By Marc Porter Magee, Ph.D.

June 2020

The AdvocacyLabs Interviews: Insights into Effective Advocacy from the Nation's Leading Experts

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Advocacy Labs_

A collaboration between

About the Interviewer
Marc Porter Magee is the founder and CEO of 50CAN. Over the past decade, Marc has led 50CAN to more than 100 policy victories through advocacy campaigns in more than a dozen states. He previously served as the COO of ConnCAN, research director for the Partnership for Public Service, and founding director of the Center for Civic Enterprise at the Progressive Policy Institute. Marc holds a B.A. from Georgetown University and a Ph.D. in Sociology from Duke University. Email Marc at marc.magee@50can.org or follow Marc on Twitter at @marcportermagee.

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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.

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.

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.

Foreword

We launched AdvocacyLabs to bring fresh and rigorous perspectives to how change happens in education policy.

Our inaugural report focused on a review of the academic literature. In this report, we gather the insights of many of America's leading thinkers on advocacy to help advocates for America's students chart a path forward in what is going to be a very challenging post-COVID period in the education sector.

We hope the diverse perspectives in the dozen interviews that follow help push your thinking, spark your imagination and fuel your advocacy campaigns with the ideas you need to accomplish great things for the students, families and communities you serve.

Marc Porter Magee, Ph.D.
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Sarah Anzia on Special Interests and Local Elections

Anzia is the Michelle J. Schwartz Associate Professor of Public Policy and Associate Professor of Political Science at University of California, Berkeley, and the author of *Timing and Turnout: How Off-Cycle Elections Favor Organized Groups*.

Porter Magee: What got you interested in the role of organized groups in local elections?

Anzia: I was inspired by a couple of different experiences very early in my career. When I was a master's student at the University of Chicago, I worked as a research assistant for a political scientist named Chris Berry who was writing a book on special districts, which are special-purpose entities independent of other local governments. This is, for example, the way fire protection is funded in some places. They have elections and the power to tax. But when you start looking into the elections for these special districts, you realize that most people don't even know they are happening or even that they have a choice over the decisions that are being made.

Shortly after that, I started my Ph.D. at Stanford, and I was working with Terry Moe, and he has done a lot of work looking at school board elections and teacher unions. That deepened my interest in local elections, the weird ways in which they are set up, and the organized groups that actively try to influence them. I started with a really basic question: Who benefits from elections that most people aren't paying attention to and don't show up to vote in?

And what did you find?

When elections are held in off years or on unusual days, the people who do show up are the ones who really care about the outcomes, and usually this means that well-organized groups are overrepresented. Oftentimes, in local government, it means that government employees and their unions have outsized influence. It makes sense that they would be really politically engaged, because what these local governments do affects their jobs very directly.

So especially when elections are off-cycle, firefighters have disproportionate influence in the elections of fire protection districts and cities, and teachers unions have disproportionate influence in school board elections. And that perhaps would surprise most people. If I were to say, "The Chambers of Commerce, the realtors and the developers are really active in local politics," you might say, "that's obvious." But people might not realize that firefighters are some of the most active groups in local politics, in many states. The result is that a relatively small number of people have outsized influence on, for example, how well local government employees are compensated—and that compensation makes up a large share of local

government budgets. But, of course, everyone ends up paying as taxpayers whether they knew about the election or not.

Have organized groups always played around with the timing of local elections to maximize their influence?

Toying with the timing of elections goes back to the 1840s, so this is a very old phenomenon. In big cities, it was political parties that were the driving force behind the timing of elections. They figured out whether they would do better in an election in even-numbered or odd-numbered years and would then change the election calendar to boost their chances of winning. And you can track how the election dates were moved back and forth depending on who was in power.

We often hear people bemoaning America's low levels of turnout for elections, but it sounds like we don't talk enough about how that is often by design. That is, powerful people decided they could maintain their power by creating an election schedule that discouraged voting.

That's right. Most elections that happen in this country are low-participation affairs, and this is not an accident. This is the system that somebody somewhere wants.

If you're an interest group, you know that new elections could potentially push policymakers away from your interests. Election timing is a way to avoid that. Holding off-cycle elections—for example, a school board election that takes place in the Spring—is a way to put a limit on the number of people who will participate and to affect the kinds of people who participate. So, some interest groups work behind the scenes to reinforce the structures that encourage low-turnout elections.

If our goal was to increase turnout for elections, the easiest switch to make would be hold all elections on even years in November. In some cases, this switch alone would boost turnout dramatically over what it is now if you held these local elections at the same time as the national elections. But often there are powerful forces that want to keep things the way they are.

Would Democrats benefit most from turnout-increasing changes?

In most situations, the answer is probably yes. That's what many argue. But if you dig a little deeper, it's clear that in some elections, key Democratic groups benefit from keeping voter turnout low. Perhaps the best example of this is school board elections and the way that teacher unions can benefit from lower turnout.

If you hold a state election at the same time as a national election, it's quite possible you're going to get a larger share of Democrats in the electorate. But the push to align local school board elections with national elections, which would dramatically increase turnout, is pushed primarily by Republicans.

Why is that?

Because this is an area where it's the Democrats who benefit from greater barriers to participation and low voter turnout. It allows a key Democratic interest group, teachers unions, to be more influential.

So, it's really strange when you read about these debates to align school board elections with national elections, you see Republicans saying things like, "We need to do everything possible to increase participation and increase turnout in these elections." And it's the Democrats who are saying, "No, we need to protect local control."

Another argument I have heard in favor of off-year and off-cycle elections for school boards is that it helps keep the politics out of education decisions.

This is the classic Progressive Era argument, that local government should be detached from politics. Decisions should be made by experts to keep policy free of politics. My view is that you can't ever take the politics out of these decisions. As long as you are electing people, as long as you have government, you're going to have politics. And when you decide to elect representatives through low-turnout elections, you are just trading one kind of politics for another.

When you push supporters of off-cycle elections on this, what you eventually hear is: "At least we know that the people who do show up know about the issues. They are the ones who have enough information to cast an educated vote, a well-informed vote." But what they are really saying is: "We don't want the masses voting in our elections."

It's important to not be naive about what's really going on. No one ever tells you, "We're doing this because we're more likely to get our way if you

don't vote." They put it in terms of public interest, just because that's what you have to do to make it appealing. But the truth is that everybody in the school district is paying taxes toward the school district. Why shouldn't they all have a say?

If we moved all school board elections to the first Tuesday in November in even years, how do you think that would change those elections?

The evidence suggests that one result would likely be an electorate for school board races that is much younger and more diverse than what we see right now. It also seems likely that well-organized groups, such as teacher unions, would see a weakening of their influence unless they were able to refocus on reaching a broader audience with their mobilization and persuasion materials.

Would that make teacher unions more responsive to voters? Perhaps. If they knew that twice as many people were going to turn out to vote in a school board election, it would become politically important to appeal to all of those people.

Interview 2 John Campbell on The Power of Experts in a Populist Age

Campbell is the Class of 1925 Professor and Professor of Sociology at Dartmouth College, the author of *American Discontent: The Rise of Donald Trump and Decline of the Golden Age* and the co-author of *The National Origins of Policy Ideas: Knowledge Regimes in the United States, France, Germany, and Denmark.*

Porter Magee: You have been a leader in exploring how ideas shape policy and politics. What is the most important thing you have learned about social change?

Campbell: One of the most important insights is that institutions are sticky. They slow down the process of change and conserve the existing order. That's in part because people get used to them and take them for granted. But they also produce constituencies that benefit from them, and those beneficiaries will work hard to stop anyone trying to change them.

Given that, how should advocates think about the opportunities to secure change?

There are four ways you might answer that question.

One is that there isn't much change, that the status quo prevails. It's perhaps not the answer advocates are looking for, but you could argue that it's the most obvious answer given how often change efforts fail to achieve their goals.

Two, when you do have change, it tends to be very incremental; maybe two steps forward, one step back.

Three, change does happen, but only when there is a crisis that upsets the apple cart. We call this a "punctuated equilibrium framework," which is a phrase borrowed from evolutionary biology. This suggests that we will have long periods of stability that, once in a while, are disrupted by big shifts.

And the fourth and final answer, one that I tend to subscribe to, is that change is contingent. Sometimes, no change is possible. Sometimes, the only path forward is incremental change. Sometimes, it's a punctuated kind of a process, but rarely do you get anything brand new.

Can you give an example of that?

One interesting historical example would be the post-communist transitions back in the early 1990s. The media talked about these as being revolutionary changes, but in fact, if you looked closer, they contained lots of bits and pieces of old ways of doing things that were just rejiggered and recombined.

The post-Soviet societies and their institutions did look new at first glance, but they were strongly influenced by the past. Sometimes this is referred to

as bricolage, a recombining of already existing pieces. Advocates should understand that while institutional change comes in a variety of different forms, you will almost never have the chance to create anything that is brand new, even in a so-called revolution.

How should we think about the role of experts in driving these changes? Has the new upswing in populism made experts less relevant?

The role of experts has changed over time, and in some ways is less important in driving change. But they still matter. I guess the metaphor when drafting white papers or reports might be like throwing spaghetti against the wall. Less sticks than it used to, but some does and it's just hard to know which until you do it.

Expert-driven change sounds very messy, which is perhaps fitting for our age.

Yes, and this is particularly so in the United States. 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.

Of course, one of the people in power right now is Donald Trump. What would it mean for the future of expert-driven change if we ended up with more politicians like Trump?

We probably shouldn't overstate the degree to which expertise mattered in the Obama administration. But there is one big difference between Trump and previous administrations, which is that he reacts much more unpredictably from the gut. This is especially clear in how Trump has often ignored the advice of health policy experts during the coronavirus pandemic.

With Obama, Bush and Clinton, there was always a set of experts who would play some role in helping them form policy, for better or worse. That doesn't mean they always gave good advice, but these were serious, well-educated people who presidents would often listen to before making a decision. That gave people trying to influence the president with research and ideas a way to do so.

Do think tanks and researchers matter in a world where decisions are made from the gut?

It's sort of a grab bag. There are two reasons funders keep giving to think tanks. One is the direct way they are interacting with policy makers. They produce and distribute reports and white papers. They provide testimony. And all of that matters, up to a point.

The other way is how they are shaping how we think about and talk about a topic, which in some ways is more powerful. You see a lot of funders, for example, giving money to universities to influence the realm of ideas and ideologies. It is harder to measure, but I think those strategies have been pretty successful. And it doesn't require a politician to read a white paper because the whole way we talk about an issue has shifted. Of course, that's a long-term plan that requires decades of investment.

So, if you were a funder investing in a cause, would you still give to the expert side of this advocacy work?

I would try to use as many strategies as I could afford and hope that one of them or two of them, at any particular moment in time, would actually hit the target. That way, if you have direct access to the policymakers, you are ready with the policy plans. If you don't, you can still use research to drive the stories that will get picked up in the media, which is another way to reach the politicians. And in the meantime, you should always be working to shape and define the broader discussion of the ideas you care about and using a variety of other tactics to build up political will.

All the money in the world can't guarantee change. But a combination of strategies—including ones driven by experts—increases your odds of success.

Interview 3 Elisabeth Clemens on Volunteers and 21st Century Advocacy

Clemens is the William Rainey Harper Distinguished Service Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago, the author of *The People's Lobby* and co-editor of *Politics and Partnership: Voluntary Associations in America's Past and Present*.

Porter Magee: How do today's grassroots advocacy organizations compare to those of the past?

Clemens: There are some very important parallels. The idea that frustration is leading people to get mobilized in voluntary associations that bridge the civic and political is similar. In the late 19th century, for example, there was a deep sense of frustration about the political system, the inability of parties to make things happen. There was a feeling that important issues were off the agenda. And this frustration was there at the municipal, county, state and federal levels.

At the same time, there was a recognition that these new kinds of civic organizations could do work for local communities and get things done. They could make playgrounds happen. They could get streets paved. All that kind of basic, local work that would pay off in a direct way and reinforce the sense of, "Oh, we work together and our world gets better together."

Voluntary local organizations eventually gave way to larger, more professional advocacy efforts. How did that switch happen?

So there's a bit of a historical debate to be had with respect to this question. In many organizations, World War I is a key turning point. What happened during World War I is that the federal government stepped forward to mobilize support for causes, and that started to crowd out the volunteers who had been in charge.

You saw this in all sorts of voluntary groups: Women get pushed out as men come in to mobilize the war effort. And that kind of thing happens repeatedly when there is a major crisis, be it World War I, the 1927 Mississippi River flood, the Great Depression or World War II. There is a tendency for professionals to take an enlarged role in managing during times of crisis.

By the beginning of World War II, there's a real challenge about what you do with volunteers. While political leaders knew that volunteering was crucial for maintaining morale and support for the war, and that it was important that everyday folks feel that they are doing their bit, with the increasingly technologically sophisticated approach to war, there wasn't much for ordinary citizens to do.

And the phenomenon of professionals crowding out volunteers is still with us.

Exactly. In post-9/11 New York, there were moments of conflict between the grassroots volunteer groups that were trying to do something and the professionals trying to keep some order at Ground Zero. People wanted to give blood post-9/11, but there wasn't much need. It wasn't clear what kind of architecture of national mobilization would actually be helpful.

And this is because of a broader change. The combination of a smaller 19th century government that reflected really powerful anti-statist sentiments and the reliance on mass mobilization in a crisis also meant that there was a mechanism that kept governments small and gave volunteers a real role. Then, for a whole host of reasons, that changed.

In your book The People's Lobby, you talk about the paradox of progressivism—the idea that in the quest to better serve the people, progressives end up excluding those same people from the change process itself.

One of the challenges was that progressives thought party machines were a source of corruption. The result was an effort to support the poor and provide services in a way that was outside the control of elected officials, which put their work in tension with electoral democracy.

There's a particular configuration of those tensions in the progressive era, but that same technocratic impulse is with us today and perhaps has intensified. Policy leaders are recognizing, "Oh, we kind of forgot the democracy."

Do you think we are in a populist moment now? And, if so, what does that mean for advocacy?

Yes, there is a populist resurgence among both the right and the left. And the managerial instincts of the political leaders are driving them to try and figure out how to channel that grassroots energy toward an organized campaign.

I think of the stories about farmers in the 19th century coming in on their wagons and listening to four hours of lectures on monetary schemes. You had this deep anger, but you also had this effort to educate people on the issues and create the motivation to do something together. That is the same challenge now. You have marches and marches, but for what?

I think one of the shifts in the last six to nine months has been a move toward creating the content for a real movement. People are not simply protesting but are also developing a sense of what kind of world might come out of those protests.

How do we create new forms of solidarity at a time when the old forms don't seem to be working?

I have a book coming out that explores how we respond to crises and what kinds of opportunities we can create for people to feel that they are making meaningful contributions to their communities and nation in times of need.

If you think about the 19th century response to a disaster, or war, or a depression, the classic activity at the time was some direct form of contribution—whether of time or money—that was in line with what a citizen could give. If you don't have any money to give, you can always pick lilies of the valley in your garden and sell them and send us 25 cents to support the cause. Or you can collect moss for bandages. Or you can knit. And our leaders recognize this and celebrated it as a real contribution. They knew you had to keep people mobilized.

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.

I get concerned that the contemporary discourse of social entrepreneurship contributes to this problem. It feeds the idea that the only way to feel involved is to start something new. And that not only has the potential to waste a lot of energy, it makes it harder to create solidarity for a cause. It leads to a fragmented landscape. So, perhaps what we need most is not new organizations, but better ways of networking and coalition formation.

What advice might you give to funders who are looking to contribute to that approach?

In the early 20th century, the Rockefellers were far and away the wealthiest family in the United States and the biggest donor. In any crisis, they would try to cover 5 percent of what local groups were trying to raise. The idea was they wanted to help, but they would only join in when the majority of energy was from other local sources of support.

This was also true of Carnegie and his approach to building libraries. He would give the money to build the building and fill it with books on the condition that local communities had done the work to get the operating costs funded locally.

A lot of contemporary, big philanthropy has lost touch with that spirit of contributing to local projects and respecting that they shouldn't be the ones in charge. To make lasting change, you want the beneficiaries of your philanthropy to also be co-producers of the good rather than simply recipients of a gift. That is the biggest lesson from the 20th century that I wish more 21st century philanthropists would learn.

Interview 4 Mark Granovetter on Riots, Reform and Social Networks

Granovetter is the Joan Butler Ford Professor of Sociology at Stanford University and the author of *Society and Economy* and *Getting a Job*.

Porter Magee: One of your big contributions to the field of sociology is introducing a more quantitative approach to studying social networks. What sparked that idea?

Granovetter: In college, I read a book by the French historian Georges Lefebvre called *The Great Fear of 1789*. He was tracing how riots spread from one place to another in 18th century revolutionary France. He showed pictures of the postal routes connecting towns across the countryside and revealed how the idea of riots spread through these networks of dirt roads along with the mail to reach tens of thousands of people. Those pictures of networks really stuck with me. Something seemingly as chaotic as a riot was actually highly dependent on the way information flowed between people along well-organized mail routes.

I realized that these networks linking people together were a different, but crucial, level of analysis between the micro scale of individuals and whatever was in their heads, and the macro scale that historians talk about, like wars and revolutions. In graduate school, I met a sociologist named Harrison White, who became my adviser. He was pioneering the study of these social connections, which I learned people were starting to call social networks.

That launched me into the study of social networks. Through my conversations with White, I got increasingly interested in what kind of ties connected people to larger groups.

You wrote an article titled "The Strength of Weak Ties" that grew out of your insight that we should pay attention to how people were connected to each other. It is the most-cited publication of all time in the field of sociology and it created a new way of thinking about the social world through the mathematics of loose, far-reaching social connections. You followed up on that surprise success a few years later with "Threshold Models of Collective Behavior," which brought new insights to the way social movements are born. What is the concept of the strength of weak ties and how does it connect to the idea of collective behavior?

The idea of the strength of weak ties came from my dissertation work on how people find jobs. A common

viewpoint was that strong ties between people were crucial for success and weak ties were a sign of alienation. But it turned out that the weaker ties between people were often indispensable in creating new opportunities.

The connection between social networks and collective behavior came out of the question: "Let's imagine everyone is equally influenced by everybody else; how might the number of people doing something shift people's willingness to get involved?" In other words, what's the threshold for getting involved?

A popular idea in the 1960s and 1970s was that when people are in a crowd, their mentality changes; they became a different person. In contrast, the idea behind thresholds is that people will respond rationally to the actions of the people around them.

The notion is that each person has some threshold of how many other people they have to see do something before they'll do it. If they see that number of people do it, then they do it. If they don't see that number do it, then they don't do it. Nothing changed in their head that caused them to take action. It's just that their threshold has been triggered.

If you have just a slightly different distribution of thresholds, you may get a completely different outcome. Take the example of 100 people who have thresholds ranging from 0 to 99. Under those conditions, everybody will riot. The person with a threshold of zero takes action. The second person sees this first person riot, and the third person sees two other people rioting, and eventually everyone's threshold is triggered and everyone is rioting. But if the person with a threshold of 1 was missing, no one else would riot, and you would see only a single rioter!

These are simple ideas, but they have big implications. Malcolm Gladwell got ahold of the strength of weak ties and it became a core idea in his best-selling book *The Tipping Point*, and the work on threshold models later appeared in his New Yorker article on school shootings.

What does it look like when you apply these ideas to the world of advocacy and social change? For example, did the marriage equality movement benefit from these kind of threshold behaviors?

Gay marriage is certainly a very interesting case because what happened was that as people became more and more comfortable coming out as gay, more and more people realized that they could come out of the closet, too. You can imagine that gay individuals had different thresholds for how many other people had to come out publicly before they would feel comfortable doing so.

The more people came out, the more people realized how many gay people they actually knew. And it turned out that the thresholds were also at work with people's support for gay rights. Having a few people that they knew reasonably well come out of the closet really shifted the way people thought about this issue. Instead of gay people being "the other," it turns out to be their sister, their cousin or their friend. Once those thresholds were cleared, it created this kind of tsunami of support for gay marriage in a short period of time.

Does this same idea also help illuminate the fight against sexual harassment and the success of the Me Too movement?

Yeah, it's a similar dynamic at work. A lot of people didn't understand how widespread the problem of sexual harassment was because it wasn't talked about in public. And women had different thresholds for when they would feel comfortable telling their own stories.

Women were rightly scared for their jobs, scared for their reputations, scared for retaliation. Someone had to be the first one to do it. These were very brave people. When the first women went public with their stories, it made it possible for other women to feel comfortable coming forward as well, and eventually so many women came forward it became a movement.

What made Me Too so powerful was the way it changed individuals who were not in a movement, but who just saw enough other people come forward who they could identify with that it helped them overcome their fear of retaliation. And that is a true threshold phenomenon.

Where do you think this kind of threshold advocacy might go next?

Well, I think that the way people are connected together through social media is hugely important in both good and bad ways if you care about social change. We are becoming much better at spreading ideas within like-minded circles through these social

networks, perhaps too good at it, because the ideas don't have to be true to spread.

The social media platforms themselves bear some responsibility for that because they have enabled echo chambers where people just hear the same thing over and over again. And they become completely implacable in their views and not able to get any new information. So, it is possible that, if you want big changes, you will need to find ways to break out of those echo chambers.

Which brings us back to the strength of weak ties. Is social media another example of the power of weak ties, or does it show us their limits?

There is a debate, which Gladwell was one of the first people to get involved in with his 2010 article, "Small Change: Why the Revolution Won't be Tweeted," in The New Yorker about the limits of creating big social movements through social media. His argument at the time was that people needed to be in close contact with people they know well who are engaged in a social movement before they'll be activated and social media doesn't do that. Ten years later, there is still a huge debate in the literature about this.

My belief is that this critique of online social networks is only partially true. Take the 2019 Hong Kong protests. It was almost completely coordinated through social media. So, a more interesting question is: When are the weak ties created through social media strong enough to power a movement? We don't know yet. But it's a big question that advocates should be asking themselves.

Interview 5 James Jasper on Getting Emotional About Advocacy

Jasper is a Professor of Sociology at City University of New York and author of *The Emotions of Protest* and *Protest: A Cultural Introduction to Social Movements*.

Porter Magee: A big thread running through your work is the push to bring emotions back into the research on social movements and advocacy. Where did that come from?

Jasper: It was really just about getting out there into the world, participating in protests, talking to people and looking at the decisions they made. It made me think that emotions were a big part of it all, but they were largely missing from the literature on social movements. So, I started reading the research on emotions and quickly realized that psychologists actually know a lot about emotions, but sociologists and political scientists just weren't applying that knowledge to their work on social movements.

And oftentimes when academics wrote about the psychology of emotions it was pretty one dimensional.

Yes, and that goes back to the 1950s and earlier. You have these crowd theories in which otherwise sensible and respected scholars said, "People just turn into this unthinking mass when they get in crowds." Emotions were seen simply as irrational.

In the 1990s, things started to shift, and you saw scholars writing about the positive emotions that drive social movements: the joy and solidarity of a collective identity. They put a big emphasis on the pleasures of marching, for example.

And we are just starting to get to a place where we can say, "Emotions aren't good or bad. Emotions are just normal." They're going to be a part of good actions. They're going to be a part of bad actions. They're going to be a part of rational actions. They're going to be a part of mistaken actions.

How does this apply to two social movements in the news: climate change and Black Lives Matter?

The emotion that Black Lives Matter is channeling is anger, which is a crucial emotion in social movements. It seems that climate change activists are trying to channel people's frustration, which is a lot harder to do.

The thing you want to do as an advocate is to create a moral battery: pairing strong positive emotions with strong negative emotions. You need that

negative charge at one end. People needed to be pissed off and disgusted with something, just really angry. But if you want to change things, then you need to connect that negative feeling to the positive as well: this is how the world could be, here is a hopeful picture of where we want to go.

If you have one without the other, the movement isn't going to go anywhere. And frankly, climate change is, yes, a really important issue, but it can also feel hopeless. That is not the emotion you want people to be feeling if your goal is for them to take action.

What can leaders do in these situations? Do we need heroes? Do we need enemies?

Heroes reassure us and give us confidence. They'll protect us. We admire them because they're strong and moral. Villains motivate us because we're afraid of them. They're evil, they're always plotting, they're always looking for our weaknesses. We also need victims in our stories. They are sympathetic, we have compassion for them, we want to help them.

Characters are why we care about the plots. Characters are why we read novels. Characters are why we feel things when we read stories or hear people's stories. And all of these different kinds of characters play an important role in the political rhetoric of a movement. They tell us what emotions we're supposed to feel and often, through that, tell us how we are supposed to act. We are supposed to hate the villains, join the triumphant hero and save the victims.

Where does someone like Rosa Parks fit into this typology?

She was really the perfect person to rally behind against the police and the forces of white supremacy.

At first, she looks like a classic victim, right? She is small, well-mannered, quiet. But then there is this almost miraculous transformation into a hero. She's not going to take it anymore. She draws on this almost divine power that changes her. And suddenly she is driven by such moral confidence that she faces down all of the forces arrayed against her.

There is a line in Jeanne Theoharis' book The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks, where one of Parks' neighbors was asked why the community was rallying behind her. And the response was: "She's quiet—like steel is quiet."

Yes, that captures it perfectly.

A lot of the figures in the civil rights movement were deeply religious, which seems to have armed them with a strong moral sense of purpose. Is that missing from American movements today?

I do think that the left, at least, in America is less religious and perhaps approaches the world with maybe a bit more of an ironic distance from the moral language of right and wrong than is helpful to power a movement.

A lot of my friends are Marxists and they have this elaborate scientific critique of capitalism and none of that has ever really mobilized anybody in America. They don't really know what to do with strong emotions.

What advice would you give to the aspiring advocate looking to put emotions to work for their cause?

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.

If you want to use emotions, start with shock and anger. Let people express genuine indignation about something. And then move them towards the positive. Be ready to say at the right moment, "Here's the hope."

And be explicit about the characters in your story. Do we have a villain here? If not, go find them. Maybe you are uncomfortable singling out one police chief or one superintendent of education. But if you don't have any villains—if not a specific person, at least a category of people—you aren't going to get very far.

Remember that 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.

Interview 6 Kelsy Kretschmer on Infighting and Innovation

Kretschmer is an Assistant Professor in the School of Public Policy at Oregon State University and author of *Fighting for NOW: Diversity and Discord in the National Organization for Women*.

Porter Magee: One of the things we spend a lot of time thinking about at 50CAN is how to maximize local autonomy while bringing people together into an organization that will last. There's always a tension between centralization and local autonomy.

Kretschmer: Yeah, I am in the uncomfortable position of defending bureaucracy and defending the idea that activists should spend time on organizational infrastructure that contributes to sustainability. There is this belief that if you spend time on infrastructure building, it will take away energy from activism.

In the National Organization for Women (NOW), the founders largely came from hierarchical industry and government organizations, and that's the kind of organization they created because it is what they knew. But they also gave people at the local level enormous freedom to do whatever they wanted to do. As long as they weren't violating the organization's basic platforms, they could take on any project they wanted.

I found that activists at the local level of NOW ended up being interesting and creative and contentious. Existing inside of a larger bureaucratic structure meant their local group didn't fall apart as soon as original members moved on. They were able to continue having a presence in rural and conservative places because they were paired with this larger national bureaucracy.

Nobody wants to defend bureaucracy, but it really did matter. It mattered for the local activists that they could still do whatever activism they wanted to do at the local level. But they didn't have to start from scratch every single time.

Could you highlight one or two things you think NOW got right and one or two things that they're still working on?

One thing that they got really right was to say, "We are going to aggregate resources at the national level, and we're going to really make a push to have a national presence and to put pressure on elites and politicians at the national level," while also saying to local members, "You can do whatever you want."

That freedom ended up generating a ton of new ideas. Many of the local leaders ended up as national leaders. Over time, that meant that really good, cre-

ative ideas that were generated at the local level could move up the chain, and then the national leaders could help institute those ideas in new places. For example, one local chapter successfully established a domestic violence shelter, and then other local chapters took that model and brought it to their own communities. So that sort of unbridled freedom at the local level was really a boon to the whole organization over time.

The one big thing that they got wrong initially was that it was not clear how local leaders could influence the national organization other than by revolting. There wasn't a very clear, democratic structure set up at first and, as a result, the organization faced a schism, and several groups ended up breaking away in the first 10 years because they didn't have a more elaborate structure.

There's this idea in the field that insurrection is the thing written on the tombstones of most social movements, and advocacy leaders live in fear of that. You bring together people who are passionate, and it's easy for them to turn on each other if the lines of communication aren't open, because everyone feels this so deeply. You're making the case for structure and clarity as a way to stave that off.

Well, factionalism, infighting and conflict are probably inevitable. There's just no way to avoid it because as you said: People are passionate. They come with very strong ideas and very strong attachments to particular ways of doing things. The bigger the organization gets, the more diverse it gets. The new people don't know each other in the same way and bring their own priorities. Conflict boils over into factionalism. It's just going to happen.

Building an infrastructure does help channel some of that fighting. But it's not a terrible thing if splits do happen. One organization cannot meet every need for the whole movement. If you have an overabundance of vitality, passion and resources, maybe it's better to split into two separate organizations and then work together as partners where it makes sense. That was one of the happier things to discover while researching for the book.

I tracked down roughly 25 schisms inside NOW over the years. And the vast majority of those groups thrived and continue to work with NOW after having broken away. Catholics for Choice, for example, was founded by NOW members who thought the broader movement needed a feminist group that was explicitly Catholic. They continue to work with NOW quite happily when an occasion calls for cooperation. Women's Equity Action League (WEAL) split very early when its founders felt the movement needed a group to represent more conservative women. WEAL founders said very explicitly that they couldn't stay a part of NOW, but they envisioned a robust partnership going forward.

So, rather than letting things get poisonous and fighting to the death, sometimes it's better to just say, "We all want the same things. We disagree about how to get there. So, let's split amicably and do it in a way that will allow us to continue to work together." Hoping that you're going to avoid conflict completely is probably futile.

You advance the idea that peaceful and quiet organizations aren't the most innovative, that organizations have to be prepared to argue their way to innovation.

I wish I could take credit for that idea. Carol Mueller wrote about how creativity is generated through conflict in movement organizations. Amin Ghaziani also wrote a great book touching on similar ideas. Fighting about the best way forward helps you interrogate the ideas, and it forces people to defend them and think through, "Okay. My critics are saying that X, Y and Z is going to happen if we do this. How will we handle that? How will we deal with it?"

Advocates benefit from having to fight through ideas and challenging each other about whether the idea on the table is good. Fighting is always painful, but if you can survive it, you have a much clearer idea of what people are passionate about, and then the way forward is clearer.

I always feel nervous about making that argument because in the middle of the fight it feels like a disaster. It feels like this can't work out because all we're doing is fighting. But it is also clear that when nobody is fighting for anything, when they're just sort of showing up at meetings and then going home, that it's probably a good indication that there's not a lot of vitality.

It seems that how things get done, who gets it done, which organization gets it done are secondary to the mission.

A good example is that even after advocates split off from NOW, they still show up at NOW's events. They might show up wearing their new organization's attire, but they make it very clear that they support NOW and are on the same team as NOW. Ultimately, the broader mission of the whole movement is what matters. And they all are still moving in that same direction.

Your book looks back through many years of developments, but you also situate it by talking about Trump's election and what that means for the issues of NOW and its members.

When someone from the opposing ideology is in power, it's generally good for a social movement's mobilization. There are a lot more people wanting to join feminist organizations now because they feel like the stakes are much higher than when Obama or the Democrats were in power. So, it's not that surprising that you see in the months since Trump was elected the largest feminist mobilization, that was also the largest mobilization of any kind, in U.S. history.

The trend is clear, which is as long as Trump is in power, feminist groups are going to have no trouble mobilizing people. Then after the initial wave of mobilizations, we'll probably see the same kind of splitting and pulling apart as people want to respond in different ways.

We've seen new kinds of feminist groups spring up in the Trump era like the National Women's March. How do they compare to NOW and other more traditional feminist organizations?

These new organizations are very different in structure than the ones that emerged in 1960. For example, if you try to join the National Women's March as a member, you can't. You can give them money, but you have no voting rights. You have no ability to elect a representative to serve on the board. You can't have much say in what they do.

In 2018 there was a bombshell article reporting that two (now former) Women's March leaders said anti-Semitic things, and there was a lot of anger from local affiliates who had a stake in the larger reputation of the group but no power to vote those leaders out. They couldn't send a delegate and get their own slate of leaders on the ballot. Their only choices were to accept the reputation of the National Women's March as anti-Semitic, and still be a part of it anyway, or split away.

The organizers clearly have the energy and the loyalty to build a really long-lasting organization, but so far, they haven't built any membership infrastructure. And I think that they're in jeopardy of just sort of fading away because they've given people so few options for participation. Even if they are loyal to the mission, splitting away is preferable to just accepting the organization's problems.

When you think about the next generation of advocacy leaders, what are the two or three things you hope that those new leaders would take away from your book?

I think that the research is fairly clear that younger women are going to be much more progressive in their politics. NOW has always been concerned about younger women. But it's also clear they have not done a good job of actually letting those young women drive the agenda.

Instead, it's still driven by Baby Boomer women who feel a lot of ownership in the organization but aren't really good at making room for younger women. I would like to see those older organizations like NOW really let savvy, young activists take the lead. And I haven't really seen that yet.

There have always been contingents of NOW that cared about women of color. It just wasn't what got the most attention. Going forward, the campaigns that will be the most successful will be the ones that really explicitly put women of color and women of color's interests at the forefront.

I really do hope that this next generation spends the time to build some infrastructure, as well. Long-term advocacy is hard work, and while showing up to a protest is exciting, making the time to build the infrastructure is what will ensure that an organization can outlast the first wave of passion that people have and stay around long enough to make a real difference.

Interview 7 Beth Leech on Why Advocacy Isn’t Just Arm-Twisting

Leech is a Professor of Political Science and Vice Chair of Graduate Studies at Rutgers University, author of *Lobbyists at Work* and co-author of *Lobbying and Policy Change*.

Porter Magee: You have done some of the most in-depth research on the sources of success in the advocacy world. What do most people not understand about how change actually happens?

Leech: There are two things that I think people often forget. One is that it's way easier to stop a change than it is to affect change. And big change takes a long time.

When you hear someone say, “The NRA is always winning,” it is worth pausing to think about what we mean by winning. The most important question in any advocacy effort is: Who owns the status quo? Because those are the people who have all the advantages on their side.

That’s true of the NRA, which is mostly focused on stopping change, not securing change. But that is also true of supporters of the American Disabilities Act, who secured a huge victory way back in 1990 and mostly focus now on making sure it doesn’t get rolled back. And it is true of corporations because they are on the side of protecting a status quo that already benefits them. Does that mean that corporations as a group are stronger advocates for their cause? Well, maybe they are. But seeing them win when they're protecting the status quo doesn't demonstrate that.

The other thing I would say is that you have to be persistent. For the book *Lobbying and Policy Change*, I interviewed a group of civil rights organizations in 2000 who were working on criminal justice reform and they were not getting anywhere, to the point that there was no proposal before Congress, even a proposal that was going to fail. They were so disadvantaged that they didn't even have anyone organizing to fight against them. I asked them whether they thought they had any chance of success and the reply was "God no, this is not happening this year, but we have to start somewhere." People don't realize how long change takes. You note when the final fight comes forward and whether you won or lost. But that fight had been building for decades.

There is something encouraging about knowing that sticking with a cause over decades is sometimes the path to victory.

Especially when the win you're looking for is big. You think about the decades of work that went into

the civil rights movement. Few big changes happen overnight.

When you are in these long-running fights, is it worth exploring different approaches to securing your goal if you keep hitting roadblocks?

For the book *Lobbying and Policy Change*, I interviewed advocates working for banks and advocates working for the credit union industry. In Congress, credit unions have a huge advantage over banks, and banks hate this. But who wants to harm the cute little credit union? Credit unions are nice, they give people low-interest loans and they have low fees. Even Congress has its own credit union. So, if the banks can't win on something in Congress, they switch venues. They go to the Supreme Court and get a favorable ruling on a law. And then the credit unions go back to Congress and get another law passed. And back and forth it goes between these venues.

Another example is the efforts of the union that represented healthcare workers wanting to require safer needles. This was a law that would require everyone, all hospitals, all doctor's offices, to use safe needles so the healthcare worker wouldn't be accidentally pricked by a needle that might give them HIV or hepatitis or another disease. Republicans were against it because they saw it as one more case of over-regulation. So, the union changed venues and took the fight to the states and succeeded in getting a few big states, including California, to adopt this law. As a result, the needle manufacturers decided it would be too complicated to make needles for all these different specifications, so they ended up lobbying Congress alongside the healthcare union on behalf of the original bill.

One theme that came through in your work is this idea that maybe effective lobbying doesn't look like what we might see on cable news or in the movies.

Sometimes I'm at a party and I mention that I study lobbying and people are like, "Oh, that must be so depressing," because they think it's all about corruption. But it really is about information.

The most effective lobbyists are great at providing elected officials with the information they need to act on the lobbyists' 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.

Great lobbyists know a lot about procedure and process. They know powerful people too, but those connections can fade, whereas knowledge about process can be incredibly helpful no matter who is in power.

So, it's not about who is better at shouting behind closed doors and who is the more effective arm-twister?

It is much more about who is better at helping. Who is better at making it easier for a particular member of Congress to advance a bill. That means building allies within Congress, creating a supportive argument and organizing a coalition.

What does the current political polarization mean for advocates?

Well, people may not realize it, but the advocacy community has an important role to play in helping tamp down the increased partisanship we are seeing. For most advocates, it's not to their advantage to have their issue become too partisan. If that happens, then they can only win when Democrats control everything or if Republicans control everything.

So, you can't just go with one party or the other. You have to have some bipartisan support for your issue. I'm currently working on a project that's cross-national. We're looking at lobbying in four countries. And I found in the U.S. data that most of the issues that interest groups work on are not described as extremely partisan. They are either nonpartisan or only a little bit partisan, and they're actively working to secure support from both sides. So, in this world of extreme partisanship, I think it's helpful that you've got this big advocacy community that finds it in its best interest to pursue things that both sides can agree on.

Interview 8 Tondra Loder-Jackson on Teacher Advocacy

Loder-Jackson is a Professor of Educational Foundations in the School of Education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and author of *Schoolhouse Activists: African American Educators and the Long Birmingham Civil Rights Movement*.

Porter Magee: You are one of the leading voices on the role of teachers in the civil rights movement. What was it about that topic that drew you in?

Loder-Jackson: Growing up in Birmingham, you're influenced by the history of the civil rights movement because it is so central to the city's history, and that history is all around you. So that was certainly part of it. But I'm also an educator. I have spent a lot of time with educators. I've watched them advocate on behalf of their students. So, I'm just aware that, on a regular basis, there's a lot that teachers are doing behind the scenes.

And as I read more civil rights history, I kept seeing this curious phrase: "Teachers were not involved in the movement." And I said to myself, "There has to be more to this than meets the eye." Any categorical statement that a whole group is not involved is always going to raise my eyebrows.

Where did the notion that teachers were not advocates in the civil rights movement come from?

There is some truth to the idea that teachers were not involved in some of the most visible direct-action tactics, which is what we've come to think of as the civil rights movement: marching in the streets, sit-ins, going to jail. It is true that a number of teachers would not have wanted to be publicly identified in that way. But if we broaden the definition of civil rights participation to include not only direct action but the support work for that direct action, what I found in my research is that teachers were often very involved.

For example, one of the educators I interviewed said that when he was a student in Selma, he remembered his teachers preparing sandwiches and other meals for civil rights workers. Some of the teachers who I have interviewed mention that when civil rights leaders came to town, they would go pick them up if they came in at the airport. All of those support services make a movement possible but are largely ignored in the traditional histories of the period.

What other ways did teachers support the movement?

In the classroom, teachers would act as if they didn't know their students were leaving when they participated in the 1963 Children's March, when by law they were supposed to make sure students were there and report them as absent. And students were supposed to be suspended or expelled for absenteeism, but there were many teachers who found ways to avoid doing that.

The 1963 Children's March had enormous levels of participation from students, and if you step back and you think about it, that just really couldn't work without support from teachers. Again and again that is what I found in my research for my book *Schoolhouse Activists*.

One male teacher I interviewed told the story of finding a few students left in his classroom and he asked them directly, "Why are you still here? You're supposed to be out there marching for your rights."

But of course, they didn't write any of this down. So, if you're looking at the agendas of teachers' meetings, especially Black teachers' associations meetings, they were not going to put on paper that they were going to be talking about voter registration or supporting a walk out. That's why we have to rely on oral histories.

And that seems particularly true in your work to uncover the role African American teachers played in the South during the first wave of school desegregation.

Yes. The big question that is as relevant today as it was in the 1960s is: How do you really go about integrating a school? We can talk about policy, but it's experienced and carried out at the human level.

And when you interview the teachers involved, you realize how powerful and challenging it was to be a Black teacher in these newly integrated classrooms. One of the examples in my book is of a white boy who was learning one thing about race in his home but then seeing a very kind Black teacher who isn't anything like what he had been taught. And that child is trying to put this all together: "Well, you don't seem to be this bad person that my parents have been talking about." And then the child blurts out these revelations, "Well, my parents are in the Klan and they wear sheets and so forth." And perhaps not even fully understanding what that must sound like to his Black teacher.

And the cost of integration was born disproportionately by Black teachers.

That's right. In my interviews I heard a refrain of regret that the way integration unfolded put all the burden on Black teachers (and Black students and their families). High-performing Black teachers would often find themselves demoted when they were moved into the white schools. Reportedly, the lowest-performing white teachers were sometimes reassigned to the Black schools.

Black teachers lost power as important Black institutions within education were dismantled, including not only successful Black schools but also the Black teachers' associations. After Brown v Board of Education you saw those dissolve, and the Black teachers' associations became part of the National Education Association. A lot of Black teachers felt we hadn't really thought about what the consequences of integration could be.

Your research has helped uncover the ways that teachers were active in the civil rights movement. They were also active in the push for collective bargaining in public education in the 1960s and 1970s. Now we are seeing a resurgence of teacher activism. What advice would you give to a young teacher who's thinking about stepping forward to be an advocate?

It is fascinating to start seeing teachers mobilizing themselves today, and in many instances outside of teacher unions. In some of the states, the teacher unions were not really present or certainly not very powerful in the protests of the past couple of years. So that kind of mobilization is very impressive. While obviously issues like teacher pay are part of it, it is also driven by a larger desire to speak out for their students.

What I tell my students when they say they want to be an advocate for their students is that, number one, you do need to examine yourself—your motives for doing this. It's important to be self-reflective, particularly for teachers who don't look like the students they are serving. So, I tell them to try to work through some of their own issues around race and gender.

The second thing that I say is that they need to take some time to research and learn about other

teachers who've come before them, who've done what they want to do. Try not to be ahistorical and act like you are the beginning of all of this. You are a part of a continuum. You are at one place in history. It gives you some humility to understand what they've done and to learn about their strategies—what worked and what didn't—and then realize what won't fit during your contemporary time.

Third, I tell them you cannot work in isolation. Any teacher who has been successful with any movement was part of a larger group of teachers working together.

Interview 9 Christopher Parker on Patriotism in a Reactionary Time

Parker is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Washington, co-author of *Change They Can't Believe In: The Tea Party and Reactionary Politics in America* and author of *Fighting for Democracy: Black Veterans and the Struggle Against White Supremacy in the Postwar South*.

Porter Magee: One of the hallmarks of your work is taking a counterintuitive idea and systematically working through the data to understand what's happening.

Parker: The idea is to interrogate the conventional wisdom from different perspectives, and that's why I'm doing this work. I enjoy the degree of difficulty of trying to understand things that aren't one dimensional.

In my book *Change They Can't Believe In*, the conventional wisdom was that the Tea Party could be understood as either a small government movement or driven solely by racism. What I found was something much more complicated.

What did you learn about the Tea Party movement?

If you look at it from a variety of perspectives—historical, survey data, content analysis, interviews—what you see is a modern version of a long American tradition that dates back to groups like the John Birch Society and the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s. It is a reactionary movement that emerged in response to all the racial, gender and lifestyle fissures in American life, and those kinds of movements can remake American politics.

The Seattle Times called you the professor who predicted Trump because your analysis led you to conclude in early 2015—when almost everyone was ignoring him—that Trump had a clear path to victory if he activated this reactionary base.

The key thing to understand is that the people who make up the Tea Party aren't fearful. The response to fear is to withdraw from the threat, which makes one less politically engaged. I found that the central emotion among Tea Party members was anger. They felt like they had been violated, and the response to that violation was a strong desire to take action.

If you feel like people from traditionally marginalized groups are stealing your country, you aren't going to sit on the political sidelines. So, what I concluded was that this movement was bigger and more powerful than one grounded simply in racism or philosophical conservatism. It's about race, but it's also about gender. It's about nativity. It's about same-sex rights. It's about all these things that are just different

from "mainstream" America. It's a complex mix of reactions to the way the world is changing, and that is what led me to believe that Trump was going to be successful.

Why did Trump see the potential in tapping into this anger when so many other Republican candidates didn't?

I think the other Republican candidates saw it and understood it. They just didn't want to tap into it. Trump was willing to do something that mainstream Republican candidates weren't willing to do.

Why did this reactionary movement emerge when it did?

The short version is: Bush messed up so bad it got a Black man elected and then this Black man got us Trump. If we don't have President Obama, we don't get President Trump.

Why would Obama being president have such a big impact if his policies weren't much different than Bill Clinton's?

Because for a reactionary movement, the spark is not any one policy or position, it's the symbolism of your world changing. Having a Black man in the White House caused a lot of people to lose their minds, not just because he was Black but because of the larger societal changes that his success represented.

Now, knowing that, would one be willing to trade not having Obama if it means we don't get Trump?

I wouldn't. In fact, I think you can argue that Trump getting elected, at least this one time, was a good thing because it revealed all these fissures in American society. You can't deny them anymore, and maybe that makes it easier over time to address them.

When Obama was elected, there was a lot of talk that we had crossed some threshold of progress and many people were dumbfounded by the Trumpian backlash. One of the more common refrains you hear from progressive white people is: "This isn't the country I know."

And my response is: "You have not been paying attention, my friend, because this has always been that country."

I have seen a lot of stories about how white progressives are living in a constant state of anxiety and depression because Trump is president. And I think that one good thing about Trump getting elected is that now these white progressives have a small sense of what it's like to be a person of color in America.

What advice would you give to progressive advocates who are struggling to figure out how to navigate in this new environment?

Some of the work I'm doing right now has led me to believe that there are more Republicans who are willing to partner with the left and compromise to get things done than many on the left may think. There are a lot of Republican patriots who will put country over party when given the chance.

And the left needs to take patriotism more seriously. Not the kind of patriotism that's "my country, right or wrong." When people on the left hear patriotism, they think about Joe McCarthy. And I think it's a shame because if people really, truly understood the roots of patriotism, more people would embrace it in their politics.

Patriotism is a commitment first of all to the common good, but even beyond that, a commitment to the values on which the country was founded. And if you really take it to its logical conclusion, these values are really progressive values. Patriotism is not about "my country, right or wrong." Patriotism is more like, "What can I do for my country and the values on which it stands?"

And offering a way to sacrifice for the common good might provide a path to bring people together?

That is exactly the case. If you want to beat the reactionaries and build a broad coalition for change, it can't be just about materiality. You can't do it just with a healthcare plan. You need to have a sense of common American identity and a shared feeling of patriotism to hold it together.

Interview 10 Marcos Pérez on Creating Movements People Want to Join

Pérez is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Washington and Lee University and author of “Life Histories and Political Commitment in a Poor People's Movement.”

Porter Magee: How has the study of social movements changed over the years? Are we asking different questions now?

Pérez: The field of social movement studies has exploded in the past 50 years. Before the 1960s, the best we had were general theories that, while useful, did not look deeply into the lives of social movement participants. Scholars since then changed that with their research, putting a particular emphasis on the political context of social movements and the strategic choices of organizations.

Some of the biggest questions we are tackling now are about participation. Why do people get involved in politics? Why do people get involved in social movements? It’s an exciting time in the field because we are challenging a lot of assumptions people hold about how politics and advocacy work.

What are some of the assumptions that might not be supported by this new evidence?

For instance, we have probably overstated the connection between ideology and mobilization. We tend to assume that people join movements because they have a deep connection to the ideas that movement supports. But my research suggests that people can join social movements they don’t agree with, which seems very counterintuitive.

We know that talk is cheap and what people say they believe doesn’t always match their behavior. So why should we expect a clear-cut connection between ideology and political behavior? The answer is: We shouldn’t. Does this mean that people are stupid? No. Does this mean that people have been deceived or fooled into joining a movement? No, those are very poor explanations for these empirical phenomena.

People have a complex mix of motivations, and this complexity is expressed through both their stated beliefs and their actions. We need to look at what they actually do, not just what they say, to really understand them.

It seems like the context in which a movement is operating is essential to understand this complexity.

That’s right. I live in the United States but I’m originally from Argentina, where I do most of my field

work on social movements. And these are very different places.

Politics in the United States is very structured. There are more than 200 years of institutional traditions that shape how to get stuff done in this country. Argentina has been a democracy for only 40 years and has a completely different political history. When you are an advocate in a social movement in Argentina and you want to get attention, you have different options. For instance, a common tactic is to block a road. You block a road, you stay there, and you wait until the cops come. They arrive and may tell you that they're going to beat the shit out of you, but you know they probably won't. So you stand your ground and then the negotiation begins. That's the way advocacy happens in Argentina. In most parts of the United States, if you block a road, you're going to be in jail in five minutes and you don't get much attention for your issue. It's a completely different context.

If we really want to understand social movements, we need to understand the environment in which they take place and all the institutions and rules of the specific political culture that affects the behavior and the tactics of the people involved. A tactic that works in Argentina might not work in Brazil. Whatever will get attention in Jackson, Mississippi will be very different than the attention that you would get in Portland, Maine. Context matters.

Why is mass participation so important?

Most of the problems we have as a society could be more easily solved if more people got involved. If more people were involved, we would have a political system that would be more attuned to the concerns of people. We would have more equality in political representation. Groups that are today more or less excluded would actually have more of a voice in policymaking. So figuring out how to get more people involved is crucial to these different ways of improving our society.

How do we get people more involved in advocacy and politics?

It starts with asking broader questions. So, for instance, why do people enjoy political participation? From a strictly rational perspective, political participation should not be enjoyable. Political participation and social movement participation are super costly because they take a lot of time and effort. There is often a big personal sacrifice and success is rarely guaranteed. Social movements fail. Political campaigns fail. And, yet, some people can't get enough of them.

For a long time, the answer was that people were driven by ideology. My own research and that of others points to another possible answer: It can also be about enjoying yourself and expressing yourself. If you really want people to join your campaign or your social movement, you need to focus on making the experience meaningful for participants. The fact that advocating for something can be gratifying, or even fun, does not mean that the cause is frivolous.

So with the future of democracy on the line, it sounds like we can’t afford to take our eye off the ball of how to encourage people to become participants, and how to help them stay participants, in politics and advocacy.

We have known for a long time that democracies fail when people cease to believe in them and to participate in them. Yes, it's more complicated than that. Yes, there are some bad actors here and there, but ultimately democracies are strong when most people are active participants in them.

So if democracy rests on participation, one of the most important things we can do is to try to make it more likely that people will want to get involved. The research says one of the ways to do so is to make sure they actually enjoy the experience. That is what the best advocacy leaders do. It not just about enjoyment, but that’s a really important factor.

Interview 11 Sarah Reckhow on The Education Funder's Dilemma

Reckhow is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Michigan State University, author of *Follow the Money: How Foundation Dollars Change Public School Politics* and co-author of *Outside Money in School Board Elections*.

Porter Magee: What led you to study the foundation world and, particularly, its intersection with education reform?

Reckhow: I went to grad school right after my experience as a Teach for America corps member in Baltimore. I wasn't sure how much I was going to end up focusing on education because I was in a political science program, but eventually I found myself working on a study of the small schools initiative in Oakland.

This was in 2005 and, in the beginning, I didn't pay much attention to the role of foundations. But as I did more interviews for that project with community organization leaders, school principals and people who worked in the central office, foundations just kept coming up over and over again. It wasn't really the point of our study but the big role that people felt foundations were playing in Oakland seemed important to me, particularly the way it worked in tension with the more grassroots and partnership-based model of change Oakland had started out with.

That proved to be a pivotal moment in time; the start of a decade of big reform efforts backed by national foundations seeking to transform the way American education works.

When you look at just how much money was being given away by national foundations—like Gates, Walton, Broad, Bloomberg, Carnegie and Ford—that alone made this trend a huge deal. That big money came together at the same time more locally focused advocacy efforts started to network together through umbrella organizations like the PIE Network. And that momentum carried into the start of the Obama administration, when the people involved in these national foundations and local advocacy efforts found themselves pushing forward reforms that were well-aligned with the new administration in Washington.

It looked like everything was lined up for big, lasting changes. But you have argued that the national funders had some blind spots.

The biggest blind spot has to do with how information flows up to these national foundation staff. There will always be a huge distance to travel between what is actually happening on the ground and the rooms where national funding decisions are made.

One way this distance plays out is in the challenges foundation staff have in getting good information about what is actually happening in these local areas. Since they aren't actually at the table in a lot of these places when the local conversations are taking place, they end up getting very filtered information about how well their grants are working. They are highly dependent on third parties to keep them in the loop.

Another way this distance plays out is in their willingness to walk away from the changes they set in motion and even walk away from entire cities and states when it isn't going the way they planned. For example, you saw Gates walk away from the small schools strategy and all the local partners involved in that effort. When you don't live in these communities, it is not like you will bump into the local people you defunded while you are walking to the grocery store. You are insulated from consequences of these decisions.

Is it a good thing or a bad thing that big funders have been willing to change strategies when they think things aren't working?

That's an interesting question. In a lot of cities, large foundations were able to get an array of organizations oriented toward the foundations' agendas. And they leveraged huge amounts of public money, including historic levels of federal funding, to match their private donations. When they decide to simply walk away from that, it deserves public scrutiny.

One theme that comes through in your writing is that these problems are compounded if a national foundation is too much in the lead or too large a share of any local initiative.

Yes, and the extreme version of that is when national foundations actually create their own local advocacy groups to advance their agenda. That is something Gates did around their teacher quality agenda in a few states. For example, in 2010 the Gates Foundation started an advocacy group Communities for Excellent Teaching (C4TE) to focus on the foundation's four "deep dive" districts for teacher quality: Memphis, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh and Hillsborough County, FL. By 2012, the organization had folded.

Obviously, there are challenges if you're going to work with existing local organizations. They have their own priorities. But they also have local resources and local connections, and they are more likely to have staying power.

How did this play out in the world of local politics?

We found the same challenges of distance, information and relationships when we looked at the role of national money in local school board races. Often, the national funders don't actually know the people who are running in these races and aren't leveraging any long-term and trusting local relationships.

It was funny talking to some of the reform-minded local candidates the national funders supported because a lot of them were genuinely awestruck that they got money from some famous, wealthy person they had never met. For example, one candidate commented: "I got a contribution from Mr. Hoffman [cofounder of LinkedIn] two or three days before the election...I never understood how that came about but appreciated the contribution."

Oftentimes, whether they win or lose, these local candidates never hear from these national supporters again. It's such a sharp contrast to what they are used to with their local supporters, who are people they will get emails and phone calls from, who they will see at events or house parties, who will be there for them time and time again.

What changes have you seen in how these national funders are approaching school reform and what advice would you give them on how they might improve their approach?

National funders continue to play an important role in school reform, but it is a lot more behind the scenes than before, with more local groups out in front.

I think that some national funders are beginning to recognize that there needs to be more of a partnership with these local groups if they are going to overcome the blind spots that have hurt their own giving. That will require a greater level of humility from national funders about their own ability to influence local changes from a centralized national office. They will need to step away from a leading role and get used to playing a supporting role. They will need to accept that they have to work with and through the local leaders who are in the community meetings, who do have the local relationships and who are committed to sticking with these changes over the long run.

Interview 12 Theda Skocpol on Local Advocacy in the Age of Trump

Skocpol is the Victor S. Thomas Professor of Government and Sociology at Harvard University, author of *Diminished Democracy* and co-author of *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*.

Porter Magee: In Diminished Democracy you explore the ways in which advocacy organizations have changed. Can you talk about that?

Skocpol: I think that the biggest change in recent decades has been the rise of professionally run advocacy groups, which have a bigger role in policy advocacy than citizen groups run mostly by volunteers. That's pretty important in the education world because schools are local. There was a time when it would have been the PTA that would have been doing most of the local advocacy work. But how much of those functions have been taken over by more professional groups? I suspect quite a bit.

Are we seeing a return to local, citizen-driven advocacy?

These citizen groups in the United States were never exclusively local. Instead, they were organized across levels: federal, state, and local. We're seeing some of that again. There has been—on both the right and the left—a revival of these local actions that speak to larger issues at the same time. Right now, my research is on the kind of groups that have emerged under the Trump presidency, and they're very active locally. They often have regional or state networks as well, and sometimes they're part of national frameworks like Indivisible, the progressive advocacy network. Those local groups talk about education issues at the local level; they're not focusing on what's happening in Washington, D.C.

How should we understand these developments? Are these purely partisan movements or are there issues at the core of their work independent of the political parties?

Well, I don't think there's anything wrong with partisanship per se. But I do think that when people have different understandings of reality, which has to do with the way organizations and their active members fit into the media ecosphere, then I think you've got some problems. One of the big findings in our work on the anti-Trump resistance is that it's not concentrated just in blue areas. We thought it might be, but it isn't. Both the Tea Party and the Resistance are all over geographically.

You've got anti-Trump groups meeting in very, very conservative areas. What they do in those places varies depending on whether it is in a college town or if they're in a big metropolis. But same was true for the Tea Party. When people feel beleaguered and threatened, they sometimes decide it's time to act and get together.

I wonder if you could talk about the structure of these efforts and the way they are locally driven?

I think the reason that we still have a certain amount of local citizen action is because the United States is still a federated political system. The most effective groups in American public life have always been federated, which means they have some ability, either through one organization or through networks, to operate across levels. That's especially true for groups that work on education. You really have to be able to deal with local and state issues.

By the way, what both the Tea Party groups and the Resistance groups do is teach people about all the complexities of our political system. When you joined the Tea Party groups, you learned about gerrymandering, you learned which district is where and who decides what. And they encouraged their members to run for office. Now we're seeing exactly the same thing, somewhat more remarkably, among liberals. Because liberals have been used to looking only to Washington for solutions up until now.

Could you say more about the way liberals got too focused on Washington, D.C.?

We're seeing a movement to correct some of that. It's awfully late. The horse has left the barn and they have suffered a really devastating loss of power in dozens of states. So it's going to be hard to reverse it, but they are now finally stepping forward and running for office at all levels.

I am concerned that the big fight over the Democratic nomination took away some of the focus on state and local races that were so strong among Democrats between 2016 and 2018. Liberals almost had no choice but to focus on states—there just wasn't anything else to do—and so everybody did that. But certainly there are a lot of forces pushing the focus back on the presidency.

It was amazing to see all these candidates out there telling people what they would do if they were elected president, and not a single one of them was going to be able to do any of it if they didn't win Congress or state legislatures. And I think we have a media system that actually exacerbates that mindset, on both the left and the right. The media gives people the impression that a president can actually do whatever he or she wants. Well, they can't.

Anything you want to make sure aspiring local advocates know?

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.

About AdvocacyLabs

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