

By Marc Porter Magee, Ph.D.

October 2019

A Little Opposition is a Good Thing and Other Lessons from the Science of Advocacy

Advocacy
Labs_

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A collaboration between



About the Author

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About AdvocacyLabs

AdvocacyLabs is an initiative of 50CAN and FutureEd that provides fresh thinking and rigorous insight into how change happens in education policy, using reports, briefs, interviews and events grounded in both academic research and exclusive data from the field. Follow us on Twitter at [@AdvocacyLabs](https://twitter.com/AdvocacyLabs).

About 50CAN

50CAN: The 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now is a locally led, nationally supported nonprofit education advocacy organization committed to a high-quality education for all kids, regardless of their address. Follow us on Twitter at [@FiftyCAN](https://twitter.com/FiftyCAN).

About FutureEd

FutureEd is an independent, solution-oriented think tank at Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy, committed to bringing fresh energy to the causes of excellence, equity, and efficiency in K-12 and higher education. Follow us on Twitter at [@FutureEdGU](https://twitter.com/FutureEdGU).

Foreword

This is the first in what will be a series of reports, briefs, interviews and events for AdvocacyLabs, a new initiative from 50CAN and FutureEd focused on bringing fresh and rigorous perspectives to how change happens in education policy.

Our goal is to bring together academic research on advocacy and exclusive data from education advocacy campaigns to provide insights into the most effective ways to improve outcomes for underserved students in the nation's schools and colleges. By doing so, we aim to help advocates tap the rich trove of insights from academia and apply research to the real-world questions advocacy leaders are asking themselves every day.

We have seen how an increasing focus on the science of learning is making a difference in classrooms across the country, and we believe there is tremendous promise in bringing a scientific mindset to the similarly complex world of education advocacy.

This inaugural report is focused on a review of the academic literature with an eye to what will most benefit advocacy leaders working to maximize their odds of success. In future reports, we will showcase the data that advocates themselves are collecting in order to contribute to this growing body of knowledge.

We hope this new initiative can make a difference in the educational lives of underserved students and we welcome your partnership as we strive to help those working toward that end.

Marc Porter Magee, Ph.D.
CEO and Founder, 50CAN

Thomas Toch
Director, FutureEd

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Preface

What can academics really teach advocates about how change happens in our world? A lot, it turns out.

If you are a little skeptical about that claim, this report is for you. In the pages that follow, I organize the results from the most significant quantitative and qualitative academic studies of the past 40 years with the goal of helping practicing advocates judge for themselves what is useful and actionable from the world of the academy to their daily work.

My hope is to provide better answers to the big questions that really matter to those who have devoted their lives to changing the world: How do you recruit people to your cause? How do you keep them engaged? What do you do when the political winds shift?

For me, this effort to build bridges between the academic world and the advocacy world is personal. My journey started with a class on political sociology at Georgetown University taught by Timothy Wickham-Crowley (author of *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America*) and continued through graduate school at Duke University under my dissertation advisor Nan Lin (author of *The Struggle for Tiananmen*).

Since earning a Ph.D. in sociology in 2002, I've been putting these lessons learned to the test, first through my work for Will Marshall at the Progressive Policy Institute think tank in Washington, D.C., and later through education advocacy campaigns in a dozen cities and states over 15 years. My experiences have taught me just how much the perspectives of both the academic and the practitioner have to offer each other but also the substantial barriers that often stand in the way of a rich exchange of ideas between the two sectors.

This report is the culmination of a two-year project to help bring these worlds a little closer together. The project plan was simple to describe but challenging to execute:

- 1 Look at best-in-class academic work on advocacy across the domains of political science, sociology, economics, psychology, anthropology, history and law.
- 2 Conduct in-depth interviews with 16 leading academic researchers studying advocacy.
- 3 Read and assess the findings from over 200 of the most cited journal articles, research papers and books on advocacy from the past four decades.
- 4 Write up the insights from these interviews and academic studies into concise lessons that advocates can put to use right away.

The findings that emerged from this effort were often counterintuitive and challenged conventional wisdom on how advocacy campaigns should be built and carried out. For example:

1 *The hardest changes to secure are the modest ones.* There is a natural friction to policy change, like trying to push an object across a table. Once you apply enough force to get it off its resting place, it is more likely to travel a foot than an inch.

2 *The powerful aren't as powerful as you think.* It seems logical to assume that the advocacy efforts of the powerful should succeed more often than those with less power, but this isn't true. When it comes to seeking a policy change, powerful groups are no more likely to win than any other group.

3 *The most effective lobbying doesn't look like lobbying.* Arm-twisting, raised voices or threats rarely get results. Instead, most change happens when policy makers and outside advocates see themselves as members of the same team.

4 *If you want people to stay involved, ask them to sacrifice.* It's natural to think that the best way to keep people involved in your cause is to make it easy for them to take action. However, it is the very act of sacrifice that generates a long-term, personal commitment to the cause.

In the report that follows, I explore these four lessons and 13 others through a lightning-fast tour of the best that academia has to offer the practicing advocate.

My aim is to let the authoritative sources and the leading academics speak directly to the reader. As such, I've strived to quote from the original research and from my interviews with professors as much as possible and to use each section as an invitation for the reader to dig deeper into their research.

Marc Porter Magee, Ph.D.
CEO and Founder, 50CAN

Section

1

Adopting the Right Mindset

Lesson 1 A little opposition is a good thing

A common deterrent to public advocacy is the risk of public criticism. Who wouldn't be daunted by the prospect of a fierce and vocal opponent? Yet the greatest threat to any advocacy campaign is not determined opposition but vague indifference. In fact, researchers have found that a lack of pushback is a key predictor of failure. With only a limited amount of time each year, the incentive is for policy makers to focus on the most important issues under debate. Those are usually topics with strongly held positions and intense campaigning on all sides. Rather than shy away from conflict, advocates should embrace it and use the energy of their opponents to gain attention for their side.

What the experts say

“There is a lot more change being proposed in any given year than there is the capacity at the political level to enact these changes or even consider them. While there may be a fear of stirring up people on the other side of an issue, it is important to understand that that is all part of the political process. You can be loud and stir up some attention and opposition or you can be ineffective.”

Jeffrey Berry, John Richard Skuse Professor of Political Science, Tufts University and author of *The New Liberalism: The Rising Power of Citizen Groups*.

What the research says

In the 1990s, many experts inside and outside of the United States Postal Service (USPS) had reached the conclusion that the organization was in need of fundamental reforms if it was going to adapt to the new world of electronic communication and an increasingly competitive shipping landscape.

Few elected officials disagreed with the idea that USPS was in need of major reforms and there wasn't much organized opposition to doing something to improve its efficiency and sustainability. But in legislative session after legislative session, the leadership in Congress failed to act.

The reason? There simply wasn't enough of an active debate of USPS reform to push the topic up the policy agenda, write Frank Baumgartner, Jeffrey Berry, Marie Hojnacki, Beth Leech and David Kimball in their 2009 book, *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses and Why*. Grounded in more than 300 interviews with lobbyists working on a random sample of more than 100 issues from 1999 to 2002, *Lobbying and Policy Change* argues that successful legislation is rarely a one-sided endeavor:

“As the visibility of issues increases, so do the stakes for the legislative parties as they search for ways to promote their policy solutions” (p. 99). Without the visibility that an active debate provides, causes like postal reform die from lack of attention. “Large changes ... can seldom be achieved quietly,” they conclude. “The only way to produce big change is to get many people to engage the issue. If this does not occur, nothing may happen” (p. 118).

In his 1999 book *The New Liberalism: The Rising Power of Citizen Groups*, political scientist Jeffrey Berry explores this intersection of competition and attention in the legislative process in three different sessions of the U.S. Congress: 1963, 1979 and 1991. Across these three sessions, he was able to study 205 different policy issues. In contrast to the traditional view that the different advocacy groups were focused mostly on defeating each other’s ideas, Berry finds instead a war for attention: “Space on the congressional agenda is a precious commodity” (p. 85).

One of the most striking findings in *Lobbying and Policy Change* was that a “lack of countermobilization is a good predictor of failure” (p. 75). When the authors dug a little deeper into this pattern, they found that “the existence of conflict immediately increases the chances that others will be drawn into or begin to observe the policy debate. Conflict attracts attention. As interested others—including members of the public, journalists, organizations, and government decision makers—become aware that an issue is contested, they too may ‘choose sides,’ thereby increasing the chances for greater and more visible conflict” (p. 76). More than one-third (34 percent) of all advocacy groups seeking a change in policy named “lack of attention” as a major obstacle to their success (p. 83).

While visible conflict may feel to advocates like losing ground, it is actually a crucial step forward on the way to turning their ideas into law. “Most observers of the policy process recognize how few potential issues actually find their way onto the public agenda,” write Baumgartner et al. “Advocates who are able to draw attention to their concerns have cleared an enormous hurdle” (p. 76).

Discussion questions

- 1 Who are the opponents of your issue?
- 2 How might you draw them into the debate?
- 3 What do you need to focus on to win that debate?

Further reading

Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, Beth L. Leech, and David C. Kimball, *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*, The University of Chicago Press, 2009

Jeffrey Berry, *The New Liberalism: The Rising Power of Citizen Groups*, Brookings Institution Press, 1999

Lesson 2 The Hardest Changes to Secure Are the Modest Ones

There is a natural friction to policy change, like trying to push an object across a table. If you can apply enough force to get it off its resting place, it is more likely to travel a foot than an inch. The most likely outcome of any advocacy campaign in a given year is failure but advocates who push for bold changes are more likely to be successful than those who seek only modest ones. Thus, advocates looking to maximize their impact should not aim for a series of small wins but instead shoot for a win worth fighting for.

What the experts say

“The status quo is sticky. People get used to the existing rules and arrangements and they take them for granted as the natural way of doing business. Once you’ve got a particular set of policies or institutions in place, that tends to produce constituencies that benefit from them. Whenever anybody stands up and wants to challenge them, there are people who step forward to defend them. So, change is always about struggle, even when the change you seek is incremental.”

John Campbell, Class of 1925 Professor and Professor of Sociology, Dartmouth University and author of *The National Origins of Policy Ideas*

What the research says

A top goal of environmentalists during the Clinton Administration was to secure a reduction in the level of sulfur allowed in gasoline. Sulfur contributes to air pollution but is also helpful in making automobile engines run smoothly. The oil and automobile industries were lined up against these changes.

After no significant movement for seven years in the face of significant opposition, the EPA adopted sweeping requirements in the final year of the Clinton Administration that cut the amount of sulfur allowed in gasoline by 90 percent. The oil refiners fought vigorously against the changes, which they described as “catastrophic,” but the administration marshaled its political capital and went big, seizing the window of opportunity to do something historic.

Baumgartner et al. document this example in *Lobbying and Policy Change* as a way of exploring the strange and contentious give and take that results in policy wins. What they found was a world in which most advocacy efforts failed, and it was the campaigns focused on significant changes that stood the best chance of overcoming these difficult

odds: “Sometimes programs received huge boosts, propelling them to double or triple their original sizes or more. Sometimes, but less often, programs lost half or more of their funding. Moderate increases or decreases were rather unusual” (p. 37). In total, across all the advocacy campaigns studied, significant policy changes were secured 28 percent of the time.

As Baumgartner et al. dug deeper into the world of elite negotiations through their interviews, a few key drivers of change emerged. On the one hand, “policy makers and other advocates often are invested in the status quo that they developed, making them reluctant to consider even relatively small changes.” At the same time, “in heavily charged partisan policy disputes, incremental change does not appear as a policy option. Instead, government officials choose between significant policy change and the status quo” (p. 236).

Thus, the world of policy advocacy is like a physical system governed by a high level of friction. “Policies move forward as proponents are able to mobilize support sufficient to scale a threshold, or to overcome the friction associated with the scarcity of attention,” they write. “It is a process full of resistance. Overcome the friction, and substantial policy change may follow” (p. 247). Reflecting on these dynamics, the authors conclude: “the risks and opportunities associated with policy change are large, even if the probabilities are low” (p. 239).

These findings extend and confirm the conclusions reached by sociologist William Gamson in his groundbreaking 1975 book, *The Strategy of Social Protest*. In that study, Gamson examined 53 advocacy groups operating between 1880 and 1945. He found that “even groups with modest aims often fail” (p. 49). In fact, the success rate was higher for groups that adopted bolder goals as long as those groups didn’t seek to displace another group. The bolder groups, Gamson found, gained acceptance into the political establishment 68 percent of the time, compared to 56 percent for groups with more limited goals.

More often than not, campaigns with bold goals attract more attention and more supporters than those with more limited ambitions, which impacts how often they succeed.

Discussion questions

- 1 What is a modest version of your goal?
- 2 What is a bold version of your goal?
- 3 Who might be more energized if you aimed higher in the change you seek?

Further reading

Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, Beth L. Leech, and David C. Kimball, *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*, The University of Chicago Press, 2009

William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest*, The Dorsey Press, 1975

Lesson 3 The Powerful Aren't as Powerful as You Think

It seems logical to assume that the change efforts of the powerful should succeed most of the time, but this is not what researchers have discovered. The reason is that the powerful in society have already exercised their influence so many times that it is literally written into our laws. Paradoxically, when well-resourced groups are pursuing a new policy change they are no more likely to win than less well-resourced groups. At the same time, the powerful and wealthy are not a unified group and often find themselves spending their resources counteracting each other when seeking change. Even when they are united, public opinion and the outcome of elections will matter a lot more than their specific advocacy efforts.

What the experts say

“There’s a tendency to overestimate what money can do. It’s important but it’s not the only thing that matters. When people actually get active and organized, they can make a big difference. We have seen quite a lot of that throughout American history and that’s especially true for the local and state governments.”

Theda Skocpol, Victor S. Thomas Professor of Government and Sociology, Harvard University and author of *Diminished Democracy*

What the research says

The key priorities of the business community were largely absent from the legislative calendar when the U.S. Congress opened its session at the beginning of 1993. Instead, a Democratic president and a unified Democratic legislature were focused on enacting their campaign promises, such as the Family and Medical Leave Act and a new healthcare reform bill. Two years later, Congress was driving forward with a completely different slate of priorities, including long-time business goals such as tort reform, social security reform, deficit reduction and tax cuts for small businesses.

Had the advocacy efforts of American businesses gotten that much more effective in just two years? Obviously not. The difference can mostly be attributed to what happened between the two legislative sessions: the 1994 election, where Republicans made huge gains, and a sharp drop in public support for the Democratic president.

In his in-depth exploration of the sources and limits of the powerful in our society, political scientist Mark Smith unpacks the consequences of these and

other shifts on legislative outcomes in the U.S. Congress. Written up in his 2000 book *American Business and Political Power: Public Opinion, Elections, and Democracy*, Smith explores more than 2,000 issues under debate between the 1950s and the 1990s and the key drivers in the outcomes of these debates.

While big businesses have some of the best resourced lobbying efforts in the country, Smith finds that, in contrast to the expectation that these resources would buy results, “in substantive terms, public mood—the measure of global public preference for stronger or weaker government—constitutes the strongest driving force. If we want to know whether business will be either celebrating legislative victories or absorbing defeats, the best place to look is at demands among the citizenry on the appropriate scope of government action” (p. 109).

In fact, through a regression analysis of potential drivers of the advancement of business-friendly legislation in Congress, Smith finds that the average effect of shifts in public mood towards businesses explain nearly three-quarters of the difference in the success rate of business-friendly legislation “between 1957, a year falling within an era characterized by many business wins, and 1972, a year in the middle of a run of business losses” (p. 110).

How could this be? “Issues generating a consensus within business tend to be politicized, meaning they are ideological, partisan, and highly salient among the public,” Smith writes. “As a result, those issues provide officeholders with incentives to respond to constituent preferences and also heighten the consequences of elections” (p. 9). That is, the bigger the issue, the more other groups will enter the debate, which leads the public to pay more attention, which in turn leads elected officials to be more attuned to public opinion.

This conclusion finds support in other studies on the ability of the powerful to get their way in our pluralistic system of government. For example, in their 2013 article “Special Interests After Citizens United: Access, Replacement, and Interest Group Response to Legal Change,” law professors Samuel Issacharoff and Jeremy Peterman find that despite predictions to the contrary, after Citizens United special interests haven’t gotten more powerful.

In their analysis of the 98 groups that spent more than \$1 million in 2012 on election related advertising, they find that “none was a for-profit corporation; 7 were unions; a few were established interest groups,

such as the NRA, the Club for Growth, and NARAL; and the remainder were new ideological groups organized for the purpose of independent spending” (p. 200). The pattern was consistent with a broader trend of “the continued rise of ideologically oriented groups funded by individuals.” In other words, post-Citizens United it is still mostly politicians and their aligned ideological donors who are driving the money, not issue campaigns or corporations.

Returning to Baumgartner et al.’s *Lobbying and Policy Change*, we find similar patterns that help illuminate this counterintuitive dynamic of elite negotiations. Across all of the issues studied, they find that “the percentage of times the wealthier side won ranges from 50 to 53, which means that the side with fewer resources won with about the same probability. Thus, at the issue level, there seems to be no relationship between the level of these types of resources that a side controls and whether it obtains its preferred outcomes. The wealthier side sometimes wins and sometimes loses” (p. 209).

In their study, Baumgartner et al. uncover a few key factors driving this finding. First, “whatever bias in the mobilization of various social, business, and corporate interests may exist in Washington, this bias should already be reflected in the status quo. That is, existing public policy is already the fruit of policy discussions, debates, accumulated wisdom, and negotiated compromises made by policy makers in previous iterations of the policy struggle ... if the wealthy are better mobilized and more prone to get what they want in Washington, they should already have gotten what they wanted in previous rounds of the policy process” (p. 20).

At the same time, the authors find that another reason “for the low correlations between resources and success [has] to do with competition. In short, large sides mobilize when necessary, not in the absence of powerful opponents. Similarly, the emergence of a powerful force for change can lead to other powerful groups moving into action to oppose them” (p. 225). In other words, well-resourced change seekers often draw powerful opponents into the debate.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, even the most well-financed advocates will find a formidable opponent in the status quo. As explored in the previous section, our whole system of government works to frustrate those seeking to disrupt the existing policy arrangements. The effect of this tilted playing

field means that “the defenders of the status quo can often sit back and do very little ... Across all three categories of tactics—inside, outside, and grassroots advocacy—defenders of the status quo are less likely than challengers to report activity” (p. 152).

Surveying the outcomes from all the campaigns studied, Baumgartner et al. conclude: “Defense is a winning game in Washington” (p. 164).

Discussion questions

- 1 What is the status quo on your issue?
- 2 Who benefits from this status quo?
- 3 What are the divisions among the groups that make up this status quo?

Further reading

Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, Beth L. Leech & David C. Kimball, *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*, The University of Chicago Press, 2009

Mark A. Smith, *American Business and Political Power: Public Opinion, Elections, and Democracy*, University of Chicago Press, 2000

Samuel Issacharoff and Jeremy Peter-man, “Special Interests After Citizens United: Access, Replacement, and Interest Group Response to Legal Change,” *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, Vol. 9, 2013

Lesson 4 Persistence Is Power

Advocacy demands a long-term commitment to your cause. Typically, advocates must invest years of work before their campaign shows results. Researchers have found that the vast majority of issues are debated in legislatures year after year, and that the majority of advocates plan to continue their work as long as it takes to secure a win. For groups tackling issues such as criminal justice reform, it can take decades to achieve concrete results. Yet, despite the challenges, staying the course works: the common characteristic of successful efforts is persistence. What stands in the way of achieving this longevity? Funding and factionalism.

What the experts say

“Change takes a long time. You note when the final fight comes forward but usually in one form or another that fight had been going on for decades. This little gain happens and then there’s pushback. And then this little gain happens and there’s pushback. And round and round and round. Sometimes it just means hunkering down and sticking with it, especially when the win you’re looking for is a big win.”

Beth L. Leech, Professor of Political Science and Vice Chair of Graduate Studies, Rutgers University and author of *Lobbyists at Work*

What the research says

Criminal justice reform struggled to get traction during the 1990s. “For a time, the issue appeared poised to emerge on the national agenda,” Baumgartner et al. write in their 2009 study of federal advocacy campaigns (p. 114). A series of major research reports documenting racial disparities across the criminal justice system had laid the groundwork for reform, and dozens of civil rights organizations pushed the cause. But ultimately, neither the Clinton nor the Bush Administrations took action on the issue.

Why? Baumgartner et al. quote a member of one of the civil rights organizations on the barriers they faced: “The opposition is everywhere, so strong it doesn’t need to be organized. It is every politician who argues for tough-on-crime attitudes. It’s the entire criminal justice system” (p. 115).

As federal efforts to achieve a breakthrough on criminal justice reform stalled, advocates shifted their focus to the state level with campaigns in both Texas and Georgia. In 1994, Georgia’s Democratic Gov. Zell Miller passed a major “tough-on-crime” bill ushering in the penalty of life without parole for just

two offenses and mandating that juveniles be tried and convicted as adults. Years later, Republican Gov. Nathan Deal was “shocked by a widely publicized 2009 Pew report that found 1 in 13 Georgians were under some form of correctional supervision,” write political scientists David Dagan and Steven Teles in their 2016 book *Prison Break: Why Conservatives Turn Against Mass Incarceration* (p. 115).

A unique coalition formed to address Georgia’s problem of mass incarceration: Democrats led by then-minority leader Stacey Abrams; faith leaders from across the state; and conservatives looking to cut back on government overreach. In 2013, a sweeping criminal justice reform bill passed and was signed into law. The results appeared as early as 2014: “new admissions to prison, which sank almost 15 percent, driven by a 20 percent drop in black offenders,” according to Dagan and Teles (p. 128).

A few years later the success of the Georgia reforms, together with similarly sweeping reforms in Texas, helped push the 2018 First Step Act across the finish line in the U.S. Congress. While not as comprehensive as the state-level reforms, the First Step Act reduced the disparities between different drug offenses, gave federal judges more control over mandatory sentences for nonviolent drug offenders and made it easier to gain a reduced sentence through good behavior. The initial work received strong support from foundations started by George Soros, but this final push also received strong support from foundations started by the Koch family. Among other things, persistence gives movements the time they need to expand the political tent.

In his 2013 book, *Strategy: A History*, war studies professor Lawrence Freedman writes, “a determination to seek a quick and decisive result is a frequent cause of failure” (p. 628). The best strategists understand that change unfolds not like a three-act play but like a sprawling, multi-year soap opera. In their 2009 study, Baumgartner et al. found much evidence to support this pattern across a host of issues. Nearly 9 in 10 of the advocacy groups studied in their initial sample were still working to achieve their goals two years later. “[Advocates] live in a world that rewards patience,” they write.

If persistence is so important, why don’t more advocacy causes simply persist? The answer is that advocacy campaigns almost always contain within themselves the potential seeds of their destruction: factionalism.

In his 1975 book, *The Strategy of Social Protest*, sociologist William Gamson documented the many ways that advocacy causes end, concluding: “Internal division is a misery that few challenging groups escape completely—it is in the nature of the beast” (p. 99). Overall, he found that 42 percent of groups collapsed without any success, 38 percent gained both wins for their cause and acceptance of their group by the establishment, 11 percent were preempted by achieving wins for their cause but not acceptance of their group, and 9 percent were co-opted by gaining acceptance for their group without any wins for their cause.

At the same time, Gamson found that 43 percent of all advocacy groups experienced factional splits and those that experienced factionalism were much less successful: “less than one-fourth of the groups that experienced it are successful, in contrast to 70 percent of those that escape it” (p. 101).

A few internal characteristics tended to help groups lessen the damaging effects of factionalism. Centralized groups were much less likely to experience factionalism than those with decentralized structures (25 percent vs. 64 percent). Gamson also found that it helps to have an organizational hierarchy with clear lines of authority and an inclusive culture that welcomes different perspectives and viewpoints.

Building on Gamson in their chapter “Infighting and Insurrection” in the 2018 book *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements: Second Edition*, sociologists Amin Ghaziani and Kelsy Kretschmer sum up the state of contemporary research using Joyce Marie Mushaben’s memorable phrase: “Factionalism is engraved all too often as the ‘cause of death’ upon the tombstones of protests past” (p. 224). At the same time, they argue that advocacy leaders can work to avoid this outcome by promoting clarity about “the organization’s values, goals, and targets of action” and moving quickly to overcome social divisions that distract from their overall mission (p. 223).

In her 2019 book *Fighting for NOW: Diversity and Discord in the National Organization for Women*, Kretschmer explores this argument further through 45 detailed interviews with leaders who were active in NOW during the fractious 1960s and 70s. “NOW’s early years were plagued with fights—even lawsuits—over the best balance of power between local and national interests,” Kretschmer writes (p. 12). While NOW’s bureaucratic structures didn’t prevent these conflicts, “formalization allows NOW, and groups like it, effectively to weather consistently erupting internal conflicts” (p. 5).

Foundations, while good at fueling new advocacy groups, are not always helpful in ensuring those groups persist. Political scientist Sarah Reckhow documents this inconsistency in her 2013 book *Follow the Money: How Foundation Dollars Change Public School Politics*. After a burst of activity to help jump-start new strategies and scale up advocacy efforts, it is not uncommon to see national foundations “remove their investments and depart for greener pastures” when the inevitable pushback to change emerges (p. 146).

Sociologist Debra Minkoff’s research completes the picture with an ecological perspective on the question of organizational persistence. In her 1995 book *Organizing for Equality: The Evolution of Women’s and Racial-Ethnic Organizations in America, 1955–1985*, she draws upon a statistical analysis of 878 organizations to uncover the variables that drive the creation and the collapse of these groups.

Through this regression analysis, Minkoff found that there were statistically significant factors that increased the odds of new advocacy organizations getting started and that also inhibited their future growth. The promise of policy wins on the horizon increased the odds of new groups being formed, but as groups started to realize this potential in the form of actual victories, it became increasingly difficult to maintain interest in the work. Similarly, while initially the creation of new groups increased the odds that other groups would also be created, this effect became negative once the number of groups in a field reached a critical mass.

Simply put: when it comes to advocacy start-ups, it turns out, you benefit from some wins but not too many, and you never want the field to be either too crowded or too empty.

Discussion questions

- 1 How long have you been advocating for your cause?
- 2 How much longer do you think it might take to reach your goal?
- 3 What can you do to ensure you sustain your effort over the long run?

Further reading

- Amin Ghaziani and Kelsy Kretschmer, “Infighting and Insurrection,” in Snow et al., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements: Second Edition*, John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2018
- David Dagan and Steven M. Teles, *Prison Break: Why Conservatives Turn Against Mass Incarceration*, Oxford University Press, 2016
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Section

2

Building a Movement

Lesson 5 Begin with Betrayal

As we've seen, the status quo is a powerful opponent of advocates. How, then, should advocates build a movement capable of changing the status quo? Researchers have found that the most powerful force driving new social movements is outrage—specifically the outrage of feeling betrayed by one's own government. Once that outrage is harnessed into a movement, the negative emotions of fear and anxiety can actually help the movement persist, forging a sense of collective identity among the advocates that powers them forward.

What the experts say

"Culture does nothing by itself. It operates largely through emotions. Symbols resonate because they create certain feelings inside us: good and bad, attraction and repulsion, approval and disapproval. Morality operates the same way. It arouses feelings of pride or shame inside us. It arouses compassion or indignation. We tend to emphasize the positive emotions in social movements: the joy and solidarity of a collective identity. And we've forgotten about the negative emotions, which often lead us to action."

James Jasper, Professor of Sociology, City University of New York and author of *The Emotions of Protest*

What the research says

In her authoritative 2013 biography, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*, political scientist Jeanne Theoharis explores the role of emotions in igniting the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955.

While there had been many arrests in previous years for violating bus segregation rules, Parks' arrest sparked a movement in large part because she was a well-known and sympathetic figure playing an unexpected role—a soft-spoken woman confronting the colossus of Jim Crow. In the hours and days after her arrest, testimonials to Parks poured in from the African American community. Theoharis quotes from first-person reactions to Parks' arrest (p. 85): "Her character was impeccable." She was widely known as "a person of real dignity." She "did not look like a woman that would start a revolution." "It was just too much," one activist noted, "to have a quiet, dignified, intelligent person like Mrs. Rosa Parks humiliated."

In his 1984 classic *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, sociologist Aldon Morris draws upon more than 50 detailed interviews with key participants to understand what drove their activism in

the face of such long odds. He finds that African Americans were particularly primed for an emotional response to a bus boycott since a “Jim Crow bus was one of the few places in the South where blacks and whites were segregated under the same roof and in full view of each other. A segregated bus ride dramatized the painful humiliation of the Jim Crow system” (p. 17).

Adding to the sense of betrayal was the fact that bus fares from black riders kept these bus companies afloat and the riders were paying to be consistently—and sometimes violently—mistreated by the bus drivers themselves. Perhaps Rosa Parks put it best herself: “We shouldn’t be expected to not react to violence. It’s a human reaction. And that’s what we are: human beings.”

“The first task facing organizers,” sociologist James Jasper writes in the 2011 article “Emotions and Social Movements,” “is to nudge a person from bystander to participant” (p. 292). Increasingly, researchers studying social movements are finding that, as in the case of the Montgomery bus boycott and countless other causes, it is impossible to understand this process without putting emotions front and center in the analysis.

Jasper has emerged as a leader in using a “typology of emotional processes” to understand why people join advocacy causes, why they take action and why they stick around when the going gets tough. He has studied a range of emotions—fear, anger, joy, surprise, disgust, shock and more—but it’s the emotions connected to our place in the world that are the biggest drivers of advocacy actions.

Reviewing the past 20 years of research across more than 100 research studies, Jasper finds that many movements “that appear instrumentally interested in power or material benefits are motivated at least as much by a concern for the human dignity that political rights imply” (p. 289). A clear pattern emerges across a range of different advocacy efforts: moral outrage sparks participation. Individuals join causes when they feel that the people who should be solving the problem have failed to do so.

“Indignation at one’s own government can be especially moving,” Jasper writes. The perception that the government has failed to do its job—to stand up for what’s right—creates a powerful sense of betrayal. When the government then steps in to try and shut down protests, the initial moral shock is compounded by the realization that the government is not just delinquent, but actively obstructive. “Outrage over

state repression,” Jasper writes, “far from curtailing protest, can sometimes ignite it” (p. 292).

In his 2017 article “Social Movement Theory and the Prospects for Climate Change Activism in the United States,” sociologist Doug McAdam finds that the ability to create a clear sense of betrayal helps explain why some movements are able to activate a broad base of supporters and some are not. McAdam contrasts the Black Lives Matter movement to the climate change movement, finding that the power of the former lies in its connection of patterns of discrimination by police to the government’s larger failure to protect the rights of African Americans. He concludes that “once the general link between police violence and race had been so powerfully articulated by Black Lives Matter activists, mobilizing collective action in the aftermath of similar incidents ... has become fairly predictable” (p. 200).

By contrast, despite an enormous effort by environmental groups, we have not seen mass mobilization to stop global warming. “One problem that climate change activists have had in trying to mobilize action,” McAdams writes, “is the difficulty of concretizing or personifying climate change, or identifying specific villains to blame for the escalating threat. Instead, the crisis seems to be largely the product of impersonal forces beyond our control” (p. 204). If no one is in charge, there can be no betrayal, and if we all contribute to the problem through our patterns of consumption, then there is a natural hesitation to assign blame.

In his 1992 book *The Struggle for Tiananmen*, sociologist Nan Lin finds that at each stage in the social movement it was the shared sentiments of the students and Beijing residents that fueled their mobilization. “These sentiments,” Lin writes, “far outstripped any rational calculation in explaining their participation and contribution in the struggle.” Initially, people were drawn to the square as an emotional response to the students, whose hunger strikes “struck a sympathetic chord.” Later, when soldiers poured into the city in an unprecedented show of military force, unarmed civilians responded with almost unimaginable acts of bravery and sacrifice. “What motivated the Beijing residents was a strong sense of attachment to homeland and outrage of its being violated. The passion for the home village ... deeply rooted in Chinese history and culture, propelled them into action” (p. 170).

Discussion questions

- 1 Which emotion best describes why you got involved in your cause?
- 2 Who else might share that feeling?
- 3 How could you heighten these feelings to motivate more people to get involved?

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Lesson 6 To Jumpstart a Big Movement, Start Small

The likelihood of people joining your cause increases as the people around them join. It can take a surprisingly small number of people within a group to create a cascading effect. Researchers exploring the mathematics of social relations have found that the actions of a small but energetic percentage of people can set in motion the forces that drive mass participation in a social movement. The challenge for advocates is how to get those first few percent to sign up and make their actions visible to those around them.

What the experts say

“There’s no one right way to get people involved in your cause. There’s lots of them. What really good advocates do is pay attention to their context and their situation. Lots of ideas for getting people mobilized don’t work and so a good leader will try something, and if that’s not working, they will try something else until they have found what works.”

Pamela Oliver, Conway-Bascom Professor of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison and co-author of *The Critical Mass in Collective Action*

What the research says

One of the biggest challenges confronting the civil rights movement in the 1950s was where to find the most promising recruits. African Americans were largely dependent on white employers who had shown time and again they were prepared to punish anyone willing to work against white domination. As sociologist Aldon Morris documents in *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, the solution was to focus in on the small percentage of African Americans who worked only for other black people: ministers, funeral home directors and beauticians.

The strategy was so effective that the Highlander Folk School, one of the top training sites for the civil rights movement, created special workshops just for beauticians. By actively seeking out people who had a lower cost to joining, the modern civil rights movement was able to set in motion the cascading effect that would ultimately drive sweeping and historic victories through mass participation.

One of the best ways to understand what might stand in the way of people joining your cause—and what would make them want to overcome those

challenges—is to simply ask them. In her 2014 book, *How Organizations Develop Activists*, political scientist Hahrie Han did just that, using in-depth interviews and survey results to uncover what drives the actions of advocacy members. “For me, personally,” one new recruit reported to her, “there are two things that drive meaning in my life, and those are people and principles, and both of those two have been areas in which I have found deep fulfillment” by joining the advocacy campaign. The recruit goes on to share that “there’s been a community of shared values that I feel that I’ve found ... which has been very gratifying, and has been a big part of what has compelled me to dedicate whatever time I have to the organization” (p. 101).

Creating a strong attachment to a cause for a large number of people is potentially very costly and time-consuming for the group’s leaders. But in his 1978 article “Threshold Models of Collective Behavior,” sociologist Mark Granovetter demonstrated that leaders didn’t have to secure the participation of 100 percent of the group all at once. The reason is that “the costs and benefits to the actor of making one or the other choice depend in part on how many others make the choice.” For example, the “cost to an individual of joining a riot declines as riot size increases, since the probability of being apprehended is smaller the larger the number involved” (p. 1422).

Exploring how each individual’s propensity to get involved in group activities is influenced by those around her, Granovetter found that the actions of small percentages of group members could have dramatic cascading effects on the behavior of others. His analysis showed that the actions of a small number of people with a low threshold for involvement (such as the beauticians in the civil rights movement) could set in motion a big shift in the willingness of others to get involved. Granovetter’s finding translates into fairly simple marching orders for the would-be advocacy entrepreneur: focus on whatever you need to do to get the most likely participants in a group to take action on behalf of the whole, and then make their actions clearly visible to those around them.

In her 1993 article “Formal Models of Collective Action,” sociologist Pamela Oliver describes the challenge of starting a movement as having enough “self-activators” in a group that they “exceed the threshold... and action ‘takes off’” (p. 289). But what does the research say about how advocacy entrepreneurs might help jump-start this process? Oliver

finds that across a wide range of advocacy activities, research studies identify a common characteristic among those most likely to take action: they are “more optimistic about the prospect of change and about the efficacy of their participation” (p. 278). Therefore, when looking for which members to focus attention on, don’t waste your time on the cynics and instead go straight to those who seem to be truly interested in your mission and who believe they can make a difference.

In her 2016 book, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, African American Studies professor Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor explores how the actions of a few set in motion this kind of social cascade. “Every movement needs a catalyst,” Taylor writes, “an event that captures people’s experiences and draws them out of their isolation” (p. 153). The August 9th, 2014 shooting of Mike Brown by white police officer Darren Wilson in the small Missouri suburb of Ferguson served as a “breaking point” for a small but critical mass of African Americans.

The initial actions were taken by neighbors who created a makeshift memorial for Brown on the spot in the street where he was killed. Yet when “the police arrived with a canine unit, one officer let a dog urinate on the memorial.” The next day, a second attempt at a memorial was destroyed when a police cruiser drove over it. “Later that night,” Taylor writes, “the uprising began.” The small actions of a few neighbors willing to symbolically challenge the police lowered the threshold for a larger number of residents to take the action to the streets. The result was a full-blown protest grounded in the simple act of not submitting to the instructions of police who had acted so callously towards the memorial: “In the twelve days following Brown’s death, 172 people were arrested, 132 of whom were charged only with ‘failure to disperse’” (p. 155).

As conflict resolution scholars Arthur Romano and David Ragland write in their chapter “Truth-Telling from the Margins: Exploring Black-Led Responses to Police Violence and Systemic Humiliation” in the 2018 book *Systemic Humiliation in America*, once this protest was set in motion it quickly became about something more universal, which in turn lowered the threshold for more people to join the cause: “The broader statement ‘Black Lives Matter’ came to represent a moral claim of human dignity and full personhood in opposition to systemic practices of indignity and humiliation. ‘Black Lives Matter’ is a declaration

drawing attention to the continued chasm between 'guaranteed' rights and the lived experiences of Black people in the United States today" (p. 152).

Human ecology professor Brian Christens and psychologist Paul Speer, in their 2011 article "Contextual Influences on Participation in Community Organizing: A Multilevel Longitudinal Study," explore how advocacy leaders can increase the involvement of their prospective members by focusing on small gatherings of supporters. In their statistical analysis of the actions of 11,538 individuals across 115 groups, they find that "large group action meetings are negatively predictive of future participation in community organizing" in part because it is hard to generate the in-person connections that create attachment to a cause (p. 258). It is much easier to reach critical mass among very small groups.

As sociologists David Snow and Sarah Soule point out in their 2009 book, *A Primer on Social Movements*, the advantages to organizing smaller groups is why movements so often emerge from small settings like churches, college campuses or coffee houses with rich social networks: the task of getting to critical mass is much easier than a city-wide or state-wide initiative.

Discussion questions

- 1 What are the traits or social positions of your most likely action takers?
- 2 Where can you find more people like these action-takers?
- 3 What can you stop doing so you can give your full attention to these top recruits?

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- Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, The Free Press, 1984
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- David A. Snow and Sarah A. Soule, *A Primer on Social Movements*, W. W. Norton & Company, 2009
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Lesson 7 Either Everyone Ends Up Participating or No One Will

While it pays to start off an advocacy effort with a focus on a small number of committed members, sustaining a social movement requires its leaders to work relentlessly to ensure that every member ends up contributing. People tend to move in herds, which researchers refer to as social cascades. Simply put, the most likely outcome is that most people in a group end up behaving the same way. That means that the most unstable advocacy organizations are those where only 50 percent of members are seen to be taking action. Thus, once a group is off the ground, any members not visibly doing their part create instability in your cause.

What the experts say

“When you trace it backwards in time you see that social movements build upon each other in waves. Many of the participants in Black Lives Matter mobilizations in 2013 are first activated in 2011 through their involvement in the Occupy Wall Street movement. And then the earliest protests the day after the 2016 elections are actually driven by citizens who are building upon these two previous experiences. So, participation needs to be understood as a continuous process of making the opportunity to get involved visible to those around you and creating an expectation of action.”

Pamela Oliver, Conway-Bascom Professor of Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Madison and co-author of *The Critical Mass in Collective Action*

What the research says

In her 2015 book, *Schoolhouse Activists: African American Educators and the Long Birmingham Civil Rights Movement*, School of Education and African American Studies professor Tondra Loder-Jackson draws on interviews with educators from the 1950s and 1960s to better understand the role teachers played in the civil rights struggle. While the role of teachers historically has been diminished in accounts of the movement, Loder-Jackson shows how teachers helped create the conditions for events like the 1963 Children’s March.

Although teachers themselves could not march without risking their jobs, they “engaged in subtle acts of resistance concealed inside of the schoolhouse” (p. 59). Working together, the teachers created a culture where students felt comfortable talking about the march, and, by reassuring students they would not be marked absent when they failed to show up for school, removed one of the biggest barriers to student participation. The result was a remarkably high level of participation from Birmingham students: “On May 6, Birmingham’s Black public schools could

only account for fewer than nine hundred students out of 7,500 enrolled due to their activist-inspired truancy” (p. 64).

In his 1990 article “A Social Custom Model of Collective Action” economics professor Robin Naylor shows that when members in a group share many of the same characteristics, such as the students in Montgomery, the only stable equilibria are full participation by all members or no participation by any members. For better or worse, most people derive their benefits from a group in relation to the number of participating members. When people start leaving a group the result can be a swift and dramatic decline in participation.

In *Lobbying and Policy Change*, Frank Baumgartner et al. find that the same kind of bandwagon patterns apply to lobbying: “The most important element of structure has to do with the social nature of the Washington policy process and the reality that policy makers move in herds, not individually” (p. 252). During legislative sessions, policy issues tend to be either something everyone wants to talk about or something no one is paying attention to; there isn’t much room in between.

What can be done to prevent your cause from falling backward into declining attention and membership? In Christens and Speer’s 2011 article “Contextual Influences on Participation in Community Organizing: A Multilevel Longitudinal Study,” we see one possible path to retaining members’ interest: put them to work with others in the group.

The authors find in their regression analysis of 11,538 individuals across 115 groups that “meetings designed to build interpersonal relationships are significant predictors of future attendance at group meetings, while controlling for other variables.” In particular, the in-person meetings that encouraged members to stick with a group were those that involved participants “directly in action-oriented analyses of community issues and conversations with key community leaders,” as well as those in “which many participants play a role” in making decisions and shaping the agenda (p. 260).

Discussion questions

- 1 What type of involvement has been most meaningful to you in your cause?
- 2 How do you create equally meaningful opportunities for others?
- 3 How do you make those opportunities to get involved more visible to the people around you?

Further reading

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Lesson 8 If You Want People to Stay, Ask Them to Sacrifice

It's natural to think that the best way to keep people involved in your cause is to make it easy for them to take action. However, this is exactly the opposite of what researchers have found. Retention of supporters goes up when you ask people to sacrifice. In fact, it is often the very act of sacrifice that generates a strong personal attachment to the cause. The greater the investment of their time, the more likely they are to stick with you through thick and thin.

What the experts say

"In order to keep people mobilized, they need to feel useful. The combination of technology and technocracy has made it harder for people to find places where they can make a meaningful contribution, so people struggle to connect their personal activity to policy and politics. Without personally contributing something of themselves to a cause, policy change gets put in a black box. The most successful and sustainable change efforts are co-productions between leaders and supporters."

Elisabeth Clemens, William Rainey Harper
Professor of Sociology and the College,
University of Chicago and author of *The
People's Lobby*

What the research says

People will make sacrifices for a movement they believe in even when they are already living under challenging circumstances.

Unemployed workers from the poorest areas of Argentina are the force behind one of the most influential social movements of the past several decades. Known as the *Piqueteros*, these activists joined together through a series of uprisings in the 1990s to protest the privatization of the national oil company. After securing a number of concessions from the government, the movement continued to grow and has emerged as one of the most prominent political entities in the country.

In his 2018 article "Life Histories and Political Commitment in a Poor People's Movement," sociologist Marcos Pérez draws upon interviews with 133 current and former activists in the unemployed workers movement to explore what keeps people attached to advocacy efforts when their lives are already so challenging and the odds of success are so long. He finds that for those who stick with the advocacy campaigns through tough times, it is because participation

“becomes an end in itself” (p. 90). It provides these members with “refuge from the consequences of decades of socioeconomic decline and [helps] them deal with the lack of social links, self-efficacy, and positive recognition in their lives” (p. 106).

As William Gamson noted in *The Strategy of Social Protest*, this kind of behavior seems illogical when viewed through an economic lens: “Commitment and self-sacrifice imply a willingness to continue when a cost-benefit analysis yields a negative expected value” (p. 59). The solution to this paradox emerges only when we switch from an economic perspective to a psychological one: most people have a strong desire to be part of a group and that attachment only grows stronger through the ups and downs of the pursuit of a common goal. In this way, the attachment of members to an advocacy movement is not all that different than the attachment that develops between sports fans and their home team. The more you invest in the team, the less likely you are to stop watching the games when they hit the inevitable losing streak.

Or as Gamson put it: “The psychological process involved in this pleasure are centered on identification and the investment of part of oneself in collective actors. To reap the rewards of such identification requires commitment. The greater the sacrifice and effort involved ... the greater the personal satisfaction (or disappointment) with the achievements of the collective actor” (p. 58).

Sociologists David Snow and Sarah Soule also explore this question of attachment in their 2009 book, *A Primer on Social Movements*. They find that advocacy leaders can foster attachment to the cause by creating a “teams within teams” structure, so that every member of the cause feels like they belong to something. This sense of attachment is particularly important as a backstop against declining membership as the excitement from early wins fades or the political climate shifts.

In their chapter “Emotions in Social Movements,” in Snow et al.’s 2019 volume *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements: Second Edition*, sociologists Justin Van Ness and Erika Summers-Effler similarly find that “groups which generate unusually strong emotional cultures can also provide resources for enduring moments of harsh repression.” The key is using “a heighten[ed] sense of threat” to enhance “identification with one’s in-group ... and create unification against enemies and targets. When activists have an identifiable target to blame, feelings of camaraderie and solidarity can grow” (p. 415).

Discussion questions

- 1 Where do you need the most help to achieve your goals?
- 2 What are the upcoming opportunities for people to help out?
- 3 How can you structure these opportunities in a way that creates long-term connections to your cause?

Further reading

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Lesson 9 Movements Ride on Waves of Tactical Innovation

Social movements succeed by shifting the odds in favor of change—but how, exactly, does that happen? A key approach of successful advocates is to capitalize on the emergence of tactical innovations. These advocates move quickly to catch the status quo off guard when new innovations emerge, and they pay attention to how their opponents respond to their actions. Past social movements have succeeded by leveraging the spread of the printing press, television and the internet. Future success will be tied to the way different advocacy movements argue, compete and collaborate to generate novel combinations of tactics and create whole new ways of securing change.

What the experts say

“Arguing about the best way forward is inevitable. There’s just no way to avoid it because people are passionate, they come with very strong ideas, and very strong attachments to particular ways of doing things. Great advocacy leaders embrace the vitality of conflicting viewpoints to bring innovative new approaches into the world. By being willing to make room for conflict, these leaders interrogate all the possible ways forward and open up the possibility for innovation.”

Kelsy Kretschmer, Assistant Professor of Sociology, School of Public Policy, Oregon State University and author of *Fighting for NOW*

What the research says

Founded in 1892 by naturalist John Muir, the Sierra Club by the 1960s had established itself firmly at the center of the American environmentalist movement. Yet it also found itself lacking the advocacy tools needed for many of the new problems it was working to solve.

In 1965, it created a legal defense fund and launched a new kind of campaign that used the power of the courts. The spark for this new initiative was the desire to protect the Mineral King Valley in the Sierra Nevada Mountains from Walt Disney’s plans to create an “American Alpine Wonderland” ski resort that would cost twice as much as Disneyland and feature millions of visitors a year.

This aggressive new tactic suffered a setback seven years later when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 4–3 in favor of the Walt Disney Company. The Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund filed suit again, seizing on a footnote in the ruling that left open the door for private citizens to establish legal standing. The case dragged on in the courts until 1978 when President Jimmy Carter signed the National Parks and Recre-

ation Act, which made Mineral Valley part of what became Sequoia National Park. (Disney didn't go home completely empty-handed. The company took the attraction its "Imagineers" had created for the themed ski resort—a musical show featuring robotic bears—and relocated it to Disneyland with a new name: Country Bear Jamboree.)

Through this initial tactical innovation, the Sierra Club opened the door to a whole new way of carrying out its mission. As sociologist Kelsy Kretschmer reports in her 2019 book *Fighting for NOW*, in 1997 the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund "changed its name to Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund, leaving its connection to the Sierra Club in the past" (p. 115). By 2018, Earthjustice had 133 full-time attorneys in 14 offices litigating more than 827 legal cases.

In 1978, historian Charles Tilly kicked off the first wave of research into advocacy innovation. In his book, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Tilly pioneered the study of how innovation emerges and spreads through advocacy movements. He looked at the "tool kit" of tactics available to advocates and found that the tactics shifted over time. While early efforts in Europe took place within a single neighborhood or community, advocacy was transformed by industrialization. The result was the emergence and diffusion of new tactics like petitions, demonstrations, boycotts and strikes that operated across cities and, sometimes, whole countries.

While Tilly's historical research provides useful background on the variety and mutability of advocacy tactics, what can we say about how advocacy leaders might accelerate the pace of tactical innovation? This is the question sociologists Wang and Soule sought to answer by analyzing a database of 23,000 protest events in the United States between 1960 and 1995.

Through their statistical analysis they find that both novel tactical combinations and the creation of new tactics are more likely when there are a large number of advocacy groups working on the same cause in the same area. It turns out that when it comes to tactical innovation, bigger is better.

Wang and Soule also find that diversity of perspectives can drive innovation: "Results show that when protest events merge disparate issues and movement frames, tactical repertoires also come together as opportunities to pair protest tactics in novel ways. In other words, protest events that span dissimilar claims make it possible for participants to

cross boundaries separating the tactical repertoires associated with different movements" (p. 537).

In this light, it comes as no surprise to learn that Ella Baker, one of the most innovative and effective leaders of the civil rights movement, emerged from a crosscurrent of different advocacy traditions. In her 2003 book, *Ella Baker & the Black Freedom Movement*, historian Barbara Ransby finds that Baker's innovative approach to advocacy "was a result of the cross-fertilization of the vibrant black Baptist women's movement of the early twentieth century, the eclectic and international political culture of depression-era Harlem, and the American tradition of democratic socialism—a variegated mix of northern and southern, religious and secular, American and global, left and liberal elements" (p. 6).

This idea also finds support in the research of sociologist Holly McCammon, whose 2003 article, "Out of the Parlors and into the Streets: The Changing Tactical Repertoire of the U.S. Women's Suffrage Movements," found that states with a greater diversity of women's suffrage groups were more likely to see the emergence of tactical innovations.

In her 2012 book, *The U.S. Women's Jury Movements and Strategic Adaptation: A More Just Verdict*, McCammon extends this work by exploring which characteristics of advocacy organizations best allow them to adapt their tactical repertoire. She argues that some organizations are more attuned to their environment and move more quickly to adjust their tactics based on how well they're working. This allows them to "implement new or revised tactics in a proactive and strategic way" that increases their odds of success (p. 17).

Similarly, in *Fighting for NOW* Kelsy Kretschmer found that internal conflict "provides the engine for greater creativity and transformational ideology" (p. 25). In her study she found that NOW's federated structure "contributes to factionalism and eventually schism at the local level" (p. 56). Yet, she also found that although "these splits are often painful, they can also generate new and important spaces expanding the social movement, allowing more people outlets for participation" (p. 18).

This pattern—infighting leading to schism leading to new advocacy innovations—can be found far and wide in the advocacy world. "Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace," Kretschmer reminds us, "both emerged from splits within the Sierra Club when certain leaders decided that the broader movement

needed a different approach” (p. 136). This allowed the activists at Greenpeace, for example, to expand into novel forms of direct action—like inflatable boats that face down whaling ships—that would not have been possible inside the Sierra Club. In this way, “even as organizational boundaries narrow, movement boundaries expand” (p. 144).

Discussion questions

- 1 Who do you know who might be taking a different approach to tackling your cause?
- 2 How can you learn more about what they are doing?
- 3 How can you embrace disagreement in a way that sparks new ideas?

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Section

3

Securing Change

Lesson 10 Effective Lobbying Doesn't Look Like Lobbying

Effective lobbying doesn't involve arm-twisting, raised voices or threats. Instead, it is about building and maintaining relationships. You are most likely to secure change when you work together with policy makers as members of the same team, with each person playing a unique role in a broader plan to advance shared goals. This kind of lobbying is best understood as legislative capacity building, where advocates work as an extension of the staff of aligned elected officials. Researchers see this kind of lobbying as a form of government subsidy, where outsiders pay to help elected officials carry out the elected officials' own plans.

What the experts say

"Effective lobbying looks nothing like the lobbying depicted in the movies. The reality is very different than the shorthand. The reason why the image of lobbying is so different is that the reality doesn't make good entertainment. Effective lobbying takes a long time. It's a brick by brick, day by day process of moving your issue forward."

Jeffrey Berry, John Richard Skuse Professor of Political Science, Tufts University and author of *The New Liberalism: The Rising Power of Citizen Groups*

What the research says

The environmental activism of the 1960s and early 1970s is often associated with street protests and marches. Perhaps the most famous legacy of this period is the designation of April 22 as "Earth Day." Earth Day kicked off in 1970 when 20 million people attended gatherings to raise the visibility of environmental causes. By 2019, the number of annual participants had reached one billion. Yet, for environmentalists, the more important innovation in 1970 was not Earth Day but the creation of the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

As Jeffrey Berry reports in his 1999 book, *The New Liberalism*, when the "Carter administration took over in 1977, it put two environmental lobbyists, Barbara Blum and David Hawkins, in top policymaking positions in the EPA. They threw the door wide open for their former colleagues in the environmental movement." To take advantage of their increasing access to the halls of power, environmental advocacy groups remade themselves around "substantial technical expertise and informational capacities" (p. 30).

Berry unpacks these trends through a careful

study of the growing influence of advocacy groups on the legislative process in three different sessions of the U.S. Congress: 1963, 1979 and 1991. Across these three sessions, he was able to study 205 different policy issues. “They are so much a part of government today,” Berry writes, “it is easy to forget that these organizations were the direct outgrowth of angry, impassioned social movements that began in the 1960s” (p. 32).

What led these citizen groups to shift their focus over time toward becoming major inside players was seeing how change actually happened on the issues they cared about. In their desire to “represent the unrepresented,” they determined to involve themselves directly in the policymaking process.

In their 2014 article, “Advancing the Empirical Research on Lobbying,” law professor John de Figueiredo and business professor Brian Kelleher Richter reveal just how prominent lobbying is in this policy making process. While election spending gets the headlines, five times more money is spent annually on lobbying than on Political Action Committees (PACs). Corporations and trade associations spend the overwhelming majority of this lobbying money (86 percent); issues-based groups spend only 7 percent. While only 10 percent of corporations lobby, of those that do, 92 percent continue to lobby in the following year.

What does this long-term investment in lobbying pay for? Helping aligned legislators be more effective advocates for a shared cause.

“Policy makers and organized interests frequently work in tandem to advocate policy goals that they both share,” Baumgartner et al. write in *Lobbying and Policy Change*. Each can do things “that the other cannot; officials within government can set agendas, meet with colleagues, and so on. Organized interests outside of government often have more staff time available, the ability to do research and publicize findings, and the luxury of working on just one or a few issues at a time.” (p. 195).

Reflecting on their investigation into the work of more than 100 different causes over four years, Baumgartner and his co-authors conclude: “Interest groups often work in such close collaboration with friendly government officials that the most accurate depiction of their relationship is that of members of a team” (p. 195).

Exploring the way think tanks operate in this environment, political scientist Andrew Rich uncovers a similar pattern of influence through capacity building

in his 2004 book, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*. Through 135 in-depth interviews with policy makers and policy experts during the healthcare and telecom reform debates of the 1990s, Rich finds that the “groups that were successful in having their ideas translated into legislation by Democrats each had proposals clearly intended for a policymaking audience” (p. 176) and the “advocates who succeeded in being influential appeared to have fresh and ready proposals at exactly the time policy makers were ready for them” (p. 178).

Rich argues that think tanks exist in part because universities struggle in this essential, capacity-building role. While think tanks invest in relationships with elected officials and their staff and focus on the support policy makers need to translate ideas into legislation, “faculty members are notorious for being more concerned about methodology than about policy” (p. 207). Think tank staffers are the members of the expert community committed to getting policy change enacted in partnership with elected officials.

Rich found that Heritage Foundation staff particularly excelled at this approach. Why was Heritage so effective? They “packaged their research in accessible formats, timed and marketed it aggressively, and benefited from tremendous access to lawmakers.” In short: a deep understanding of the needs of legislators informed their actions. Adam Thierer of Heritage described his pitch to elected officials this way: “Consider us an extension of your own staff. However we can help, let us know. Give us a call. Whatever we can do, we’d be happy to do that” (p. 196). The success of this approach has since led many other think tanks to adopt the Heritage playbook.

Of course, there are times when the sea change that advocacy movements seek can and must make demands on elected officials. But most of the time protest strategies by themselves produce limited results. In *The Strategy of Social Protest*, William Gamson concludes from his study of 53 different advocacy organizations that the worst combination was to “speak loudly and carry a small stick”—to be, in other words, both “threatening and weak” (p. 87).

Discussion questions

- 1 Who are the biggest legislative champions of your cause?
- 2 What do they say they most need to advance these ideas?
- 3 How can you partner with them to provide this support?

Further reading

Andrew Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*, Cambridge University Press, 2004

Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, Beth L. Leech and David C. Kimball, *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*, University of Chicago Press, 2009

John M. de Figueiredo and Brian Kelleher Richter, "Advancing the Empirical Research on Lobbying," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 17, 2014

William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest*, The Dorsey Press, 1975

Lesson 11 Information Is Free, Organized Information Is Costly

While information about your cause is everywhere, public officials' time is very limited. Therefore, organizing the facts about your issue is one of the most important contributions advocates can make to their cause. By generating the briefings that public officials need to take action, advocates make themselves indispensable. In this way, advocates become the expert staff that public officials need but can't afford to keep in house.

What the experts say

"Influence is really about information. The most effective lobbyists are great at providing elected officials with the information they need to act on their behalf. That means making sure that they know what the counter-arguments are, making sure they know how to counter the counter-arguments, getting information about what people in their district might think, knowing the technical details of all the procedure and process to helping a bill become a law."

Beth L. Leech, Professor of Political Science and Vice Chair of Graduate Studies, Rutgers University and author of *Lobbyists at Work*

What the research says

In the 1980s, attempts to tackle the growing problem of acid rain resulted in a policy stalemate. As political scientist Eric Patashnik documents in his 2008 book *Reforms at Risk*, more than 70 bills were introduced to try to solve the problem, each one collapsing as it failed to overcome intense opposition over the high costs of reform.

"Ultimately," Patashnik writes, "fresh thinking and new leadership were required to break the impasse." In stepped the market-friendly leaders of the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF). Starting from "a detailed emission trading program for acid rain at a late 1987 Columbia University conference," the EDF and its partners grasped "the role of information in legislative deliberation, even prospective reform losers conceded that a market-based approach to the acid rain problem was more flexible and effective than traditional command-and-control regulation" (p. 141).

On November 15, 1989, a sweeping cap-and-trade program to combat acid rain was signed into law, building on the market-based framework developed and popularized by the EDF. In the years that followed,

support for this approach grew as the plan's promises held up: "Acid rain emissions have dropped significantly, [and] compliance costs have been remarkably low. It is hard to argue with success" (p. 144).

In his 2002 article, "Ideas, Politics and Public Policy," sociologist John Campbell draws on the results from more than 100 research studies to explore how communities of experts shape the policy agenda by organizing ideas. These are advocates "whose claim to knowledge and expertise enables their voice to be heard above others." Social scientists think of these individuals as members of distinct "expert communities" that collectively have "an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge, who share a set of normative beliefs, causal models, notions of empirical validity, and a common policy enterprise" (p. 30).

This expertise influences public policy by filtering information into concrete, actionable conclusions about how to solve problems. They don't provide all the information a public official might want on a topic, but instead a particular slice of the information that enables a quick conclusion to be reached. "Researchers have found that the status of the actors bearing new ideas affects the odds that policy makers will adopt their ideas," Campbell writes (p. 31). In other words, the persuasiveness of an idea depends not just on what is said, but on how it is said and who is saying it.

Why do policy makers turn to these experts rather than just digging into the data themselves? Because outside experts make policy decisions possible in short periods of time by serving up the information in a framework ready-made for action. Since political decisions are made by people who are almost always short on time, Campbell writes, "they inevitably use ... short-cuts to form their opinions" (p. 32).

Complexity is an opportunity for influence through expertise. The more complex a topic, the more public officials will need outside help to craft policy solutions. Or as Baumgartner et al. put it in *Lobbying and Policy Change*: If there was "unlimited time and resources to collect information, there would be little value in the information exchanged. But because time, money, staff, and other resources used to gather and sort through information about a particular issue or proposal are time, money, and staff not used to do something else, value is attached to information that lobbyists provide" (p. 123).

In their study of over 100 causes seeking to influence federal policy, Baumgartner et al. found that this

desire for organized information held true even if the information being organized was publicly available. "Precisely because there is an enormous amount of policy-relevant information out there, policy makers and their staffs would (and do) incur considerable costs to sort through and locate what is relevant, credible, useful, or being used by others" (p. 124). Saving elected officials and their staff time is an advocacy super power.

Discussion questions

- 1 What are the most important sources of information about your cause?
- 2 Who can help you organize and present this information?
- 3 How can you track counter-arguments and how will you determine the best ways to counter these counter-arguments?

Further reading

Eric M. Patashnik, *Reforms at Risk: What Happens After Major Policy Changes are Enacted*, Princeton University Press, 2008

Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, Beth L. Leech, and David C. Kimball, *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*, The University of Chicago Press, 2009

John L. Campbell, "Ideas, Politics and Public Policy," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 28, 2002

Lesson 12 Credibility Carries the Day

Once an advocate gains the trust of a public official, she must work hard not to lose it. As an extension of the official's staff, her role is to source and package information: the official wants expertise, not bluster. Researchers have found that most of the communication between advocates and officials sounds dull and mundane compared to the heated rhetoric on cable news. The best advocates can accurately summarize all sides of a debate and fluently speak the language of expertise used by the technical committee staff and bill drafters who translate ideas into law.

What the experts say

"We live in a marketplace of ideas and it's incredibly competitive. Sometimes experts have tremendous influence. And sometimes they have very little. Some are successful, some are not. The real test of influence is not whether you are generating ideas, but whether the people in power are listening to you."

John Campbell, Class of 1925 Professor and Professor of Sociology, Dartmouth University and author of *The National Origins of Policy Ideas*

What the research says

In 1980, a sweeping deregulation bill passed Congress with bipartisan support and upended the status quo in the trucking industry. When President Carter signed the Motor Carrier Act of 1980, he praised the "historic legislation" for removing "45 years of excessive and inflationary Government restrictions and red tape" and predicted that both consumers and labor would benefit from the roll-back of "outmoded regulations" and the "greater flexibility and new opportunities for innovation" it would unleash.

According to political scientist Andrew Rich, this fight over regulation was not won in the halls of Congress in 1980 but instead in the lecture halls of universities in the 1950s and 1960s. In his 2004 book, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*, Rich draws upon 135 in-depth interviews with think tank staff and public officials to lift the veil on how influence is created and deployed through expertise in the service of a policy agenda.

In the case of trucking deregulation, the convergence of opinion among economists in the 1950s and

1960s that “price, entry, and exit regulations were generally inefficient and undesirable” allowed policy experts to turn this consensus into the bipartisan policy proposals of the 1970s, which in turn led to the legislation in 1980 (p. 149).

The key to understanding the power of policy expertise, Rich asserts, is grasping the relative weakness of think tanks compared to traditional advocacy organizations: “compared with interests groups, think tanks rarely have an explicit and specifically identifiable constituency [whom] they represent in the eyes of policy makers.” Their influence, therefore, rests on “the credibility and believability of their research products” (p. 12).

Where does expertise really matter in the advocacy world? Rich finds that policy makers tend to seek outside expertise in three areas: 1) “Topics about which researchers enjoy near-consensus both on problems and solutions,” 2) “Issues that provoke high-profile public debates,” and 3) “Issues that move relatively slowly.” In these areas, Rich found that “experts had almost unobstructed access to policy makers, who, in turn, had interest in what researchers were producing” (p. 147).

In *The New Liberalism*, Jeffrey Berry finds that a reputation for expertise is a key element of effective advocacy communications. “Lobbyists’ chances of being sought out by journalists, or having the news media publicize their groups’ views,” Berry concludes, “are enhanced immeasurably when they are perceived as credible sources of information” (p. 130).

Similarly, in *Lobbying and Policy Change*, Baumgartner et al. find this process at work time and again. “When [advocates] meet with policy makers or other lobbyists within a coalition, they want to show a mastery over the issues,” they write. “For lobbyists a strong principle of behavior is that ‘credibility comes first’ ... In the words of one lobbyist, ‘my reputation is my most valuable asset’” (p. 185).

This creates some interesting patterns in insider communication that depart significantly in tone from the policy arguments on cable news: “Not only are the most dramatic arguments used the least, but the most commonly used argument, implementation or feasibility, is the rhetoric of the policy wonk ... Why is it that advocates, particularly the lobbyists that dominate our sample, rely on ordinary arguments instead of those involving partisan or cataclysmic consequences? The difference we see between the hot rhetoric of political debate before the public and

the mundane language of lobbying is that the audience is different. Lobbyists pitch their arguments to a sophisticated audience: policy makers” (p. 135).

Credibility also relates to persistence: advocates gain a big advantage by staying with their issue long enough to build up expertise. “Part of building trust comes from when a lobbyist makes an argument about what is critical to the organization and then stays with that argument for some time,” Baumgartner et al. observe. “To come back to an office a few months or even a year later with a whole new frame can work against one’s reputation” (p. 185).

Carefully developing a strong, fact-based point of view on a particular policy and then sticking with it doesn’t make for the most exciting strategy, but it can make a big difference for your cause.

Discussion questions

- 1 How are you working to gain the trust of your champions?
- 2 What do you need to do to maintain that trust once it is gained?
- 3 What is the greatest threat to your credibility in the eyes of your champions?

Further reading

Andrew Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*, Cambridge University Press, 2004

Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, Beth L. Leech, and David C. Kimball, *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*, The University of Chicago Press, 2009

Jeffrey Berry, *The New Liberalism: The Rising Power of Citizen Groups*, Brookings Institution Press, 1999

Lesson 13 Creating a Better Frame Is Easy, Adoption Is Hard

The way a problem is posed, or framed, can dramatically change the success of a cause. Researchers have found that people provide different answers to the same question depending on its frame. This has led advocates to focus on framing as a key tactic. However, researchers have also found that frames rarely switch, because so many people are already deeply invested in the existing frame. The question for advocates is not whether they can dream up a new frame that would serve them better, but whether it is worth the high cost and significant time commitment of trying to get that new frame adopted.

What the experts say

“How people think about discrete policy problems and solutions matters, of course, but shifting the world view that folks have is a longer-term project that is often measured in decades, not weeks, months or years. It’s not a simple project to get people to change their fundamental outlook. Often when we talk about framing we miss the larger questions of ideology and the way that our views are grounded in larger philosophical traditions, not narrow word choices.”

Andrew Rich, Dean, Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership, The City College of New York and author of *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*

What the research says

The first step to understanding the concept of framing is exploring why people think it can be important. There is perhaps no better illustration of the power of framing than the way it can influence life and death decision-making.

In an influential 1982 study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, 238 patients with chronic medical conditions were asked to choose between the two therapies to treat lung cancer: surgery or radiation therapy. The same questions were also posed to 491 graduate students and 424 physicians. The researchers presented the groups with the same statistical facts about the outcomes of the two cancer treatments but in two different ways: for one group these statistics were presented in terms of “mortality rates” and for a second group in terms of “survival rates.”

In the mortality frame group, people were told that 0 of 100 people died during the radiation therapy treatment, 23 of 100 people died after one year and 78 of 100 died after five years. They were also told that 10 of 100 died during surgery or the post-op

period, 32 of 100 died after one year and 66 of 100 died after five years.

By contrast, in the survival frame group, people were told that 100 of 100 people survived the radiation therapy treatment, 77 of 100 people were alive after one year and 22 of 100 were alive after five years. They were also told that 90 of 100 people survived the surgery or post-op period, 68 of 100 were alive after one year and 34 of 100 were alive after five years.

Would the same facts framed differently really make a difference in a life and death choice? Yes. For all three types of people—patients, graduate students and physicians—the choice of radiation therapy over surgery jumped from 18% to 44% when the information was framed in terms of the probability of living rather than the probability of dying. This dramatic shift was as true for experienced physicians as it was for patients.

The idea of framing is often traced back to sociologist Erving Goffman, who aimed to understand how individuals navigate their way through the complex reality around them. His insight was that we often “frame” parts of reality in order to negotiate our way through it, putting some things into the center of our perceptions and bracketing out other things from our view.

The research field provides a number of real-world examples of this concept at work in advocacy. For example, in her 1996 article “Organizational Form as Frame: Collective Identity and Political Strategy in the American Labor Movement,” sociologist Elisabeth Clemens explores what kinds of organizational forms advocates consider when starting a movement. Looking back at the advocacy campaigns of the late 19th century, she finds the same types of structures emerging again and again. “The puzzle,” she writes, “is to understand how a highly variegated history of collective action condensed into a particular institutional form” (p. 214). The answer, she concludes, is the limited number of frames we use to think about advocacy itself.

Clemens finds that these past advocates usually relied on three specific types of mental models: 1) The fraternal model, which focuses on “the development of forms of social solidarity outside the party system” (p. 216), 2) The military model, which aims to transcend “identities grounded in occupation, locality, ethnicity, religion, and potentially even race by invoking a political rationale” (p. 218), and 3) The union, which aims to construct “a model of collective identity and organization around the citizen-worker” (p. 221).

In his 2009 article “When Politics Becomes Protest: Black Veterans and Political Activism in the Postwar South,” political scientist Christopher Parker explores in greater detail the way in which military service served as a powerful frame that shaped a generation of 20th century African American civil rights leaders. Through extensive interviews with veterans of WWII and the Korean War as well as statistical analysis of contemporary survey data, Parker concludes that “military experience indeed served as a springboard from which many black veterans pursued equality ... serving overseas exposed black soldiers to a fresh perspective on race and gave them a sense that something was owed them, as well as the confidence to pursue the equal treatment to which they felt entitled, catalyzing their determination to participate in the political process” (p. 127).

At the same time, as sociologist Aldon Morris shows in his 1984 book, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the other ministers working within the Southern Christian Leadership Conference were marrying this real-world military experience of Black veterans with a new kind of Christianity. Their goal was to replace the historic emphasis of the Black church on “the meek will inherit the earth” with a new emphasis on the need to remake the earth to be more just.

Morris writes that King preached a “religious doctrine that had been significantly altered to encourage protest ... by giving contemporary relevance to familiar biblical struggles through spellbinding oratory and by defining such religious heroes as Jesus and Moses as revolutionaries” (p. 98). King’s message was married to a powerful communications infrastructure: the Black church. He secured this shift in the minds of millions of African Americans by ensuring this new ideology was repeated week after week and year after year with one consistent message: the need to act out against the “sinful” institutions of oppression.

In *Lobbying and Policy Change*, Baumgartner et al. strike an important cautionary note by detailing all the challenges this attempt to shift the frame entails. While theoretically a shift in frame can dramatically alter a debate, as in the study on options for medical treatment, it simply doesn’t work most of the time. “Of the 98 issues that fell into our sample,” they write, “we judged just 4 issues to have undergone some degree of reframing over the period studied. One of those we coded a complete reframing, and three were partial” (p. 176).

Why is reframing an issue so hard? Because framing works best when there is only one frame for each set of facts. While researchers in the cancer treatment study discussed above were able to present each group with only one uncontested frame, in any given policy debate “the median number of advocates per side is eight. This multiplicity of actors and the resources they aggregate in policy communities make it all the more difficult for one set of participants to quickly or dramatically change the terms of debate. Thus, the very structure of issue networks supports the stability of frames over time” (p. 181).

“Assumptions that policy making is highly influenced by the superficiality of advertising, public relations campaigns, test marketing, and well-designed sound bites finds little support in the history of the ninety-eight issues tracked for this study,” they conclude. “Instead, policy changes over the years are likely to reflect the long-term investment of resources by interest groups in conventional advocacy, the accumulation of research, and the impact of real-world trends and events” (p. 189).

Discussion questions

- 1 What are the existing frames that drive the way people think about your issue?
- 2 Is there a larger ideology that these frames are connected to?
- 3 How might you shift these frames in a favorable direction while avoiding the distraction of counter-framing?

Further reading

- Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, The Free Press, 1984
- Andrew Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*, Cambridge University Press, 2004
- Christopher S. Parker, “When Politics Becomes Protest: Black Veterans and Political Activism in the Postwar South,” *Journal of Politics* 71 (Winter 2009): 113–131
- Elisabeth S. Clemens, “Organizational Form as Frame: Collective Identity and Political Strategy in the American Labor Movement,” in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, edited by Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996
- Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Bennett Bergen, 1974
- Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, Beth L. Leech & David C. Kimball, *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why*, The University of Chicago Press, 2009
- Barbara J. McNeil, Stephen G. Pauker, Harold C. Sox, Jr., and Amos Tversky, “On the Elicitation of Preferences for Alternative Therapies,” *New England Journal of Medicine*, 306:1259–62, 1982

Lesson 14 You Can't Earthquake-Proof a Cause

Even the most carefully constructed advocacy campaigns are at the mercy of political events. Researchers have found time and again that big shifts in the political landscape happen frequently and can have dramatic effects on advocacy plans. While you can't predict these sudden shifts, you can lessen their impact by being prepared to adapt and adjust your plans to the reality of the new landscape.

What the experts say

"Changes in the environment can be good or bad. They can work for your cause or they can work against you. The thing you have to do is make sure that your cause is grounded and your argument is wide and deep. Because you never know which way the political winds will blow, you need to find ways to frame your issue that are bipartisan. And you need to be willing to switch venues. If you can't get traction in Congress, you move to the states. If legislatures won't help you, take it to the courts. You have to keep moving until you find a way forward."

Beth L. Leech, Professor of Political Science and Vice Chair of Graduate Studies, Rutgers University and author of *Lobbyists at Work*

What the research says

In 1898, Congress passed a three percent federal excise tax on long distance phone calls as an emergency measure to help finance the Spanish-American War. While the war lasted only four months, the telephone tax was still being collected 90 years later when the Treasury Department published a study recommending that the tax be eliminated.

For a time, the push to eliminate the tax appeared to be gaining momentum. The elimination argument was simple—at its inception, the tax was justified as a luxury tax because only the very wealthy had phones—and the advocates looked positioned for a win. Yet by the time the issue was ready for a legislative solution the policy window had closed: a recession had arrived, making legislators wary of giving up the \$5 billion a year in revenue the tax generated.

As Baumgartner et al. document in *Lobbying and Policy Change*, the advocates for eliminating the tax were forced to completely remake their strategy in the wake of this defeat. They turned from Congress to the courts, battling over a series of decisions until ultimately the tax was invalidated. While they couldn't

control the larger political environment, they were able to expand their tactical tool kit and adapt their approach while staying true to their goal.

Baumgartner et al. draw upon the concept of “policy windows” first popularized by political scientist John Kingdon in his 1984 book *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. Kingdon utilized 247 interviews conducted over four years of research on the policy setting process in Washington, D.C. to illuminate the ebb and flow of policymaking.

Echoing Kingdon, Baumgartner et al. observe that “politics does not evolve in predictable cycles. Sometimes opportunities suddenly emerge ... Sometimes long-term stability can be disrupted by events, intellectual developments, and greater media attention” (p. 183). This can be a huge challenge for advocates who have grounded their effectiveness in existing political arrangements and a small number of preferred tactics.

Sociologist Debra Minkoff explores what happens to advocacy organizations as the environment around them shifts in her 1999 article “Bending with the Wind: Organizational Change in American Women’s and Minority Organizations.” Minkoff argues that this challenge is not a side issue for groups, but one of the most pressing issues any established advocacy leader will face. “The dilemma facing social movement organizations as they operate in rapidly changing social and political environments cannot be overstated,” Minkoff writes. “Not only do they face contradictory pressures from the outside, but the decision to alter their core identity places them at greater risk of failure” (p. 1696).

Using “an integrated analysis of social movement organizational change and survival based on activities of national women’s and racial minority organizations during 1955–1985,” Minkoff examines 871 groups across a variety of internal and external characteristics (p. 1666). Her most significant finding is that making big changes in organizational strategy in response to a shifting landscape is dangerous because it moves organizations away from their areas of expertise into areas where they are inexperienced.

Minkoff concludes that the best time to experiment with strategy is when a cause is on the upswing and resources are plentiful. Once environmental shifts are already underway it may be too late, since “grassroots political turbulence is not conducive to experimenting with strategic change—unless an organization is already equipped with a ‘repertoire of flexibility’” (p. 1695).

Discussion questions

- 1 If your advocacy in your current venue stalls, where else might you turn?
- 2 How can you invest in a culture of flexibility?
- 3 How can you build up more experience with a wider tactical tool kit?

Further reading

- Debra Minkoff, “Bending with the Wind: Organizational Change in American Women’s and Minority Organizations,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 104, 1999
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Section

4

Minding the Greater Good

Lesson 15 Zeal is the Side Effect of a Potent Cause

As we try to get people fired up about our work, we may think there is no such thing as supporters who are too committed to the cause. However, researchers have found that the most successful advocacy causes attract the most zealous converts. Every cause, like every drug, has potential side effects, and unchecked zeal can be dangerous. To ensure a cause doesn't do more harm than good, we must find a way to incentivize contributions while reigning in leaders or followers who become fanatical.

What the experts say

"The world is kind of a tragic place. It is full of strategic dilemmas. You can play by the rules. You can be nice. People admire you for that. Or you can be rough. You can be aggressive. You can be disruptive and you get some things that way but it can harm you in the long run. Being aware of the tradeoffs helps activists think about how to minimize the damage. They should always ask themselves: 'Is it worth it?'"

James Jasper, Professor of Sociology, City University of New York and author of *The Emotions of Protest*

What the research says

There are few advocacy leaders in American history who have accomplished more or sacrificed more than United Farm Workers founder and labor leader Cesar Chávez. In *Strategy: A History*, Lawrence Freedman explores how Chávez's strong attachment to his cause was both the driver of his success and the source of his greatest problems.

Chávez grew up in a family of farmers and, starting in the 1950s, made advocacy for farm workers his life's work. In 1962 he founded United Farm Workers (UFW), which focused on the rights of farmworkers in the United States. At a crucial moment in 1968, when UFW members "were wearying of a long strike that appeared to be going nowhere, and the value of nonviolence was being questioned ... [Chávez] embarked on a fast to reassert his authority ... [which] had a galvanizing effect on the workers, many of whom made their own pilgrimages to the site of the fast." The fast ended up lasting 25 days, "one day more than Gandhi's longest fast," and proved crucial in maintaining solidarity and securing victory for the campaign (p. 386).

Yet it was this very determination to put the cause above all else that made it hard for Chávez to build a sustainable effort. “Eventually Chávez’s insistence that UFW staff all work on a subsistence wage became a source of discontent,” writes Freedman. “Building a movement and running an organization were two different activities. In the latter role Chávez became autocratic and eccentric, eventually leaving the UFW in disarray” (p. 387).

In his 2010 book, *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chávez, the UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century*, Randy Shaw describes in greater detail how an attempt to “build group solidarity” ultimately led Chávez towards a “growing obsession with internal dissent.” The result: “He began to accuse many longtime staff members and volunteers of disloyalty and often dispatched staffers to immediately terminate these individuals ... Chávez even accused some veteran UFW staffers of being communists, a charge he had ridiculed when growers leveled it at him during the UFW’s early years” (p. 252).

Even the best advocacy leaders need to guard against an attachment to the cause that disconnects them from their membership. By remaining open to a diversity of perspectives, leaders can stay grounded in the broader world of real people and real relationships.

In his 1988 article, “Free Riders and Zealots: The Role of Social Networks,” sociologist James Coleman explores other examples of what happens when our attempts to build solidarity in our causes goes too far. A basic challenge advocates face is that only “a fraction of the benefits of a person’s action accrue to that person.” To ensure participation in a social movement, it is necessary to develop norms and incentives that reward people for thinking not of their own individual needs but instead of the needs of the cause. This effort to get members to “internalize the externalities” might be thought of as a straightforward good but taken too far can lead to “zealous activity which indicates not a deficiency of incentives to contribute, but an excess” (p. 56).

Coleman highlights a few examples of how incentives can undermine a person’s sense of self and appreciation for the humanity of the people around them, including “the IRA hunger strikers in Northern Ireland, some of whom fasted until death,” and the “Red Guards in Italy, engaged in terrorism designed to bring down the system” (p. 52). Advocacy leaders who focus only on creating a culture where people

put the cause above all else run the risk of damaging their own followers and the larger community.

In Coleman’s analysis, the groups most at risk of slipping into zealotry and fanaticism are those that internally create a “closure of social networks,” with members only interacting with each other. This can cause individuals to become increasingly disconnected from the wider world and overly attuned to the narrow needs of the group. By intentionally embedding your group in a looser network of social ties, including connections to those who don’t always share your norms and perspectives, you can minimize the risk of zealotry.

In *The Strategy of Social Protest*, William Gamson explores one potential impact of zealotry: the shift in goal from achieving change to eliminating enemies. Perhaps the biggest consequence of this shift is that it closes off the opportunities for compromise from which most advocacy victories emerge.

“It appears then, perhaps not too surprisingly, that what really stands in the way of success for the ambitious challenger is not diffuse objectives but targets of change who are unwilling to cooperate in their own demise,” Gamson observes. “No group that attempted to displace its antagonist, even by peaceful means, was successful” (p. 44).

Discussion Questions

- 1 What are you doing to make sure your social network doesn't only include people who think like you?
- 2 Who in your life do you trust to let you know when you are slipping into zealotry?
- 3 How will you know if you have gone too far and lost touch with your values?

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Lesson 16 Big Change Is Regressive Unless Democratic

The only responsible way to seek change in the world is to tackle it with your eyes wide open to what could go wrong. While advocacy attracts optimists, the truth is that no matter how bad the present seems, things can always get worse. Although most people seeking to change the world will never find themselves in the role of political revolutionary, it's useful to explore this extreme type of change agent to illuminate how transformational change can go terribly wrong. When a movement succeeds in sweeping away the old societal order, researchers have found that usually a more regressive order takes hold.

What the experts say

“For those trying to minimize the risk of regression, then doing nothing might be the safest path. But for some people, submitting to the status quo is just not an option. If institutions have failed, and you've decided you must do something to transform your community or your country, what's the safest way and most effective way forward? Historically it has been non-violent resistance. But movements don't win because they make a better moral argument. They win because they completely disrupt the ability of the status quo to maintain itself and that act of disruption carries with it a lot of risk.”

Erica Chenoweth, Professor of Public Policy at Harvard Kennedy School and a Susan S. and Kenneth L. Wallach Professor at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, and co-author of *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*

What the research says

Karl Marx wrote in 1871 that the progress of history “remained clogged by all manner of medieval rubbish” until the “gigantic broom of the French Revolution ... swept away all of these relics of bygone times.”

Sociologist Theda Skocpol uses Marx's quote as a jumping off point in *States and Social Revolutions* to explore what happens when the civic roots that hold society together are pulled up. She looks at the facts behind the rhetoric of revolution, uncovering a pattern of elite leaders in France, China and Russia who emerge during times of crisis and remake the political order around themselves. In each case, the revolution results in a more powerful and more centralized state. While these leaders often gather support with promises of a popular dispersal of power, once in command they focus relentlessly on an “administrative-military consolidation” implemented through a continuous campaign of violence (p. 179).

Skocpol found that in France the revolution's “political leadership came primarily from the ranks of professionals (especially lawyers), office holders, and

intellectuals” who in turn “strengthened executive-administrative dominance within government” (p. 176) and deployed this new found power “to imprison and execute enemies of the Revolution” and “to continue violent punitive measures against ever more vaguely defined counter-revolutionaries” (p. 193).

In his 1992 book, *Guerrillas & Revolution in Latin America*, sociologist Timothy Wickham-Crowley carried out a comparative investigation into the characteristics of revolutions in Latin America beginning in 1956. He found a similar pattern of elites stepping forward in times of crisis to assume leadership roles under a populist revolutionary banner. In sharp contrast to the narrative of these revolutions as popular uprisings, Wickham-Crowley finds that the initial wave of participants are almost always “young ... overwhelmingly male ... highly educated offspring of rural elites and the urban middle and upper classes” and lacking in representation among the country’s ethnic minorities (p. 29).

Sociologist Jack Goldstone’s comprehensive review of more than 300 research studies over two decades on the causes and outcomes of revolutions finds a similar disconnect between rhetoric and reality when it comes to outcomes. In his 2001 article “Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory,” he writes that revolutionaries “frequently claim that they will reduce inequality, establish democracy, and provide economic prosperity,” yet a careful review of “the record of actual revolutions is rather poor in regard to all of these claims” (p. 167).

In contrast to the promise of equality, Goldstone finds that revolutionary outcomes “fall short of expectations in the social emancipation of women and their elevation to leadership roles. ... Gender equality has remained absent, or if articulated, still illusory, in the outcome of revolutionary struggles. ... Religious and ethnic minorities often do worse, rather than better, under revolutionary regimes ... [and] any groups not bound by ethnic and religious solidarity to the new government become suspect in their loyalties and may be singled out for persecution” (p. 169).

In contrast to the promise of democracy, Goldstone finds that the “need to consolidate a new regime in the face of struggles with domestic and foreign foes has instead produced authoritarian regimes, often in the guise of populist dictatorships such as those of Napoleon, Castro, and Mao, or of one-party states such as the PRI state in Mexico or the Communist Party-led states of the Soviet Union

and Eastern Europe. Indeed, the struggle required to take and hold power in revolutions generally leaves its mark in the militarized and coercive character of new revolutionary regimes” (p. 168).

Likewise, in contrast to the promise of prosperity, Goldstone finds that “long-term economic performance in revolutionary regimes lags that of comparable countries that have not experienced revolutions. This may be in part because the elite divisions and conflicts that both precede and often follow revolution are inimical to economic progress. ... It appears that the very effort that goes into rebuilding political institutions throttles economic growth” (p. 168).

One of the few bright spots on the landscape surveyed by Goldstone is found in South Africa: “A negotiated transfer of power to Nelson Mandela and the pragmatic African National Congress leadership in South Africa was always more likely to yield a democratic regime than a violent transfer of power dominated by more radical black-power movements.”

In this way, the movement developed by the ANC becomes an exception that proves the rule. When revolutions aren’t regressive, it is because of “a strong personal commitment to democracy by revolutionary leaders” and a deep organizational pragmatism informing the movement’s objectives (p. 174). And that commitment to democratic processes and pragmatic outcomes to minimize the chances of regression is a lesson that can be applied whether your goals are big or small.

Discussion Questions

- 1 How are you working to make sure the leadership of your cause reflects the diversity of the people you aim to serve?
- 2 What are the main ways your efforts might make things worse and how are you aiming to mitigate those risks?
- 3 How can you ensure a commitment to democracy informs the choices you make in advancing your goals?

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Lesson 17 How to Win Even When You Lose

After deciding what cause to take up, the choice of how to advocate is the most important one you will make. Researchers have found that advocacy campaigns can change the world in profound ways far beyond their initial goals. Intentionally democratic campaigns can increase the long-term civic engagement of communities; impart crucial skills to their participants; build bridges between groups; and create pathways for future advocates to follow. Choosing an approach to advocacy that invests in the civic life and social connections of the community around you is an important way to ensure that the people you are fighting for win even if your campaign fails.

What the experts say

“The most effective groups in American public life have always been federated, which means they have the ability to operate across the national, state and local levels. And they use these structures to teach people about our very complex political system. They encourage their members to run for office. So, people are learning about how to get involved and they are sharing what they are learning with each other. This kind of participatory advocacy can reinvent and revitalize American civic democracy.”

Theda Skocpol, Victor S. Thomas Professor of Government and Sociology, Harvard University and author of *Diminished Democracy*

What the research says

One of the greatest mobilizations of civic energy in the 19th and early 20th century was the temperance movement, which sought to dramatically restrict or completely abolish the sale of alcohol.

The proposal for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to prohibit the sale of alcohol was first introduced in Congress in 1878, but it wasn't until 1919 that it passed the House of Representatives and the Senate. One year later it was officially ratified as the 18th amendment. While the movement also suffered one of the biggest defeats in the history of American advocacy with the ratification of the 21st amendment in 1932, which reversed the prohibition on alcohol, its legacy of energizing the civic infrastructure of American democracy was felt far beyond the fate of its particular policy goals.

As captured in Skocpol's *Diminished Democracy*, many of these 19th century groups functioned in ways that replicated the American political experience: “Local chapters printed up copies of constitutions and by-laws so every member could have a copy to carry and consult ... Because mimicry of U.S.

rules of taxpaying and representative governance was so central to group procedures, what association members learned was also relevant to what they needed to know as U.S. citizens” (p. 100). While at the time colleges “were open only to the few,” in the weekly meetings of the 5,000 divisions of the Sons of Temperance, “a quarter of a million men attended a democratically open ‘school for popular debate’” (p. 102). These experiences served as on-ramps to exceptionally high levels of civic and political participation.

In his 2004 book *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle*, Kenneth Andrews observes that “the impact of movements may lag behind the peaks of mobilization, so that effects are seen only after the movement has declined” (p. 19). This can lead us to discount both the impact of these efforts and the importance of their investment in the civic and political fabric of the communities they serve. Using regression analysis to study the connections between advocacy activities and political outcomes in Mississippi in the 1950s and 1960s, Andrews finds the “counties that established strong movement infrastructures in the early 1960s experienced significant success in expanding black political participation in the late 1960s and early 1970s” (p. 134).

Similarly, in her examination of the advocacy efforts surrounding the Equal Rights Amendment, political scientist Jane Mansbridge found that beyond the outcome of the specific campaign itself, the advocacy effort “raised consciousness, helped women organize politically, and stimulated legislative and judicial action” that could not have been anticipated at the start of the campaign (p. 188). This, in turn, created the social capital from which new movements and new ideas could emerge.

These conclusions about the power of civic movements to strengthen democracies find support in international studies that explore the consequences of broad-based social movements versus violent upheavals. In their groundbreaking 2011 book, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, political scientist Erica Chenoweth and civil resistance scholar and human rights advocate Maria Stephan seek to understand how different methods of pursuing change create different effects. To do so, they focus in on one of the starkest differences between types of advocacy, contrasting groups committed to nonviolence with those that utilized armed struggle in their campaigns.

Their comprehensive research effort covers 323 campaigns across the globe over more than a

century (1900–2006). One of their biggest findings upended conventional wisdom: on average, non-violent campaigns had a much higher success rate than those using violence. The authors attributed this trend to “participation advantage.” Simply put, nonviolent campaigns were able to attract a broader array of participants, particularly women, which swelled their numbers. Greater membership led to “enhanced resilience, higher probabilities of tactical innovation, expanded civic disruption” and, ultimately, more successful outcomes (p. 10).

Yet the benefits of peaceful advocacy did not stop there. Chenoweth and Stephan also found that these nonviolent campaigns were much more successful in the broader, long-term goal of creating “more durable and internally peaceful democracies” (p. 10). In general, the use of a nonviolence strategy during a time of transition increased the odds of a democracy emerging from the political transition by more than 40 percent. This was true even if the campaign failed to achieve its immediate goals. Simply the act of organizing a nonviolent social movement built up the civic infrastructure and social capital of a community in ways that had long-term, positive effects for the civic efforts to come.

This finding has deep resonance in American history, as political scientist Gene Sharp explores in his three-volume history, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. In many ways, Sharp argues, the most significant aspect of the American Revolution was the civil, not military, actions of the colonists. The revolution was a noncooperation movement more than a military rebellion, and its long-term success was grounded in securing change through civic protest.

While military battles were long and often indecisive, swift civic victories captured the public imagination. “The 1766 repeal of the Stamp Act,” Sharp writes, “came in a very few months” as Americans demonstrated they could change society through civic protest (p. 70). These were the historical events that Americans would return to again and again as they sought to improve their union.

In *Democracy in America*, political scientist and historian Alexis de Tocqueville’s famous book on his travels through the United States in 1831, he observed that a “political association draws a lot of people at the same time out of their own circle; however much differences in age, intelligence, or wealth may naturally keep them apart ... Once they have met, they always know how to meet again ... So one may

think of political associations as great free schools to which all citizens come to be taught the general theory of association.”

What these researchers and writers are pointing to is a more holistic approach to seeking change in the world. Of course, advocates should always strive to win, but they should also aim to conduct themselves in such a way that, whether they win or lose, they leave behind a society that is stronger, more connected and more capable of democratic change than when they began.

Discussion Questions

- 1 How can you ensure that the way you advance your goals also adds to the civic capacity of the people you serve?
- 2 What kind of training might you provide your members so that they learn more about how to engage with the political systems in your community?
- 3 What are the biggest opportunities to build bridges across the divides in your community through your work?

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