full-time staff who have little experience of activism, potentially depoliticising them and making them harder to relate to for the people they work with. Many established organisations have a history of working to support government efforts, which can lead protest movements to distrust them and view them as too close to government (see [here](#), page 3). This problem is compounded by the fact that many civil society organisations have taken on service delivery roles, including on a contracted basis. When civil society organisations fill these roles, it raises the danger that they are no longer motivated by the demands of citizens, but rather by imperative to provide services, often funded externally. Their success will be measured on the basis of deliverables rather than the achievement of broader goals (see [here](#), pages 12–13). Finally, there exists a gap between civil society organisations and protest movements because of deliberate misinformation and conspiracy theories relating to one of the main funders of formalised organisations, George Soros and his Open Society Foundations. Anti-Soros sentiment is expressed by many on the right as they complain of Soros exerting pressure through funding to bend states to his will. These sentiments are encouraged by right-wing populist political leaders. This rhetoric seeks to refute progressive values and developing norms and attack George Soros individually. As a consequence, some protest movements may be wary of partnering with formalised organisations out of fear that they will be delegitimised on the basis of the organisation's funding.

WHY ARE GAPS A PROBLEM?

Gaps between civil society organisations and protest movements are problematic because they decrease the efficacy of all parties involved in protests. To bring about change, it is necessary that pressure comes from a variety of different sources and strategies are diverse and multifaceted. This is best achieved when protest movements, formalised civil society organisations, international actors and others work together. Gap between civil society organisations and protest movements jeopardise this coalition building and the overall impact of advocacy efforts. Organisationally, while protest movements are often comprised of a loose coalition of individuals, formalised civil society organisations can help organise these coalitions into a solid force to be reckoned with, nationally and internationally. Moreover, when it is necessary to develop leadership strategies, the professional experience of formalised organisations can be useful (see [here](#), pages 3–4). Gaps also hinder the ability of formalised movements to attract new volunteers and cater for the needs of those who already rely on them. Protest movements have made the protest space far more dynamic than it was before, and civil society organisations must stay abreast of this, help this dynamism to grow and stay in constant contact with citizens if they wish to remain relevant (see [here](#), pages 50–51). Partnerships across formalised and informal movements – and across borders – are therefore crucial.

SURREPTITIOUS SYMBIOSIS – THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER

While distrust may characterise relationships between many civil society organisations and protest movements, the reality is that organisations and movements rely on one another in informal ways. Formalised organisations often rely on protest movements to drive the activism agenda and garner popular support for causes. Protest movements often rely on formalised organisations for logistical roles, such as booking meeting spaces and printing materials – meaning that movements do not necessarily have to fundraise – and for informational reasons, as these organisations may have insights into government or be able to provide legal advice and services. This may mean that even when activists are critical of some aspects of civil

society organisations they still appreciate good relations with members of these organisations. Because many people who now work in formalised organisations started their careers as activists, they understand the needs of protest movements and are sympathetic to them. It is clear that even where movements and organisations do not see eye-to-eye, collaboration of some kind is necessary to ensure effective activism (see [here](#), pages 18 and 21). Understanding of this motivates civil society organisations to provide informal logistical and informational support to protest movements. Public disavowal of formalised civil society organisations by protest movements can endanger these informal relationships.



BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Protest is a crucial way of expressing political will and bringing about social change. It allows for expression and dissent between, during and after election cycles in democratic states, in states that are repressive and by people whose voices are generally excluded from formal or popular discourse. Collaborative efforts are needed to ensure the sustainability and success of protest movements. There are numerous best practices that can lead to the effective exercise and facilitation of the right to protest.

PROTEST MOVEMENTS

Be dynamic – The most effective protest movements make use of diverse, multifaceted campaigning and protest strategies. Because social situations can change so quickly in the midst of a campaign or protest, it is important to use strategies that are adaptable and put pressure on states from a number of different directions. This means that even if one strategy fails, there are others in place.

Collaborate – It is important to create strategic collaborative partnerships with other protest movements, civil society organisations, international organisations and, where appropriate, foreign states. Collaboration gives you access to information, resources and supporters that you would not otherwise have and helps to put pressure on states from different vantage points, and keep this pressure up in the long term. Partnerships can take many different forms and you should select the form most appropriate to your movement's needs.

Choose your partners carefully – When collaborating, partners should be carefully chosen based on the purpose for which you seek to collaborate. Good partners are generally those that share a vision or goal with your movement and are willing to adapt their approaches to meet the needs of your movement. For instance, where a mass, grassroots protest against a particular issue is the goal, it would make sense to partner with other protest movements. However, where you are seeking legal advice or representation, a civil society organisation specialising in public interest law may be a more appropriate partner. Circumstances and needs should dictate your partnership choices.

Creativity is key – Effective campaigns are those that approach social problems in creative ways and put pressure on states in ways that they were not expecting. As the leader of Otpor! said in an interview:

“FIGHTING ASSAD IS LIKE BOXING MIKE TYSON. YOU DON'T WANT TO BOX MIKE TYSON. YOU WANT TO CHALLENGE HIM AT CHESS.”
(SEE [here](#))

Be prepared – It is important to identify potential risks to your members and prepare accordingly. Where there is a high risk of police brutality or arrest of protesters, you should ensure that protesters are educated about their rights and that you have approached lawyers for assistance. Where many members are new to social activism, training is crucial to ensure their safety. This includes mapping out march routes, carefully allocating roles and having contingency plans in place. If a protest leader is arrested, other members must know the protocols and procedures for continuing the work of the movement. Being prepared also involves notifying officials, if this is a legal requirement and will not impact on the exercise of the right to protest.

Reach out – Many network-building organisations will only assist protest movements if they approach them with a mandate. Similarly, the best way to form connections and relationships with other potential partners is to bring them together for conversations or meetings. As such, it is important to reach out and make contact with people rather than waiting for them to approach you. Reaching out also involves reaching out to the public. This means showing empathy, attempting to involve people in your work in small ways and making the protest space appear inviting and inclusive.

Be inclusive – It is important to recognise the social inequality that may persist even within your movement. Protest spaces should be created that are inclusive and conducive to the sharing of different ideas and experiences. This can be as simple as organising childcare for mothers who wish to be a part of a movement, or involve the creation of more complex, formalised measures to address sexual assault, harassment and discrimination within a movement.

Be clear – It is crucial that your movement has a clearly defined vision, and goals have been set to achieve this vision. This vision should be suitably specific and the goals should create both a short-term and long-term roadmap for achieving the vision. This clarity makes it easier for the public, potential partners and states to engage with your movement.

Go international – Working towards the development of transnational solidarity movements can strengthen your cause and place greater pressure on those who have access to the levers of power. Movements that connect internationally also have the benefits of information-sharing and greater coordination across borders.

PROTEST LEADERS

Be clear – It is crucial that your movement has a clearly defined vision and both short-term and long-term and aims that will lead to the achievement of your vision. As a protest leader, it is your job to ensure that the vision and goals are created, they are clear and, importantly, they are representative of the movement as a whole. This can be done through including members in decision-making or relying on consensus based decision-making, in which leaders simply facilitate the process.

Be representative – Becoming a leader of a movement could happen organically, or through a formalised internal election. It is important, regardless of the process, that your leadership is representative of the movement and its wishes. This means that you should be in constant dialogue with members to ensure that no decision is taken against the will of members. This will help legitimise your leadership.

Be responsive – Effective leaders are dynamic leaders who are responsive both to changing social and political circumstances and members' needs. Quick, reasoned responses are key.

Be prepared – It is your job to identify any risks that may affect members and educate them accordingly. This may involve education about rights when arrested, avoiding the effects of less-lethal weapons such as teargas

and what to expect of protest spaces in general if people are inexperienced. It is important that you know what the law requires of protest movements in terms of notification or route marking and that you take steps to comply unless these procedures are excessively repressive.

Creativity is key – Effective campaigns are those that approach social problems in creative ways and put pressure on states in ways that they were not expecting. It is your job to lead the conceptualisation of these creative campaigns, strategise about new ways of approaching the problem and foster dialogue amongst members.

Be aware – Movements are often made up of members from all walks of life, who experience different forms of discrimination and violence daily. It is important that leadership understands these inequalities, listens to differing views and experiences and provides tailored, additional support structures where necessary.

Collaborate – Ensure that you are constantly building relationships with the leaders of other movements and organisations that could be partners in the future. It is also crucial to set a collaboration agenda that clearly sets out what needs your movement has, the kinds of partners you are looking for and the terms under which you will collaborate.

DOMESTIC CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Be supportive – Grassroots movements and protest movements are often the driving forces of social change. Because of this it is important to support them. This involves offering whatever assistance your organisation can, even if it is something as small as booking a meeting venue for a movement or performing administrative tasks. This supporting role should not be diminished by any antagonism or mistrust that movements may exhibit towards your organisation. Offering support is a way of winning trust in the long term.

Be dynamic – A relationship with a protest movement may start out as one thing and transform into something different as a changing context demands new types of support. It is important to be dynamic in your organisation's support and adapt to these changing needs. The kinds of adaptation that may be required include the transition from publicly supporting a movement to doing so without any branding or official affiliation, in cases of backlash against the partnership from counter-movements.

Take direction – Collaboration with protest movements should be done in a respectful and open manner. It is important to listen to movements when they describe their needs and goal. Your organisation should not attempt to dictate strategies or hijack a movement. Your organisation should recognise that it is working together with a movement, rather than one working for one another. Movements are not subservient to formalised civil society simply because they are not professionalised or funded.

Be flexible – Because the circumstances in which protests occur change quickly, it is important that your organisation is flexible with the assistance it provides to protest movements. This is particularly true when that assistance is financial. Often financial assistance requires that the money be used for specific costs, but as circumstances change this may not make immediate sense. Instead, you should be flexible and understanding of changing needs, as long as basic reporting requirements for funding are fulfilled.

Be open – Many protest movements are distrustful of civil society organisations because they are perceived as being too closely aligned to states or as receiving funding from sources seen as compromised. It is important to be open about the ties your organisation may have to states and funders and explain how these could be used to the benefit of protest movements. Moreover, you should be open about your organisation's funders and partners as this will assist movements in making informed decisions about whether to collaborate with your organisation or not.

Reach out – If your organisation has expertise or resources that it thinks will be beneficial to protest movements, it should offer these. Because of gaps that exist between protest movements and formalised civil society organisations, these movements will often be wary about approaching your organisation first but may be open to receiving support if you initiate the relationship.

INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Be flexible – International and regional civil society organisations often offer financial support to local civil society organisations and protest movements, but money often comes with stringent reporting and accounting requirements, and strict conditions on what it must be used for. Such reporting and accounting requirements often exclude protest movements from accessing support because they may not have the procedures in place for compliance. Moreover, dictating the way that money should be used is unresponsive to changing circumstances and needs. As such, flexibility is needed. If international civil society organisations wish to be truly helpful, they should relax their requirements as much as possible when the need arises.

Be realistic – When approached to partner with or assist a protest movement, international civil society organisations should be realistic about the kind of assistance they can provide and the conditions that may be attached to this. This allows movements to make informed decisions about whether the partnership is worthwhile. It displays an awareness of the political realities that constrains many organisations working globally and regionally.

Be aware – It is important to be aware of the power dynamics at play when protest movements, which often represent the interests of disenfranchised groups, approach large international organisations for assistance. It is easy for the relationship to replicate existing patterns of discrimination and perpetuate inequality. This often manifests in an assumption that an organisation

understands the needs of a movement better than the movement itself. As such, internal sensitivity training should be conducted and organisations should work to ensure that they provide the assistance that movements request, rather than the assistance the organisation deems them to need.

Be open – It is important that international organisations are open about any political ties or funding they may have. However, it is also important that organisations make themselves approachable and widely publicise any partnership opportunities they may have or assistance they can provide.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Be representative – Law enforcement agencies and policing authorities should work to ensure that their membership is representative of the people they are serving. In the protest context trust in the police is important but also rare. It is more likely that protesters will trust police officers and work with them rather than against them if they can recognise people like themselves in the police service.

Training – Law enforcement agencies and policing authorities should ensure that their officers are trained in tactics for crowd facilitation, de-escalation of violence and non-escalation. Officers should receive human rights-based training, sensitivity training and implicit-bias training to ensure that they understand the social dynamics at play in protest movements. No police officer should be deployed to supervise a protest unless they have gone through this training.

Know the law – Alongside practical training, police officers should know the law relating to the right to protest. This involves understanding the human rights justification for protests, and the role that states are meant to play in facilitating protests. Police officers should also be clear on legal issues such as what constitutes violence and what grounds justify arrest. Rights such as the right to privacy should be emphasised, particularly in the context of surveillance of protesters. Again, no officer should be deployed if they have not had this training.

Apply the law – Police officers should apply the legal rules they have learnt. This means that they should not suppress protest out of hand, but instead work to facilitate the peaceful nature of that protest. They should not arrest or react to protesters unless protesters have broken the law. Mere provocation should not result in police action. Any police action, surveillance or arrest must be carried out in a lawful, necessary and proportionate manner and following prescribed procedures, which should emphasise precaution and non-discrimination.

Be accountable and transparent – It is important that police officers are transparent about, and accountable for, their actions during protests. Reports should be compiled detailing the events that took place, force that was used, any arrests that occurred and the procedures that were followed. These reports should be made publicly available as soon as they are published so that the public can review them. Accountability mechanisms, such as internal disciplinary procedures and independent disciplinary procedures, should be established to investigate any allegations of unlawfulness in response to protests. Specialised procedures dealing with issues such as sexual violence perpetrated by the police should also be established. These mechanisms should receive complaints both from within the police service and from the public.

STATES

Enact just laws – States should ensure that their laws around the right to protest are aligned with international law and standards. This means that they should ensure they are facilitating the right to protest rather than stifling it. Open civic space is important for the right to protest and states should develop their laws accordingly. States should ensure that punishments for breaking laws are not disproportionate to the purpose for which laws were enacted.

Apply the law – States must ensure that the laws, in addition to being in line with international law and standards, are not just symbolic but are actually applied. This means that states should ensure that all people who interact

with protesters know and understand the law and are equipped to abide by it. From the officials in charge of receiving notification forms to marshals, medical staff and police officers, all levels of staff must be trained as to the content and application of the law. There should be severe consequences should any public official fail to apply the law or otherwise act repressively towards protesters.

Open civic space – Civic space should be opened. Open civic space is less likely to result in violent protests and more likely to enable protests to be sites of collaboration and compromise where no person is forced to break the law to make themselves heard.

Be receptive – The best way to ensure that protests do not escalate to violence is to be receptive to the ideas put forward by protesters. This does not necessarily mean bending to their will, but rather being open to communication and compromise. Such receptivity is likely to contribute to the legitimacy of a state and may result in important and beneficial reforms that would not have been possible without input from the public through protest movements.

Be cooperative – Many states struggle to provide their citizens with everything they need to meet their basic needs. As such, it is important that states collaborate with civil society to ensure proper service delivery and cooperative governance. When states only engage with citizens during election cycles, they are likely to face resistance from people who want to make their voices heard. Constant collaboration with formalised civil society organisations and protest movements helps people express their views and avoids conflicts.

FUNDERS

Be flexible – Money from funders often comes with stringent reporting and accounting requirements. These often exclude protest movements, which tend not have the procedures in place to access and report on support. Given the rise of grassroots activism through protest movements, and the

limited membership of formalised civil society organisations, it is important that funders start looking for ways to partner with protest movements even when they do not have accounting and reporting procedures. This should come with an understanding that funds may be used for a variety of different purposes depending on the needs that arise, but that these will be justified by the gains that a movement achieves.

Have a diverse focus – Often funders cluster around specific issues, meaning that protest movements and formalised civil society organisations working in those fields may have access to many resources, while others working on other issues do not receive assistance. It is important to have a diverse focus and encourage protests movements and civil society in general, as civil society helps defend human rights and advance development and democracy as a whole.

Multifaceted assistance – Funders, by their nature, contribute money to protest movements and civil society organisations. However, they are often in a position to provide more than financial assistance. Funders may provide multifaceted assistance such as providing protest movements with accounting officers, or access to scientific researchers and expertise. Assistance such as this can make a movement more efficient and also make more desirable to other potential funders.

Don't dictate – Money is often given to protest movements subject to specific conditions. These conditions can make it difficult for movements to adapt to changing circumstances and needs. Conditions often represent a misconception that a funder understands the needs of a movement better than the movement itself. This can lead to an unhealthy relationship in which it becomes less likely that funding will be used efficiently or a movement succeeds.

USEFUL RESOURCES

TOOLKITS:

- [Communicating for feminist movement building](#)
- [Beautiful Rising Protest Toolkit](#)
- [New Tactics in Human Rights](#)
- [New Tactics in Human Rights Tactical Mapping](#)

REPORTS AND ARTICLES:

- Academy for Educational Development (2005): [Supporting Civil Society Networks In International Development Programs](#)
- Nicola Banks and David Hulme (2012): [The role of NGOs and civil society in development and poverty reduction](#)
- CIVICUS (2011): [Bridging the gaps: Citizens, organisations and dissociation](#)
- CIVICUS (2016): [State of Civil Society Report 2016: Citizens Mobilising: Protest, Activism and Participation](#)
- CIVICUS (2017): [State of Civil Society Report 2017: Protest: Citizens in Action](#)
- CIVICUS (2017): [Keeping up the pressure: enhancing the sustainability of protest movements](#)
- Christian Elongue and Charles Kojo Vandyck (2019): [Social Movements and Social Change in Africa](#)
- Ana Margarida Esteves, Sara Motta and Laurence Cox (2009): [“Civil society” versus social movements](#)
- Marlies Glasius and Armine Ishkanian (2014): [Surreptitious symbiosis: engagement between activists and NGOs](#)
- Brendan Halloran and Walter Flores (2015): [Mobilizing Accountability: Citizens, Movements And The State](#)
- Patrick Heller: (2013): [Challenges and Opportunities: Civil Society in a Globalizing World](#)

- INCLIO and the International Human Rights Clinic at the University of Chicago (2018): **Defending Dissent: towards state practices that protect and promote the rights to protest**
- Collaboration between PRIA, ICD, PSO, CDRA, EASUN and INTRAC (2012): **Civil Society@Crossroads Shifts, Challenges, Options?**
- Grzegorz Piotrowski (2009): **Civil society, un-civil society and the social movements**
- Transparency International (2017): **Building On Social Movements To Achieve Systemic Change**
- United States Institute of Peace (2015): **Aid to Civil Society A Movement Mindset**
- War Resisters' International (2014): **Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns**
- James Whelan (2004): **Reformers, Reactionaries and Reinvention**
- World Economic Forum (2013): **The Future Role of Civil Society**



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