

FUNDING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

*How mass
protest makes
an impact*



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Funding Social Movements:

How Mass Protest Makes an Impact

*A project from the **Ayni Institute**
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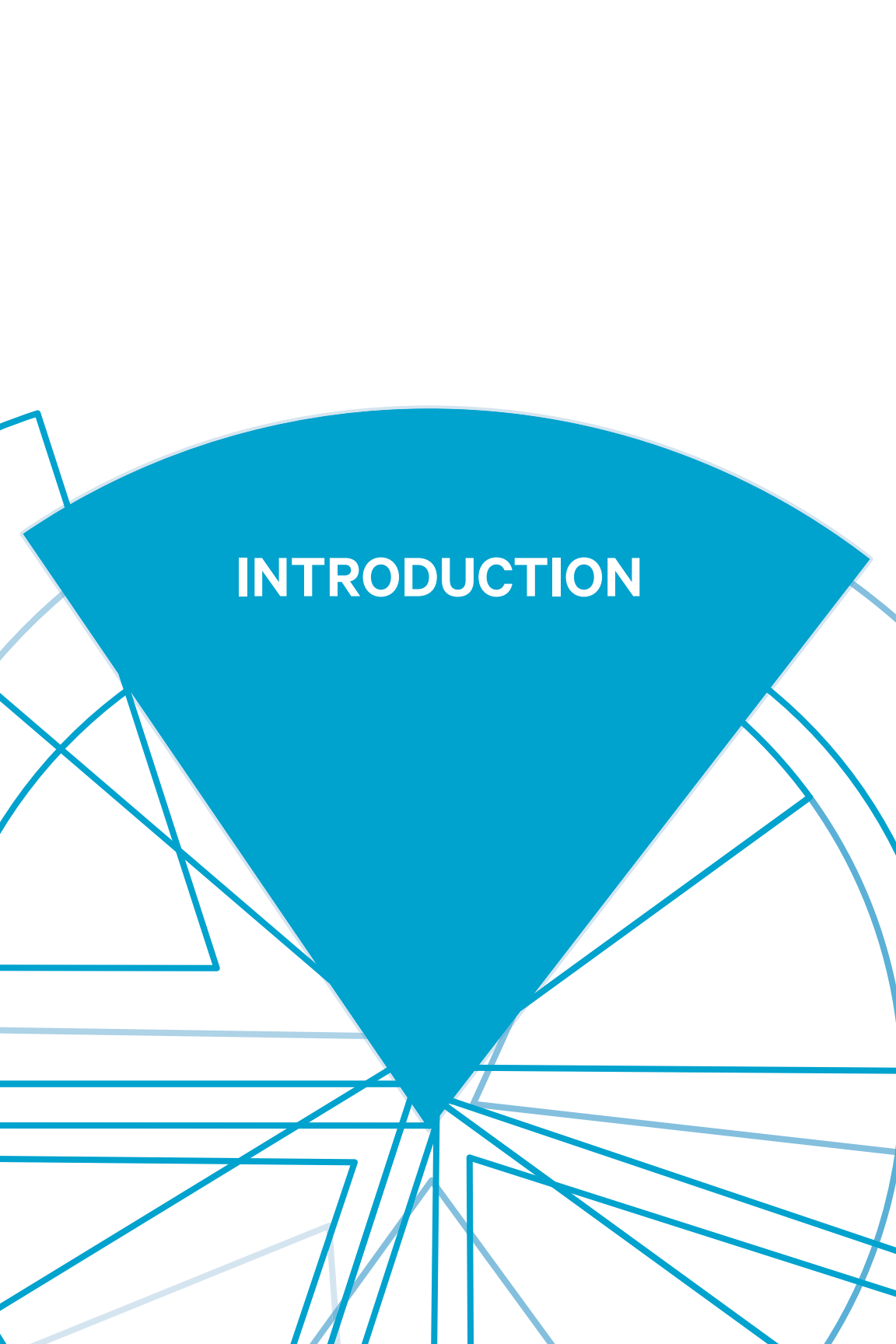
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The image features a large, solid blue fan-shaped sector pointing downwards, centered on the page. The word "INTRODUCTION" is written in white, bold, uppercase letters within this blue sector. The background is white and filled with a network of thin, light blue lines. These lines radiate from the bottom point of the blue sector, extending outwards and upwards, some forming partial circles and others straight lines, creating a complex geometric pattern.

INTRODUCTION

Prologue

A defining time for movements

Where were you at the end of Election Day 2016, when you first realized that Donald Trump — as many had feared but few believed possible — would, in fact, be president of the United States? For many of us, the moment we acknowledged that truth for the first time is seared into our memory. Trump's election as president was a devastating blow to our country, portending serious harm to so many of our communities. But it also ushered in a new era of defiance. Almost immediately, mass mobilizations began appearing to proclaim their resistance, and they have punctuated the political landscape ever since.

Thanks in large part to the millions who flooded streets around the country after the new president was sworn in, Trump failed to gain the post-inauguration approval ratings bump that every other modern president has enjoyed. The January 21, 2017 Women's March made its mark as the largest single day of protests this country has seen, and it set the tone for the year to follow, during which movements new and old surged in response to attacks from the administration. When Trump attempted to introduce a discriminatory travel ban on six predominantly Muslim nations, mass protests at more than a dozen airports in major cities rallied thousands against the policy, even though the measure had been framed in the traditionally unassailable language of national security. Just after the administration finished its first year in office, teen survivors from a tragic school shooting in Florida became the unlikely spark that caused millions of young people to rise up and demand safer gun laws. In terms of both the numbers of participants and the frequency of protests, the country under Trump had entered into one of the most intense periods of social movement activity in many decades.

The rise in popularity of social movements is an indication of an important shift in American politics. The millions of people who joined in the collective outcry were responding to the harsh realization that — for those who cared about equal rights, climate change, access to health care, the protection of immigrants, and more — there was no longer a viable, inside track to securing the policies we need. With Trump in office, a Republican-controlled Congress, and a conservatively-stacked judiciary, the traditional routes to spurring change — routes that depend on access and influence inside government — had become markedly unfriendly to those seeking progressive advances. In this new context, the American people did what many people throughout history have done when locked out of power. They rose up to insist that their voices would not be ignored.

In a unique time, a familiar challenge

Facing a stark loss of power in the White House and on Capitol Hill, outraged Americans grasped the necessity of prompting change from outside, rather than relying on action taken within the halls of power. Likewise, many progressive organizations, philanthropists, and other changemakers that previously based their strategies on an 'inside game' approach started looking for methods that could match the new circumstances. They recognized that previously reliable pathways to securing legislation, policy, or legal outcomes had been blocked, and that traditional lobbying and advocacy could do little in this new context. And

so — like many communities that have been locked out of power in the past — they turned to building pressure from the outside.^[1]

This document was written in the first year of the Trump presidency, as this tide of resistance rose. During a time in which mobilization and protest was so pronounced, it seemed fitting for us to be immersing ourselves in the literature and data about how social movements can sometimes alter a nation's trajectory. We did so knowing that, although this moment in history is in some important ways unprecedented, the necessity of pursuing an outside strategy is not novel.

In many different time periods and across many different countries, entire populations have been excluded from power when colonialists or dictators have taken charge. In the 20th century, citizens of dozens of nations facing such circumstances looked to strategies of nonviolent protest and mass noncooperation to compel transformative change. In our own domestic history, many communities have used popular pressure to claim rights that they had been unjustly denied. Indeed, many of the most pivotal national reforms in our history — women's suffrage, the end of Jim Crow laws, the implementation of environmental regulations, the establishment of the eight-hour workday, the creation of social security, and the winning of marriage equality — were secured thanks to widespread cultural and political shifts instigated by social movement organizing.

Seeding the next great movement upsurge

For all their differences, the diverse social movements that have formed here and abroad have faced many similar challenges and have had many similar experiences on their road to success. In recent decades, social scientists, political analysts, and practitioners have worked to understand some of the common patterns. At the Ayni Institute, we have dedicated ourselves to studying the science behind social movement upheavals and to discerning lessons relevant for leaders ushering new movements into action. This has led us to exciting insights into how public participation can be harnessed to create new political possibilities, and how they can open a path for the type of changes needed to address some of our most pressing social and economic problems. Inevitably, however, the question arises: How can movements best be resourced to facilitate this progress?

Our research has uncovered a pattern: Often, there are only a select few funders who have seeded social movements before the movements have reached their zenith. These funders identified opportunities for mobilization early and backed leaders at risky moments. Because of their prescient judgement, they had a disproportionate impact on the development of key movements, and saw their support yield historic change.

Stanley Levinson was one of these early adopters. Levinson, a Jewish businessman and lawyer, was the unheralded fundraiser who sowed some of the early seeds of mobilization in

[1] Some analysts note that social movement activity had previously escalated during the Obama administration, and that the anti-Trump response represents a peak in already burgeoning social movements. Even so, one reason social movements flourished in the Obama era was that Congress was unwilling to pass much-needed social and economic reforms. With Congress stymied, activists felt that action on such issues as climate change, police violence, and income inequality could not wait. And since these were not being adequately addressed by inside-game strategies, popular pressure was needed for any substantial reform to take shape.

the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, supporting the work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. before that name was known worldwide. More than any other figure, Levinson used his resources and access to bolster the fundraising strategy of King's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). In an interview about the relationship between the two men, a rabbi remarked how Levinson could easily have taken a different path: "He could have done anything he wanted, backed any cause he chose to back." And yet, his belief in the power of movements to address injustice led Levinson to make an unbending commitment: "He swam in conviction when it came to King. He saw a problem and wanted to fix it."^[2] Levinson saw the early the potential of the Civil Rights movement, and he put his full force behind it at a time when this was hardly an uncontroversial stance.

When a movement reaches the height of its visibility, floodgates of resources are opened. But support that comes early, when a movement's potential is still latent, can have far greater significance. At any given time, there is opportunity for the next great movements to be recognized and resourced. People like Levison, who both recognize early opportunities and act on them, are among the unseen heroes of history.

Cultivating an ecology of change

There are many factors that together led to the success of a movement like the 1960s struggle for civil rights. One of the most unfortunate yet persistent myths in our society is that any great movement is the result of the visionary talents of a single, charismatic leader. Following this view, funders might be tempted to go looking for the next Dr. King, when really there needs to be attention given to cultivating an environment that allows many talented leaders to emerge. The great movements of the past have grown out of complex ecologies of change, held together by relationships, resources, and networks of support. The more that funders strategically engage with an entire ecology, paying attention to how groups with different organizational models and theories of change interact, the greater the likelihood that their efforts will have impact.

Our vision for this guide is that it begins to provide funders with the perspectives and tools necessary to cultivate successful social movement ecologies in the United States. Rather than remaining on the defensive and leaving it to chance whether a powerful mobilization will ignite, funders can intentionally support efforts to engineer proactive fights. Our years of research give us confidence that social movements can mobilize with the force and at the scale necessary to meet the most pressing challenges of our time — and that they can therefore serve as a catalyst for the change that millions of Americans are seeking. Our hope is that, inspired by this prospect, a new class of visionary funders will provide the surge of resources that can propel this new wave of movements in our country.

[2] Ben Kamin, "Stanley Levison: Quiet Underwriter of the Civil Rights Movement," *UTNE*, September 2014. <https://www.utne.com/politics/stanley-levison-ze0z1409zcvil>.

Summary of Key Findings

At countless defining historical moments, mass protest mobilizations have played a crucial role in laying the groundwork for legal and legislative change. Despite this, protest movements are dramatically underfunded. Foundations and large donors are far more likely to focus on the final stages of social transformation — backing the advocates or lawyers who formalize new laws and policy — rather than the movements that make these changes possible to begin with. This approach leaves a huge gap in the social change ecosystem, and it often allows for only piecemeal reforms. To promote more transformational change, funders must recognize how mass mobilizations create the conditions for substantive reforms, and they must work to bolster and sustain this part of the social movement ecology that remains undernourished.

The first purpose of this guide is to equip philanthropists with thorough evidence of the impact of mass protest and to demonstrate how mobilization tactics can align with wider strategies for prompting change. A common misconception holds that mass protest movements owe their success to luck or the natural tides of history. In contrast, we argue that successful protest movements can be engineered, and thus strategically funded. We make the case that not only is mass protest an effective strategy for spurring large-scale social change, but also that its outcomes align with the priorities of many philanthropic institutions, grantmakers, and donors.

The second purpose is to give philanthropists the necessary tools for tracking social movement impacts. Funders typically measure the impact that their grantees make with metrics such as lives saved or policies passed. We argue that conventional measures do not adequately gauge the progress and success of mass protest movements, and that a different set of metrics is needed to allow funders to do so. We encourage funders to value the way in which mass protest efforts can dramatically increase public participation rates, shift public opinion, and change the parameters of what might be considered politically feasible.

We believe that, supported by the right framework, funders can provide mass protest movements with key infusions of support. We outline how funders can inject critical resources into mass mobilizations at their height — in order to enhance the reach and influence of a protest wave — as well as how funders can help movements during slower periods to achieve recurring cycles of success. Additionally, mass protest movements have ongoing infrastructural needs that funders can help meet over the long-term. Finally, there is a need within the philanthropic community itself to build capacity for supporting mass protest efforts. To sustain this work over the long haul, funders need access to better resources, training, and networks that deepen their ability to back robust strategies for change.

Who We Are

This funding guide is authored by the [Ayni Institute](#), a social movement incubator and training institute. Ayni supports an ecology of thinkers and practitioners within the fields of popular movements, alternatives, and historical memory.

Chief among our areas of focus is the study of the dynamics of social movements, contemporary and historical. Through our research and trainings, we teach people how to incorporate the best mass movement techniques and strategies into their ongoing work for social justice. Our leaders are organizers, researchers, and trainers who collectively possess decades of experience in many different social movements.

This body of work led us to establish the Momentum training program, now housed within the [Momentum Community](#). Momentum remains one of our closest partners and is one of the communities of practice we most actively cultivate. Momentum has trained hundreds of grassroots leaders in dozens of organizations throughout the United States and internationally in the art of decentralized movement-building. Groups that have participated in Momentum trainings include: the Black Lives Matter Network, 350.org, MoveOn, Greenpeace USA, the Working Families Party, UNITE HERE, People's Action, Ohio Student Association, Indivisible, the Sierra Student Coalition, Black Youth Project 100, IfNotNow, Sunrise Movement, and Cosecha, among many others.

Much of the theory and research that informed this writing is explored in [*This Is an Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt Is Shaping the 21st Century*](#), authored by Momentum co-founder Paul Engler and his brother Mark Engler. Released in 2016 by Nation Books, *This Is an Uprising* surveys the field of civil resistance and draws lessons from prominent social movements of the past century.

Among Ayni Institute's other endeavors:

- We have trained more than 6,000 people in movement building, political education, and organizational development. In addition to the Momentum training, Ayni has developed trainings including the Long View (covering 10,000 years of history focusing on indigenous wisdom), SWARM (the first major U.S. training about decentralized organization), and Social Movement Ecology (working towards greater movement collaboration).
- Ayni has provided long-term coaching to organizations such as Neighbors United for a Better East Boston, the PICO National Network, and Relational Uprising, as well as leaders in France, Hungary, Mexico, Spain, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sweden, and the UK.
- Most recently, Ayni created the Memory Fund to support the work of artists, filmmakers, writers, and trainers who are working to protect a long view of history, particularly in indigenous communities. Through this program we have released our third film, *Voices That Heal*, which documents the language and legacy of four Amazonian communities.

This project was made possible by The Open Philanthropy Project. The criminal justice portfolio at [The Open Philanthropy](#) seeks to reduce incarceration to the maximum extent possible, consistent with public safety. Given the pervasiveness of this issue in America today, Open Philanthropy is especially interested in approaches that can scale. Mass social movements are powerful forces for change, yet are poorly understood. Under the direction of Chloe Cockburn, Open Philanthropy funded this report in order to better understand how movements work and what impact they may have on pervasive social issues such as the use of incarceration in America today, and furthermore to better understand how to properly fund them. Though Open Philanthropy did not author this report or expressly endorse all of its findings, it encouraged that the authors share this research in the hopes that other funders may similarly benefit from a better understanding of the role of mass mobilization and mass protest in the ecosystem of social change.

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Methodology

Over the past decade, we have conducted hundreds of interviews with social movement practitioners, surveyed the organizing literature in order to create our training programs, and developed detailed case studies (published in more than two dozen articles, in the book *This Is An Uprising*, and in our *Resistance Guide*). Through this research, we have studied and synthesized lessons from social movement theory, civil resistance, and the histories of dozens of domestic and international movements from across the 20th and 21st centuries. In the process, we have established a significant repository of data on mass protest movements and their dynamics.

Our latest research focused on contemporary examples such as Occupy Wall Street, #BlackLivesMatter, the marriage equality movement, and the contemporary immigrant rights

movement to determine how mass mobilization can shift public opinion and alter the confines of what responses are seen as politically viable. This document represents merely a summary of our original data. Our full database of research can be found online.^[3]

We hope that this resource will not only help funders and organizational leaders understand the contribution that mass movements make, but will also serve as a jumping-off point for additional research into how mass protest mobilizations can spur reform in the United States.

Initial reading on foundations and movements

Our first step in preparing this material was to conduct a literature review of influential work related to how institutional funders can best support social movements.^[4] These reports provided context on the existing dialogue about how philanthropists can engage with social movements. After finishing this review, we concluded that these reports can be helpful in building a foundational understanding of social movements, their internal capacities, and how to resource them. However, we believe that the existing materials lacked three important components, which our report aims to provide. These missing components are:

1. A clearer distinction of the varying types of strategies within social movements — and specifically a framework that delineates the unique role of mass mobilization and protest;
2. A lack of explicit reflection on or elucidation of basic theories for how mass mobilizations progress and succeed; and
3. Metrics to track this development.

Collecting data on active and passive support

As our preparations continued, we surveyed academic and journalistic articles, books, and other resources that examine methods for measuring social movement impact on public consciousness and on the political process. Second, for each of our contemporary movement examples — #BlackLivesMatter, Occupy Wall Street, the campaign for marriage equality, and the Dreamers and wider immigrant rights movement — we collected both quantitative and qualitative data on how these movements grew and had impact over time.

Whenever possible, we sorted this data to distinguish between ‘active support’ and ‘passive support’ (categories upon which we elaborate in [Part 2](#) and [Part 3](#)) The most common active support metrics we tracked included protest events, organizational growth, creation of new

[3] *Movement Metrics Research*, Ayni Institute, 2018.

<https://legacy.gitbook.com/book/movementmetricsresearch/movement-metrics-research>.

[4] The primary materials we reviewed included:

- Manuel Pastor and Rhonda Ortiz, *Making Change: How Social Movements Work - and How to Support Them*, (University of Southern California, 2009).
- *Moments into Movements*, Solidaire Annual Report, 2014.
- *Movements Rising*, Solidaire Annual Report, 2015.
- Barbara Masters and Torie Osborn, *Social Movements and Philanthropy: How Foundations Can Support Movement Building*, (The Foundation Review, 2010).
- Manuel Pastor, Jennifer Ito, Rachel Rosner, *Transactions, Transformations, Translations: Metrics That Matter for Building, Scaling, and Funding Social Movements*, (University of Southern California, October 2011).

organizations, and voting patterns. For passive support, common metrics included public polling, electoral results, news coverage, social media coverage, and narrative changes. Through this process we compiled a resource list of some of the most useful sources for tracking polling data, news media coverage, and social media impact — and we prepared suggestions on best practices for using these resources.^[5]

Our research focused heavily on amassing evidence of changes in passive support for social movements, because much of the data on active support (such as internal organizational growth) is not publicly available, even though this information is commonly shared among organizations and their funders. When we did find data relevant to active support — for example, total participation in immigration marches in Los Angeles in 2006, as catalogued by academic researchers — we included it.

Expert interviews

Alongside this research, we interviewed experts and used their perspectives as springboards for further research. Interviewees included researchers, organizers, and funding experts such as the Alliance for Safety and Justice, Erica Chenoweth, Ryan Clayton, James Hayes, the Peace Tech Lab, Andres Ramirez, and Maria Stephen, among others. We also collected and referenced interviews completed during research for *This Is An Uprising* and during curriculum development for Ayni's Social Movement Ecology Training. Interviewees consulted in those processes included Andrew Cornell, George Lakey, Ivan Marovic, Frances Fox Piven, Jonathan Matthew Smucker, Rebecca Tarlau, and Stephen Zunes.

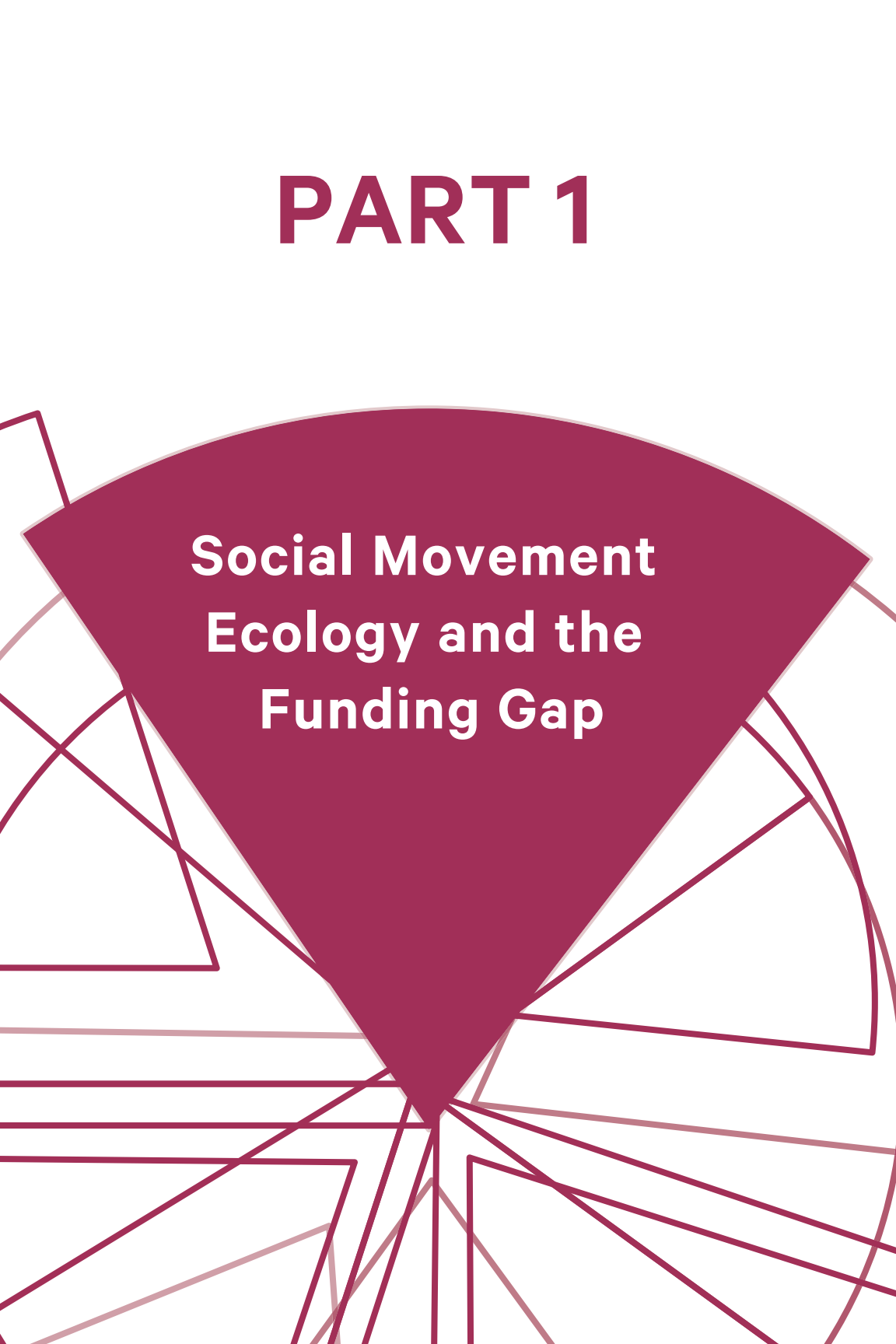
The role of our research

The experts in the field that we interviewed consistently reported to us that, although there are good social-scientific efforts underway to evaluate individual movements, there exists an unmet need to create standards of measurement that would allow observers to assess progress across movements, to analyze comparative rates of participation, and to create uniform standards for tracking movement impacts — ones distinct from the final legal and policy gains these movements might help bring into existence. As one of the first research efforts of its kind in the U.S., we hope that this resource will encourage future efforts to more carefully document comparative movement progress and track the relationships between mass participation and the advancement of social and political objectives.

[5] *Movement Metrics Research*, Ayni Institute, 2018.

<https://legacy.gitbook.com/book/movementmetricsresearch/movement-metrics-research>.

PART 1



Social Movement Ecology and the Funding Gap

Key Points

- **Successful social movements throughout history have included groups with different approaches to change, working in synergy with one another.**
- **The more that groups are able to articulate their operative theory of change, locate themselves within a particular piece of the movement ecology, and figure out how to relate strategically to others, the more likely it is that a movement can advance transformative change.**
- **While insider strategies such as political advocacy and litigation are regularly recognized and funded, mass protest groups that are designed to shift public attitudes are consistently under-resourced.**
- **Although mass protest efforts have led to numerous successes, some common misconceptions and barriers have led funders to undervalue mass movement groups.**
- **Being able to articulate how mass protest aligns with a philanthropic institution's mission and priorities is essential to opening up more resources for these mobilizations.**

Social Movement Ecology

As our political, economic, and social realms have grown increasingly complex, planning for how any specific intervention can affect change has become increasingly vital, albeit difficult. Over the past several decades, the nonprofit and philanthropic world has come to embrace the importance of what is commonly called **theory of change**. An organization or individual's theory of change is their conceptualization of how and why social change happens.^[6]

New Philanthropy Capital defines theory of change as a “path from needs to activities to outcomes to impact.” They write, “It describes the change you want to make and the steps involved in making that change happen. Theories of change also depict the assumptions that lie behind your reasoning, and where possible, these assumptions are backed up by evidence.”^[7]

For grantmakers in particular, making theories of change explicit can be useful both for internally clarifying the foundation's mission, and for working with grantees to fulfill their stated purposes.^[8] In general, a theory of change forms a key basis for more sophisticated strategic planning.

“I realized that in order to succeed in scaling change in my role as a funder, I would need to understand the work happening in each piece of the ecology, and support complex collaborations between them. I would also need to map critical gaps in the work, such as the fact that there is no mass protest movement focused on incarceration. This has drawn my attention to the increasing energy around bail reform, where mass public disgust with the jailing of people too poor to get out of jail strikes me as fertile ground.”

— Chloe Cockburn, Criminal Justice Reform Program Officer at The Open Philanthropy Project

[6] Business professionals have also created similar frameworks to adapt to increasingly complex market conditions. One key concept that has developed is understanding the importance of a business strategically orienting to fill a specific purpose or niche, as elucidated in Jim Collins' “hedgehog concept.” Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't*, (New York: Harper Business, 2011).

[7] Angela Kail and Tris Lumley, *Theory of Change: The Beginning of Making A Difference*, (London: NPC Publications, 2012).

[8] Anne Mackinnon and Natasha Amott, *Mapping Change: Using a Theory of Change to Guide Planning and Evaluation*, (Grantcraft, 2006). http://www.grantcraft.org/assets/content/resources/theory_change.pdf.

In the for-profit world, businesses must think not only about their operations, but how their competitors are behaving. Understanding how multiple companies interact within a particular niche market has consequences for the strategic choices of each individual enterprise. The same holds true in the nonprofit and social change worlds.

Understanding how multiple approaches to social change co-exist and interact within a particular issue group, such as criminal justice reform or LGBTQ rights, can have implications for an individual organization.

The difference is that, instead of studying the market in order to gain competitive edge, social change organizations might look outwards to their field in order to find opportunities for collaboration and complementary action that will amplify the collective impact of multiple groups.

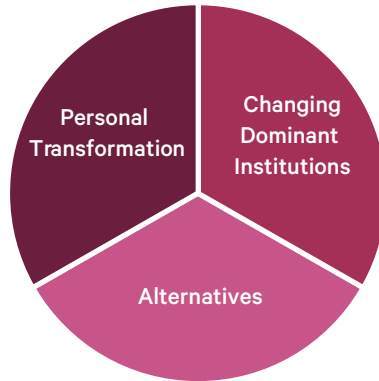
In a healthy movement ecology, organizations with different theories of change recognize each other's strengths and weaknesses, and they work together to produce large-scale social change.

Through our study of social movements internationally, as well as our experience training activists in the U.S., we have come to recognize the importance of mapping the full field of change agents working on a given issue. The Ayni Institute has developed a framework for thinking about the relationships between groups promoting change around a given issue. We call this framework **social movement ecology**.

We use the metaphor of *ecology* because, in any dynamic ecosystem, many different organisms live together in a productive synergy. Each species has its own role in the environment, and each maintains complex relationships with other organisms. In a healthy ecosystem, species sustain each other and diversity flourishes.

Analogously, successful social movements throughout history have included groups with different approaches to change working in synergy. Understanding where an organization fits into a movement ecology — and explicitly naming the theory of change that guides its work — can not only help the leadership of the organization create greater alignment internally, but it also has the potential to facilitate broader collaboration across groups pursuing different approaches. In a healthy movement ecology, organizations with different theories of change recognize each other's strengths and weaknesses, and they work together to produce large-scale social change.

Social movement ecology: The three approaches



Within any social movement ecology, one can identify three main theories of change at work. These three categories are intentionally broad, and they encompass a variety of differences between groups in each area. Nevertheless, these three main categories — alternatives, personal transformation, and changing dominant institutions — are helpful in grouping a wide variety of organizations by their approach to social change. Although any one given organization may use multiple theories of change in its work, groups most often self-identify as fitting predominantly within one slice of the pie.

Alternatives are institutions and cultures that offer a new vision for the future, by experimenting with new ways of doing and being.

Examples of alternatives include worker and consumer cooperatives, credit unions, feminist bookstores, urban gardens, cultural spaces, and restorative justice programs.

The goal of alternative institutions and cultures is to model new relationships and ways of interacting within our social, political, or economic worlds. Alternatives express the values we want to uphold, instead of values maintained by the status quo. Integral to this theory of change is the idea that successful experiments not only foster the wellbeing of those who participate in them, but can spur larger change. By proving the success of new and innovative arrangements, alternatives create prototypes that can be replicated and expanded on a broader scale.

Personal transformation is made up of organizations and programs focused on changing lives one person at a time.

Examples of personal transformation include leadership development programs, spiritual counseling, 12-step recovery programs, diversity and anti-oppression training, food banks, job placement, and other social service programs.

The site of personal transformation is the individual. Personal transformation attends to people's direct needs, and it projects a vision of change rippling slowly outward as individual lives are improved. This theory of change is based on the idea that when

we are hurt and suffering, we are more likely to inflict hurt and suffering on the people around us. Conversely, when we heal these wounds and take a step toward personal liberation or wellness, we are more capable of healing and supporting those around us.

Changing dominant institutions encompasses organizations working to alter or reform the dominant structures that shape society, such as corporations or government bodies.

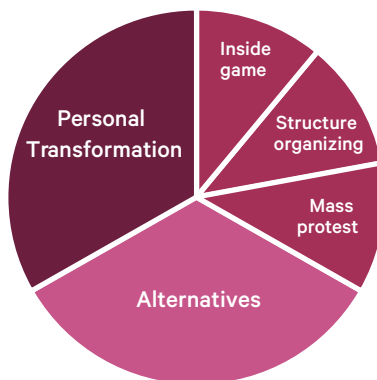
Examples of changing dominant institutions include labor unions, advocacy, mass protest movements, community organizing, and policy and litigation groups.

This theory of change focuses on reforming the laws, rules, or regulations within dominant institutions, so that the lives of people affected by those institutions are changed. The goal is to use organizing campaigns, public pressure, elections, or other methods to alter the behavior of these institutions.

A closer look at one piece of the pie: Changing dominant institutions

Robust social movements incorporate and rely on all three broad approaches to change in order to create major shifts in society. And all three categories can be subdivided and complexified further to better understand both the practices that organizations adopt and the traditions to which they belong.

For philanthropists interested in resourcing impactful social movements, it is helpful to take a deeper look at one category in particular: changing dominant institutions. In looking closer, it is useful to distinguish between we call **inside game**, **structure organizing**, and **mass protest**.



Organizations can engage directly with the decision makers in government bodies and in private institutions whose behavior affects people's lives. This strategy of working within existing channels of bureaucracy to directly influence decision makers is what we call the **inside game**.

The **inside game** includes any strategy working within insider channels to influence decision makers. Changemakers in this area leverage their proximity to powerful decision makers and use expert knowledge to lobby for reforms. Inside-game players may be vying for seats of power themselves, or they may be working closely with people already in power in order to influence decisions. Their focus is on using the established channels of change — such as elections, the legal system, and the current bureaucracy — rather than external pressure or changing the channels themselves.

Examples of the inside game include working with legislators to craft better policy, negotiating with corporate leadership, or using legal action.

Inside-game strategies play an important role, but they also have limits. Any political advocate can provide stories of times when insider channels get clogged and they are left with little influence or leverage. In these situations, lobby days, top-line research, and negotiating meetings are no longer enough to change an institution.

When the avenues for exercising political power within the formal bureaucracy are not working, social movement efforts rely on creating external pressure. These strategies allow individuals who are excluded from traditional positions of power to collectively raise their voices and achieve change by either halting bad policies or propelling good ones forward.

The two major approaches that build pressure from the outside are: **structure organizing** and **mass protest**. Both structure organizing and mass protest rest on the idea that by organizing members of society to have greater power and influence, we can prompt better decisions by institutional leaders.

Structure organizing is geared towards building organization. A structure-organizing group works to build an organized base of people to pressure decision makers around certain demands. This base could be any constituency, including people living in a certain neighborhood or city, young people, people of faith, women, Latinos, or any other group. It could also be self-identified groups of people who care passionately about a given issue, such as animal rights or health care.

The most prominent examples of structure-organizing groups are labor unions and community-based organizations. Some leading figures in this tradition include Ella Baker, Saul Alinsky, and Walter Reuther.

Structure-organizing groups have a number of common traits and methodologies. They build power and resources through a long-term organization; they develop leadership through one-on-one relationships and committee building; and they believe that campaigns are won by exerting leverage on primary and secondary targets.

There is another type of outside pressure that is often overlooked or written off. Every so often, outbreaks of popular resistance seem to come out of nowhere and put an issue on the public map. These kinds of mass mobilizations focus the public spotlight on a moral question and, over time, can dramatically change how the public supports an issue. This is what we call mass protest.

Mass protest efforts build power by using a series of repeated, nonviolent, and escalating scenarios to create political crises that gradually generate a majority of active popular support for reform (e.g. passing an Act of Congress) or revolution (e.g. overthrowing a dictatorship). Mass protest prioritizes action that is symbolic and expressive to build the movement's profile with the public at large.

A mass protest movement can consist of multiple organizations, sometimes working on multiple interrelated issues. Thus, such a movement needs to think about itself differently than a single organization. Because mass protest acts as a catalyst, it can engage both inside players and structure groups. But, typically, mass protest will also produce new groups and new formations of people that sprout up outside of established institutions.

Examples of movements that included mass protest mobilizations include the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, the marriage equality movement, Occupy Wall Street, the Movement for Black Lives, and the Dreamer movement.

To achieve social change we need all three strategies: influence on the inside, organized constituencies, and mass mobilization that has the power to put issues on the social map and capture the public imagination. While inside-game players maneuver within present political realities, structure organizers change the lives of their members, and mass protest movements seize the spotlight and bring in large numbers of people who were not previously involved.

Incremental changes versus rapid shifts

The role of mass protest is different than that of structure organizing, because mass protest is less interested in meeting the political needs of a particular membership and is more focused on making one key issue into a popular cause. Structure-organizing groups tend to be focused on the needs of their members: A union might work to get a salary issue resolved for its worker members, or a community group might be focused on securing rights for tenants. Structure-organizing groups are typically focused on organizing constituencies at the neighborhood or workplace level.

In contrast, mass protest is focused on engaging the biggest public audience possible and creating a moral crisis. Instead of activating people who have already been recruited and developed as leaders, these mass mobilizations have a viral quality. In a very short time, mass protest can draw in thousands who may have never taken action on an issue before. In order to do this, the activities of mass protest are different than structure organizing; they include mass marches, occupations, civil disobedience, and symbolic actions that are designed to engage the public.

Unlike the incremental efforts of structure organizing, mass protest comes in waves of mobilization and participation. With a burst of activity, mass protests seem to bend the traditional rules of politics. Suddenly, public constituencies or individual politicians, whose support was previously hard-won, seem to come out of the woodwork to express their approval or take action. Many people write mass protests off as flash-in-the-pan moments that have little effect. Our research shows the contrary — when harnessed over time, cycles of mass protest have tremendous impact on our political lives. In fact, the biggest issues of our day often crystallize as a result of mass protest. By building public support over time, mass protest can rapidly shift the political landscape, opening new possibilities for transformative change that previously seemed untenable. (For more on this idea, see: [Part 2](#)).

Increasing impact through collaboration

Mapping a social movement ecology and recognizing the varying orientations of different groups allows movement actors to think about how their work can complement the efforts of others. Rather than trying to do everything by themselves, each group can recognize its unique contribution and collaborate with others to facilitate a multi-pronged push for social change. Within the category of changing dominant institutions, the three different categories of groups can work together dynamically: While mass protest opens up space for change, structure organizing allows movements to assert demands and institutionalize the energy of wide-scale mobilizations; inside-game players can then negotiate and oversee concrete reforms.

Within the Movement for Black Lives, a range of different groups have followed this pattern of complementary action. The wave of protests branded as #BlackLivesMatter that followed the 2014 uprising in Ferguson, Missouri ignited a national conversation on race at levels unseen for decades. This gave structure organizations the space to push for policies to specifically address needs of directly impacted communities, such as greater community oversight of police. The energy of mass protest also created substantial public pressure for inside-game actors to address racial inequality and answer the demands of structure-organizing campaigns. Furthermore, it propelled new political candidates to victory, such as State's Attorney Kim Foxx in Chicago, who campaigned on a commitment to criminal justice reform, accountability, and transparency.^[9] After winning as a movement-aligned candidate, Foxx is now responsive to the many structure organizing groups that did extensive field work to get her elected, who can in turn provide her with political cover as she makes bold moves.

Each of these theories of change brings a critical capacity to the table, and only through mutually reinforcing partnerships can they reach their fullest potential. Although most frequently ignored, the contributions of mass protest are essential. In a matter of months, mobilization by the Movement for Black Lives achieved what many devoted civil rights organizations had been unable to accomplish for decades: it launched a deep and broad conversation about race across American society. The fact that many well-established organizations had not succeeded in doing this was not due to a lack of diligent work on their part; rather, it was because changing public consciousness requires many thousands of public displays of sacrifice and commitment to a cause, something that mass protests are well suited to accomplish and advocacy organizations are not. Existing policy organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) kept a strong hand on litigation, but they were not well-suited to also tackle culture change. Instead, when people and organizations from across the movement ecology came together, they created a whole that was greater than the sum of individual efforts.

[9] Kira Lerner, "Black Lives Matter Scores Political Victory As Chicago Ousts Its Top Prosecutor," *Think Progress*, March 16, 2016. <https://thinkprogress.org/black-lives-matter-scores-political-victory-as-chicago-ousts-its-top-prosecutor-613e1870e3f4/>.

How one funder uses the social movement ecology framework for more impactful funding

The social movement ecology framework can be used by funders in a multitude of ways. Open Philanthropy's Chloe Cockburn shared with us the ways in which the social movement ecology framework has lent new insights to her thinking about how to substantially reduce incarceration and pursue criminal justice reform. These include:

- “Enabling me to have clear conversations with other funders, grantees, thought partners and colleagues about which pieces of the ecology I am supporting and why.
- Providing a framework for discussion of complicated strategic questions, like: What does it mean to ‘change the narrative’ around safety, and how do we do it?
- Identifying which partnerships with other funders I most urgently need to pursue in order to shore up under-resourced portions of the ecology.
- Focusing my analysis on the sequencing of investments to ensure that different wedges in the ecology are ready to take and build momentum at the right time.
- Allowing me to avoid putting undue expectations on a particular group to accomplish something that their theory of change was not designed to do.
- Assessing the impact of initiatives, based on the theory of change they apply. For instance, one bail fund effort might position itself as an alternative to the current system, while another positions itself as an instigator of mass mobilization. While both are called bail funds, they serve two very different functions, and should be evaluated accordingly.
- Diagnosing the source of conflict between groups as clashes in theories of change, rather than personal conflict or unreasonableness.
- Drawing my attention to critical gaps that need to be filled. For example, I noticed that leadership development (within personal transformation) was being treated as an afterthought rather than an essential component, and prioritized funding a leadership training organization focused on developing formerly incarcerated people.”

These applications of the movement ecology framework can be further categorized into the following:

1. **Mapping:** For funders trying to figure out where to plug in, the movement ecology framework can help assess the pieces most pertinent to their institutional commitments, as well as identify groups and people whose leadership and campaigns could have the most impact. Understanding the ecological position of a grantee can also limit the administrative burden of the grantmaking relationship.
2. **Strategy:** The framework drives us to build multifaceted strategies to accomplish our goals. For example, a successful inside-game strategy might need pressure from structure organizing and perhaps mass mobilization in order to overcome serious political obstacles to change.
3. **Diagnosis:** When groups or leaders clash, the framework helps funders assess whether that clash is interpersonal or a result of misunderstanding between different theories of change. Once diagnosed, the rift can be more easily healed.
4. **Collaboration:** The ecology map helps illuminate which key leaders and groups can best collaborate to amplify impact. The framework also assists funders in supporting collaboration by providing a basic common language for meeting and strategizing.

The more that groups are able to articulate their operative theory of change, locate themselves in a particular piece of the movement ecology, and figure out how to relate strategically to others, the more likely a movement can advance transformative change.

On one level, it is a simple idea: no one group can do everything. But to really dig into this concept is a much more complex undertaking. It is one thing to understand conceptually that a robust strategy for change should pull from multiple strategic orientations, but it is another to put this into practice — and yet another to understand the barriers that have prevented most groups from putting it into practice already.

At first glance, the ecology framework presented above may strike some veterans in the social change world as simplistic. Indeed, social movements contain many layers of complexity, and the pie chart is designed to provide a basic introduction to this type of thinking. But what is remarkable is how few conversations we have — whether in the philanthropic world or among social change practitioners — that make explicit the approach to change we are pursuing, that acknowledge the biases and limitations of our approaches, and that get us talking about how we can and must relate to one another.

The current state of funding in the ecology

The social movement ecology model allows funders and activists alike to assess any gaps that might exist in the ecosystem. Philanthropists who can make the best use of the full movement ecology can tap a much greater potential for impact than they would be able to otherwise. Concerning a given issue or philanthropic portfolio, we can ask: What strategies are missing that could lead to greater collective impact?

More broadly, we can see where philanthropy as a whole has strategic gaps. For most of its history, philanthropy has been focused on personal transformation approaches to change — in particular religion, education, and social service provision — and the vast majority of charitable giving is still directed to these areas.^[10] But for the last several decades, foundations oriented toward cultivating progressive change have increasingly shifted toward other strategies.

A review of recent patterns of philanthropic giving reveal that efforts to change dominant institutions, in general, remain dramatically underfunded, and that mass protest activity, in particular, represents a strategic gap that deserves greater attention.

In 2016 the National Committee For Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) released an assessment of grantmaking dollars over the previous 10-year period.^[11] The report showed the share of funding of “social justice strategies” — which the authors defined as “the granting of philanthropic contributions to nonprofit organizations based in the United States and other countries that work for structural change in order to increase the opportunity of those who are the least well off politically, economically and socially” — benefited from only a small fraction of foundation giving. The groups in this category map roughly onto what we identify as *changing dominant institutions* in our model.

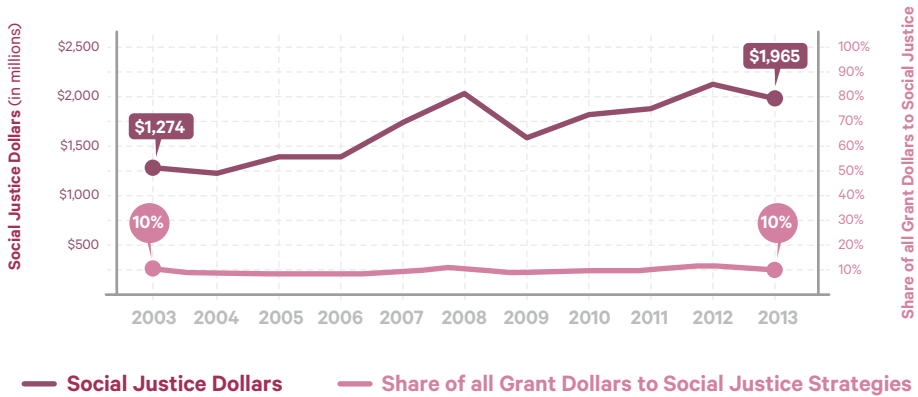
[10] *Giving USA: 2015 Was America's Most-Generous Year Ever*, (Giving USA, 2016).

<https://givingusa.org/giving-usa-2016/>

[11] Ryan Schlegel, *Pennies for Progress*, (National Committee for Responsible Philanthropy, 2016).

<https://www.ncrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Pennies-for-Progress-highres.pdf>.

Funding for Social Justice Strategies: Dollars and Share of all Grantmaking 2003 - 2013



Ryan Schlegel. "Pennies for Progress." National Committee for Responsible Philanthropy, 2016.

The report states, "Among the nation's largest 1,000 grantmakers, between 2003 and 2013, just 1 out of every 10 of those new dollars was for long-term systemic change strategies." This shows that, although there has been much work done to expand giving beyond philanthropy's old-hat models of direct services and charity, a majority of funders are still deprioritizing strategies to change dominant institutions.

Within that small proportion of grant dollars devoted to changing dominant institutions, conversations with organizers and funders suggest that the great majority goes to inside-game strategies, with structure organizing receiving only modest support and mass protest strategies almost entirely neglected. As Farhad Ebrahimi, founder of the Chorus Foundation, told us:

"Organizers and other social movements actors are chronically under-resourced – much to the detriment of the very issues that most funders claim to care about. It's a huge blind spot."

Abraham Lateiner, a funder who works with Resource Generation and Solidaire, echoed the sentiment,

"As someone who organizes donors, I have encountered many funders who are committed to social justice and have ambitious goals for social transformation. But often they seem to restrict their resources to the same big, established organizations that focus efforts in Washington. While it has become more popular to invest in targeted, local campaigns, there is still not nearly enough money to support protest movements that have the power to grow to scale. If we're really serious about fundamentally challenging injustice in this country, we funders need to be willing to look beyond the easy answers that big, inside game nonprofits have been offering us for years."

As the structure-organizing world has increasingly institutionalized over the last several decades, its access and legitimacy in the funding world has increased. Collective efforts such as the [National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy](#) and [Alliance for Justice](#) have helped to make the importance of structure-organizing campaigns more legible to grantmakers and major donors.

In contrast, because mass protest does not focus on building long-term organizations, it is less institutionalized than structure organizing. This is one key reason, among others, why philanthropists have found it more difficult to fund mass protest activity (see: [Common misconceptions and barriers: Why is mass protest overlooked?](#)). Our work in partnership with the Momentum Community over the last five years has focused on institutionalizing some of the best practices of mass protest so that movement leaders can be better equipped to run successful efforts in this tradition. Through this work we have encountered many philanthropists who have identified a lack of support for mass protest as a critical gap in the funding world.

The Missing Piece: Mass Protest

A central and recurring argument we make is that a vibrant ecology of change — with multiple intersecting strategies and roles — is necessary for large-scale change. We further contend that elevating the importance of mass protest strategies is a critical part of fixing an existing imbalance in the movement ecology around many major issues in the U.S. today. Landmark reforms have been secured by broad movements that used multiple approaches within the ecology — and, in particular, had skilled mass protest arms that drove people across many segments of society into action. Yet, **while insider strategies such as political advocacy and litigation are regularly recognized and funded, mass protest groups that are designed to shift public attitudes are consistently under-resourced.**

Mass protest occupies a unique place within the social movement ecology because — unlike strategies focused on more incremental work — it holds the potential to dramatically alter the political landscape. A variety of social movement theorists and historians have argued that major social and political changes often come in punctuated bursts, rather than in steady, gradual installments. What is more, these bursts are most likely to occur after outbreaks of highly visible protest activity. As renowned social scientist and activist Frances Fox Piven wrote in her 2006 book, *Challenging Authority*, the “great moments of equalizing reform in American political history” have followed periods when protest power was most widely deployed.

In hindsight, history books and media spokespeople tend to attribute major social changes to the actions of powerful officials rather than the political forces that compelled such individuals to act. Even in cases where movement activity is well documented, such as the Civil Rights movement, accounts often fixate on the actions of presidents and powerful senators in moving key legislation. Too often, they chalk up the social change victories to lawmakers' humanitarianism or to the natural tides of history. This bias towards emphasizing the actions of powerholders fails to recognize how the decisions of officials are often a consequence of organizing and pressure applied from below.

Not only does this bias obscure the contributions that mass protest movements make to progressive change, it also places too much faith in the ability of elected officials to move an agenda on their own. Politics is often described as ‘the art of the possible.’ But what is considered possible, pragmatic, or realistic at a given time largely reflects the efforts of popular movements that have pushed once-invisible concerns to the forefront. **In the absence of a social movement, the canvas of the ‘possible’ shrinks dramatically.** Therefore, mass protest strategies have potential to increase the impact of the entire movement ecology.

Common misconceptions and barriers:
Why is mass protest overlooked?

Although mass protest efforts have led to numerous successes, some common misconceptions and barriers have led funders to undervalue mass movement groups:

Misconception	Reality
Decision-making power is concentrated at the top of existing structures. It is ineffective and unnecessary to engage the public.	In order to prioritize funding mass protest movements that shift public debate and consensus, one must first embrace the idea that shifting culture is a necessary part of making social reform possible. Our education system, mainstream media, and popular culture tend to encourage us to see inside-game strategies, such as lobbying, electing politicians, or litigation, as the most valuable paths to creating change. No doubt, those strategies have an important role to play. But from the standpoint of social movement ecology, insider decisions are merely the endgame of a longer process of creating change. To see them as the whole of the struggle is to miss key elements of how breakthrough reforms actually come to be. Mass mobilizations are a key force capable of creating new conditions for insider negotiation, allowing proposals previously seen as unrealistic to be taken seriously. In general, it is rare to have an opening to win major reforms at the federal level without strong public backing. By engaging huge swaths of civil society around an issue, mass protest movements galvanize the public and provide a critical assist that enables insiders to then take the ball and score. When philanthropists orient their work around the idea that change only comes from the top, they set their sights on narrow victories, those seen as feasible given present political realities. Embracing the critical role of shifting public opinion allows us to look beyond the limitations of current constraints and to be watchful for opportunities to change political conditions.
Organizations in other pieces of the ecology can change political conditions.	Even when philanthropists recognize the need for culture shift, some misattribute what forces are actually <i>capable</i> of changing the political climate. When mass mobilizations shift political conditions, other pieces of the ecology are skilled at reaping the benefits. Electoral outfits can push candidates to align with new issues, and policy advocates can gain advances in legislation. And because these players work to finalize the concrete victories, it is easy for funders to see the direct impact of their dollars. But these pieces of the ecology can only <i>harvest</i> the benefits of mass protest; they are not designed to <i>spark</i> these mobilizations. One of the preeminent lessons in studying social movement ecologies is that no organization or group should try to ‘do it all.’ Although inside game and structure organizing have key contributions to make, they are not geared towards changing public perception on a wide scale. The key to success lies in partnering with others across the movement ecology who are best situated to do certain things. To achieve reforms that are currently unviable, inside-game and structure-organizing groups need allies with a different theory of change — ones oriented toward dramatizing issues and galvanizing public opinion — to create conditions in which they can realize lasting victories.

Misconception	Reality
Lacking relationships with mass protest groups makes it difficult to fund those groups.	Some philanthropists who appreciate the value of mass protest movements may not know where to turn to resource these groups. Often, they lack standing relationships with mass movement actors. This may be partially due to the fact that the groups which spur mass protest often do not have long-standing structures to maintain themselves organizationally. Consequently, many of their leaders do not have relationships with donors. For reasons we will explore in Short-Term Funding Recommendations in Part IV, mass protests are mostly driven by upstart organizations, who have less to lose than large institutions from engaging in disruptive activities. Funders may see an emergent mass protest effort starting up and want to support it. Structurally, however, it is easy to end up giving grants to people or organizations with whom they already have existing relationships. This means that funding may not go to the people in the center of the action, even though these organizers are the ones positioned to generate the most public support. To address this, funders can look for local fiscal sponsors that are nimble, and they can work to set up new pathways to connect emerging leaders to philanthropic institutions. When the #BlackLivesMatter movement emerged in 2014, Benedict Consulting and the Movement Strategy Center set up an innovative solution to this problem by creating a pooled fund to redistribute \$100 million from both foundations and individual donors to organizers on the ground.^[12] Other funder networks, such as Solidaire, are similarly working to convene philanthropists and generate pathways for both rapid-response and long-term infrastructure.
Mass protest tactics are too risky to fund.	Some philanthropists may feel that mass protest is too risky to fund. Existing funding structures tend to be wary of backing the kind of disruptive activity that is essential to mass protest. We have heard many accounts from activists that foundations have resisted allowing their resources to support mass protest on the grounds that 501(c)(3) funds should not be used for such ‘politically driven’ work. Foundations are often more comfortable with traditional messaging campaigns, which are less likely to be perceived by their peers or board members as controversial. Yet the willingness to create public controversy is precisely what produces shifts in culture (more on this dynamic in Active Popular Support in Part II). To counter this trend, funders can preemptively cultivate among their board members and directors a willingness to back mobilizations even if they are perceived as polarizing. This may involve deepening the knowledge of colleagues about the history and impact of mobilizations. In reality, the overwhelming majority of foundations supporting mass protest have never been embroiled in public controversy. By understanding that shifting public support ultimately helps win policies and concrete reform, grantmakers can make the case that mobilization aligns with already existing foundation priorities. There are also many ways in which funders can support long-term infrastructure that builds capacity for movements, such as housing and training for volunteers, which involves less perceived risk (see: Long-Term Funding Recommendations in Part IV).

[12] Ellen McGirt, “Who is Funding Black Lives Matter,” *Fortune*, August 8, 2016. <http://fortune.com/2016/08/08/funding-black-lives-matter-ford/>.

Closing the funding gap

The goal of this guide is to give philanthropists the tools to better resource mass protest movements as a vital piece of a social movement ecology. From philanthropists who are trying to do this, we have heard two central questions:

1. *Does mass protest really make an impact?*
2. *If mass protest does work, how do I fund it most effectively?*

The bottom line for all grant managers is: What activity is going to best promote the changes we seek? And, how do I maximize my impact for each dollar I put in to a project? In the following section, we make the case for why mass protest movements merit investment on these terms.

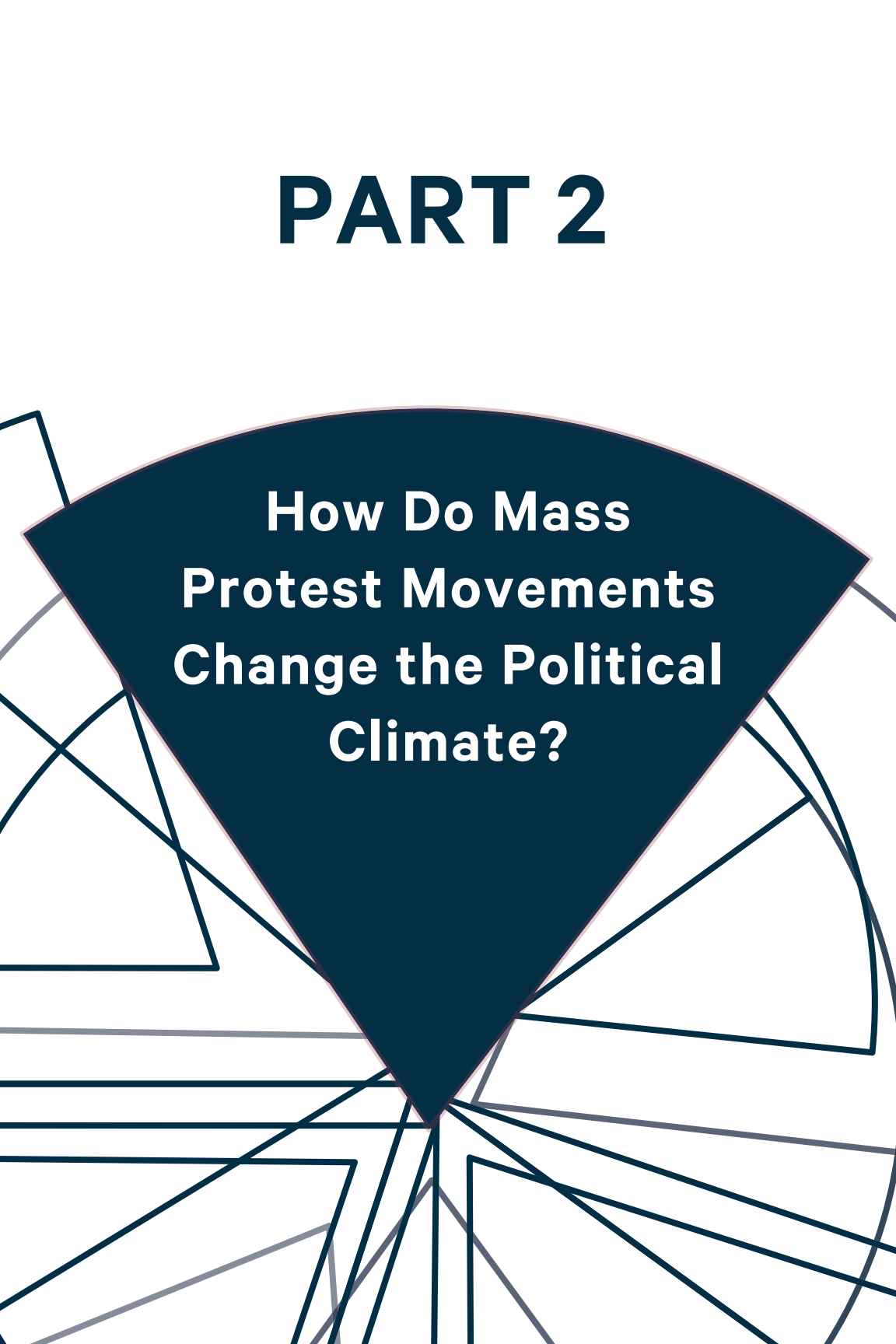
In some cases, individual philanthropists already recognize the value of mass protest movements but feel they are unable to move money towards them. Since grantmakers are accountable to the institutions they serve — and to the mission and priorities already established within that institution — **being able to articulate how mass protest aligns with a philanthropic institution's mission and priorities is essential to opening up more resources for mass protest.**

In order to track how spending aligns with mission, funders must have frameworks and tools for assessing impact and measuring progress. A 2011 research report on funding social movements by the Program for Environmental & Regional Equity at the University of Southern California stated, “For while there are many factors behind the reluctance of some foundations to put money into the broad field of movement building, including worries about being too political or just how one might explain it to trustees, one quite reasonable objection has been that movements are actually pretty hard to measure.”^[13]

The field of civil resistance has made great advances in social scientists’ and historians’ understanding of the dynamics of mass protest movements. But these lessons have yet to be well translated for use in the philanthropic world. Previously, there have not existed clear metrics of progress and success for mass protest equivalent to those available for assessing electoral campaigns or social service provision. To help remedy this situation, we have developed a metrics framework that provides a means of taking such measures. Our hope is that this framework can help encourage a new class of funders eager to fill a clear funding gap in the current movement ecology.

[13] Manuel Pastor, Jennifer Ito, and Rachel Rosner, “Transactions, Transformations, Translations: Metrics that Matter for Building, Scaling, and Funding Social Movements”, University of Southern California. Program for Environmental & Regional Equity, October 2011. https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/242/docs/transactions_transformations_translations_web.pdf.

PART 2



**How Do Mass
Protest Movements
Change the Political
Climate?**

Key Points

- Understanding the importance of social movements requires us to push back against the ubiquitous notion that change only comes from within the formal channels of official politics.
- If leaders of social movements have the right skills and support, they can transcend the adverse circumstances of the day and create a new political paradigm to allow for sweeping reform.
- The single most important element of social movement victory is sustained, active participation. Active support by a few can ultimately generate passive support on the part of the majority, pulling more and more people towards the side of the movement.
- A protest movement's actions are primarily oriented towards creating trigger events, highly newsworthy and dramatic events that compel the public to choose a side. Once movements have created multiple cycles of trigger events, the possibilities for achieving transformative change dramatically increase.
- This change in conditions will start to translate into concrete gains in legislation, litigation, and elections. Victories achieved when active and passive support reach a critical mass in a particular city or state help build momentum towards large-scale national reform.

Skills Versus Conditions

It is difficult to change the climate of public opinion around any issue. Often, doing so is considered impossible. At any given moment, even the most skilled political strategists will find innumerable factors that are out of their control. Economic downturns, international events that impact the country's political mood, entrenched social biases and prejudices, and reactionary opposition responses are all factors that can influence the strategic calculus of someone trying to create change. Given the political conditions of the day, the general public often perceives insurmountable obstacles to change and considers most big reforms impossible.

Many of our country's most pivotal social and economic reforms emerged in spite of widespread beliefs that change around these issues would never come. **Understanding the importance of social movements requires us to push back against a ubiquitous notion: that change only comes from within the formal channels of official politics.** The movements we will discuss were victorious because they were spearheaded by everyday people — by groups of engaged individuals — who changed the climate of political debate and forced politicians to take a stand on issues they would have otherwise avoided.

When mass protest movements confront the status quo, journalists and pundits often refer to them as “spontaneous,” “viral,” or “uncontrollable” phenomena that arise from “emotional reactions.”^[14] Even when a movement achieves its goals, the public narrative paints the accomplishments as exceptional and unique disturbances in an otherwise steady flow of incremental change.

For a long time, social scientists followed the same pattern, studying the conditions that gave rise to movements and the political maneuvers that cemented their victories. In the last several decades, however, the field of **civil resistance** has emerged to complicate and challenge how we understand social movements. Civil resistance examines how a movement's strategic choices can allow it to overcome the social, political, or economic conditions that are seemingly stacked against advocates of change. What social scientists had missed, and civil resistance professes, is that the *skill* of the leaders and organizations driving those movements has often been critical — even essential — to their successful transformation of what was seen as politically possible.

The field of civil resistance is generating a growing body of research that uncovers the strategic craft of mass protest leaders throughout international history. There exist myriad examples of movements succeeding in remarkably adverse conditions. Movements have confronted repressive tyrants such as Pinochet in Chile, Milosevic in Serbia, and Ben Ali in Tunisia, effectively transforming conditions and overthrowing regimes. In democracies like the United States, the field of civil resistance offers insights into how movements can overcome obstacles like Congressional gridlock and social indifference. **Civil resistance**

[14] “*Time* magazine described [the Arab Spring, mass anti-austerity demonstrations in Europe, and the Occupy Wall Street] uprisings as ‘leaderless, amorphous, and spontaneous.’ *The Washington Post* described the wave of Middle Eastern protest as something that ‘spread like a virus’ and ‘hits each country in a different and uncontrollable way.’ And, according to the *New York Times*, the surge of citizen resistance was ‘beyond the scope of any intelligence services to predict.’” For more, see page xii of *This is an Uprising* by Paul and Mark Engler.

research has repeatedly shown that, if leaders of social movements have the right skills and support, they can transcend the adverse circumstances of the day and create a new political paradigm to allow for sweeping reform.

Take the surprising shift over the last two decades around marriage equality in the United States. The 1990s saw both Democrats and Republicans endorse the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which defined marriage as the union between a man and a woman and legitimized homophobia. As recently as eight years ago, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and almost every other top Democratic leader held public positions against same-sex marriage. Today, just 15 years after DOMA, the landscape has been dramatically altered. Same-sex marriage is the law of the land. Nearly all Democrats (and even many Republicans) support marriage equality as a reasonable and fair policy.

Elected officials did not drive these changes — instead, they raced to keep pace with them. LGBTQ activists led a movement that won the hearts and minds of millions of people, racking up local legislative victories, gaining acceptance for same-sex couples in religious congregations and corporate boardrooms, and shifting common-sense attitudes in the legal community. The movement continued until what had seemed impossible all at once became reality. Once public opinion shifted in favor of same-sex marriage, politicians scrambled to ‘evolve’ in their positions and prove that they had supported equality all along. Such a dramatic shift is not an aberration. It is how ordinary people have won rights and freedoms for ages.

The next generation of social movement leaders must be equipped with the skills to build movements that change the political climate. To get there, funders must understand and resource the development of those skills. The first step is to dispel the myth that the status quo is static, that existing conditions are insurmountable, and that there can only be incremental tweaks to the system. The second step is to let go of the notion that mass movements are uncontrollable emotional outbursts that can neither be sparked nor guided through skillful effort. If we can take those steps, what is next is to understand the dynamics that make movements flourish.

Active Popular Support

When social movements do win, it can be hard to discern what the key factors and relevant skills that allowed for the victory really were. How did we get from the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act to the 2015 Supreme Court ruling declaring marriage equality a constitutional right? What led the public to change its stance and prompt millions of people to support a position once considered taboo?

Philanthropists and political strategists alike often survey the arc of movement building and are left wondering which strategic choices led to such widespread shifts in public opinion. What moved people? How did courts and politicians recognize that the political winds had shifted? In seeking answers to these questions, some look the role of media campaigns, lobbyists, or lawyers. While many of these could provide some insight into the complex reality of winning sweeping national reform, civil resistance and social scientific research shows that nonviolent protest and public mobilization is a defining feature of success. The reason that

The single most important element of social movement victory is sustained, active participation.

mass protest is so critical to social movement victory is that it emphasizes a central feature common to successful campaigns: participation.

Our research — in addition to some of the most rigorous, qualitative work in the field of civil resistance — shows that the single most important element of social movement victory is sustained, active participation.^[15] The

decentralized and replicable nature of nonviolent action — as well as its appeal to common sense values — allows mass protest movements to be highly accessible to new participants. This stands in contrast to other areas of the movement ecology, which might require technocratic knowledge or engagement through an organizational structure.

At the core of every successful mass protest movement is a dedicated base of leaders and supporters who have driven the movement through thick and thin. This nucleus of committed people is both a movement's foundation and the main engine that propels it to victory. We call a movement's level of engagement with core participants its active popular support. The amount of active popular support that a movement is able to garner represents a fundamental factor which will determine whether it can succeed.

Two key traits characterize active public support:

Mass protest support must be active. Active support involves growing numbers of people getting involved in ever-more visible ways. This encompasses a wide range of activities: supporters might attend marches, call elected officials, host educational events, or donate money. Active supporters draw their own communities and institutions toward the movement's positions. Often, these individuals hold formal or informal leadership roles in their communities and can influence others. The key is that they do more than merely agree with a movement; to be active supporters, they must back up their beliefs with action.

Mass protest support must be popular. Ultimately, the goal of the movement must be to win over a majority of support and bring people along towards the cause. In the short term, however, as a means to doing that, it is important to have an active core base. Quantitative research in the field of civil resistance has shown how powerful active popular support can be. Studying hundreds of international campaigns between 1900 and 2006, Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephen have developed a compelling dataset suggesting that active popular support of approximately 3.5% of a country's population yielded movement victory.^[16] In every case that the researchers studied, not one movement failed once it reached 3.5% participation. In fact, many groups achieved success beneath this threshold of 3.5%. In the U.S., 3.5% of the population is 11 million people, a substantial number. But what this tells us is that movements operate differently than an electoral race trying to win 50% of votes. Instead of a one-time vote, movements focus on building sustained commitment amongst smaller subset of participants.

[15] Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, August 2011).

[16] The campaigns studied included objectives of "expelling foreign occupations, regime change (i.e. removing dictatorships or military juntas), self determination or separatism, and in some cases, other major types

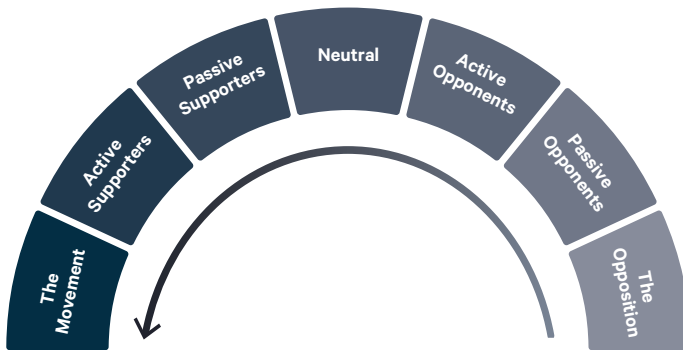
Active popular support moves everyone else

Public actions dramatize injustices and illuminate moral crises that have too often been ignored. They energize people who feel voiceless and show them they are not alone. Active popular support is a powerful thing, and we can see many examples of movements that cannot make progress because there is not enough active support at their core. Gun control is a great example. Currently 77% of Republicans and 90% of Democrats support background checks for private sales of firearms. Yet legislative initiatives to pass common-sense reforms are stymied. Over the past decade or more, a key reason there has been little political will for common-sense gun laws is an acute lack of active popular support compelling politicians to act.^[17]

However, public actions do not move people all at once. Movements do not succeed because one great march inspires everyone to flood into the streets or a good piece of messaging causes people to see the light. Instead, a movement's actions help to move people across a *spectrum* of support. If we were to map public sentiment on any given issue, it would occupy a spectrum that spans from active opposition to active support. Different groups of individuals would fit within each segment of the spectrum.

The goal of a movement is to move as many people as possible toward its end of the spectrum and away from the opposition. Active popular support plays a critical role in this process. Over time, the principled stands taken by active supporters convince neutral

Spectrum of Support



people to start sympathizing with the movement, and they convince passive supporters to become more active themselves. **Active support by a few can ultimately generate passive support on the part of the majority, pulling more and more people towards the side of the movement. It is this tug of war that ripens the conditions for large-scale change.**

of social change (i.e. anti-apartheid campaigns).” In defining success, Chenoweth and Stephen err on the side of caution, judging a campaign successful if it achieves its objectives — or, in the case of partial success, some of its principal objectives — within a year of the peak of its activities, and provided it was clear that the outcome was a direct result of these activities.

[17] The political climate on gun control may be changing in 2018. At the time of this writing, active popular support for gun safety is increasing, initiated by student walkouts and demonstrations following the deadly shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Active and passive support shift by drawing moral lines in the sand

For a movement to engage the public, it is necessary to cast issues in terms of right and wrong. A clear moral framing forces people to pick a side. This is the opposite of politicians searching for ‘middle ground’ positions where there is already broad agreement. Compromise may be appealing as a civic virtue, but as a strategy it demands tough scrutiny. We often see politicians and organizations seeking broad consensus and floating proposals that claim to reject the entrenched positions of left and right, triangulating a third position above both. They raise the prospect of ‘grand bargains,’ but these often end up disappointing both sides in equal measure. When social movements instead cast issues in terms that energize a smaller base of supporters, the force of that active base can grow strong enough to pull others along.

The mid-twentieth century Civil Rights movement is one of the most well-documented examples of how a protest movement shifted passive support to its side. Through meticulously planned escalating scenarios and public campaigns, the movement asked the public over and over again: Do you stand on the side of segregation and racism, or do you believe in equality for all Americans? The movement’s strength was in its willingness to pursue confrontational action that both exposed injustice and appealed to bystanders to shed their neutrality. (See: *How the Civil Rights movement shifted public support*.)

How the Civil Rights movement shifted public support

Among the most iconic images of the Civil Rights movement is that of police officers unleashing fire hoses and dogs on black children in the streets of Birmingham, Alabama. That spring, in 1963, families throughout the country huddled around their televisions, watching in horror as the racism in the segregated South was exposed in its most visceral and violent form. Many historians cite the confrontation in Birmingham as the pivotal moment that paved the way for the Civil Rights Act, signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson just over a year later. The confrontation changed the political atmosphere in the country and crystallized an overwhelming public demand for action toward racial equality.

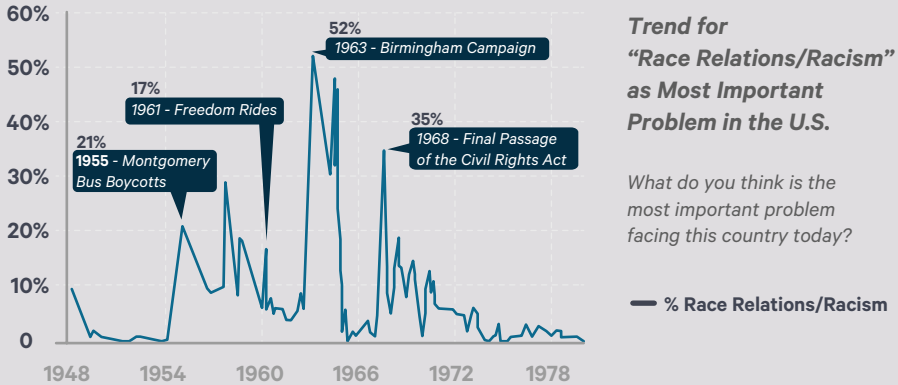
Did this dramatic conflict occur by chance — emerging simply from the zeitgeist of the time? Was the subsequent passage of the Civil Rights Act merely the work of politicians in Washington? Hardly. The protests in Birmingham were part of a carefully crafted mobilization, and their impact was far-reaching. Moreover, they are emblematic of how protest movements can break out quickly — often to the surprise of outside observers — alter public consciousness, and affect both our society’s social norms and its laws.

When civil rights organizers — then led by Martin Luther King Jr., James Bevel, Fred Shuttlesworth, and others — planned to confront Eugene ‘Bull’ Connor, the infamous police chief of Birmingham, they did not set out to change Connor’s mind. Rather, they set out to generate popular pressure that would split the segregationist establishment. The organizers intentionally chose the heart of the segregated South to dramatize the violence that black people had been suffering for generations. Their campaign, and their effective drive to use the national media to demonstrate how the violence of Jim Crow laws was an affront to American values, brought public consciousness to a boiling point.

Birmingham was one moment in a period of intense movement activity that spanned almost a decade. Although the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to desegregate schools came down in 1954, the ruling by itself did not ensure justice. In fact, the court’s decision actually engendered more racist backlash in the South, where embattled racists dug in and increased repression of those who stood up to Jim Crow laws. It was only with intensified social movement activity — which produced key breakout moments such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1956, the lunch-counter sit-ins of 1960, the Freedom Rides of 1961, the Birmingham campaign of 1963, and the Selma campaign of 1964 — that

politicians were decisively moved to take the necessary steps to dismantle the legal and political foundations of segregation.

Public opinion polling shows us just how impactful movement activity was on shifting the public's view on racial injustice. The chart below represents over 50 years of polling by Gallup on the importance of racism to the American public. (When respondents mark an issue as the most important issue, this is a strong indication that they would be willing to act on their opinion, through votes, donations, or otherwise.) The spikes, occurring frequently in the years 1954 through 1970, directly map onto peak moments of mass protest movement activity during the Civil Rights era, showing just how much active support can influence popular sentiment.



Justin McCarthy. "As a Major U.S. Problem, Race Relations Sharply Rises." Gallup, 2014.

Although many of the breakthrough campaigns of the Civil Rights movement were local in character, their impact was national. In 1967, King wrote an account that summed up the impact of some of these dramatic movement moments: "Sound effort in a single city such as Birmingham or Selma produced situations that symbolized the evil everywhere and inflamed public opinion against it [...]" he argued. "Where the spotlight illuminated the evil, a legislative remedy was soon obtained that applied everywhere."^[18]

Shortly before Birmingham, many political experts considered passing substantive civil rights legislation an impossibility, given conditions in the Senate, which was largely controlled by pro-segregation southern delegations. President John F. Kennedy was pragmatically averse to risking support from southern senators and was reluctant to put forward full support for the cause. Yet suddenly, one month after the campaign in Birmingham made international news, Kennedy delivered a fiery address in support of civil rights. This historic about-face ushered in concrete legislation.^[19] As historian Todd Purdum writes, Kennedy "moved forward because events forced his hand."^[20] The years of mass mobilizations that peaked in Birmingham had dramatically changed the terms of Kennedy's political calculus. Public outrage, amongst both whites and blacks, had shifted so that he risked more by *not* supporting civil rights than by taking a strong stance.

[18] Martin Luther King Jr, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010).

[19] Jonathan Rieder, "The Day President Kennedy Embraced Civil Rights — and the Story Behind It," *The Atlantic*, June 11, 2013. <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2013/06/the-day-president-kennedy-embraced-civil-rights-and-the-story-behind-it/276749/>.

[20] Todd Purdum, interview by Terry Gross, Fresh Air, NPR, February 16, 2015.

<https://www.npr.org/2014/04/04/299063588/the-politics-of-passing-1964s-civil-rights-act>.

Research shows that even a movement that is seen as unpopular can continue winning people to its cause. Often, people are turned off by actions that ‘rock the boat.’ They try to avoid ‘confrontational’ politics. Nevertheless, even if the public dislikes a movement’s tactics, the movement can persuade these observers that their cause is just. During the Civil Rights movement, many onlookers expressed distaste for bus boycotts and lunch-counter sit-ins; but they came to agree that more needed to be done to dismantle segregation and promote racial equality. Likewise, public opinion never favored the protesters involved in Occupy Wall Street — approval of the Occupy encampments often polled lower than it did for the Tea Party — and yet large numbers of people reported resonating with the movement’s core messages about runaway economic inequality.

Occupy Wall Street's Concerns Supported More Than Tactics

THE CONCERNS THE PROTESTS HAVE RAISED

AGREE	48%
DISAGREE	30%
DON'T KNOW	22%
	100%

THE WAY THE PROTESTS ARE BEING CONDUCTED

APPROVE	29%
DISAPPROVE	49%
DON'T KNOW	23%
	100%

Pew Research Center. "Frustration with Congress Could Hurt Republican Incumbents." 2011.

Although the Occupy movement was short lived, it popularized the argument that the United States was ruled by an elite 1% whose interests were opposed to the remaining 99%. A political debate that had been centered on budget cuts and debt ceilings prior to Occupy gave way to a debate about the unjust influence of the wealthiest few.

How Do Successful Movements Create Active Popular Support?

There are two primary ways to generate active popular support: **small symbolic actions** and **trigger events**. Small symbolic actions keep current supporters consistently engaged and help demonstrate the movement’s message in a variety of ways. Trigger events are large-scale moments that rapidly increase public attention and are most effective at drawing in new supporters. Historically, when a movement is able to create or capitalize on multiple trigger events over many cycles of movement activity, the likelihood of transforming underlying political conditions and winning substantial reform is increased.

Small symbolic actions: At their core, small symbolic actions are about speaking directly to people's moral experience. Leaders communicate the values and goals of the movement through creative actions that either demonstrate the problem, expose injustice, or reframe a key message.

A powerful example comes from ACT UP, a movement to raise awareness and prompt government action to address the AIDS crisis in the late 1980s. To call attention to the human impact of the disease, ACT UP supporters marched to the White House fence, bringing with them the ashes of friends and loved ones who had died from AIDS. Photos and videos captured the moving scene as dozens of marchers poured ashes of the deceased over the fence and onto the White House lawn. At the time, the Reagan administration had refused to mention the word AIDS in any public address. Suddenly, this powerful symbolic action presented a vivid picture of the cost of silence. With this and other similarly dramatic actions, ACT UP successfully pushed the AIDS crisis onto front pages throughout the country and made it into a winning movement that people flocked to join.

Small symbolic actions do not necessarily have to take place on the doorsteps of Congress, nor must they have a national focus. Many symbolic actions can be duplicated week after week, or staged to similar effect in different locations. These types of activities are important — and many can be undertaken with little preparation or expense. Small symbolic actions help to maintain a sense of urgency and keep the movement growing in multiple ways. They build an active base, nimbly respond to localized issues, increase opportunities for engagement, target specific constituencies, and can resonate with bigger developments that are taking place, including trigger events.

Trigger events: As originally defined by social movement theorist Bill Moyer, trigger events are “highly publicized, shocking incidents” that “dramatically reveal a critical social problem to the public in a vivid way.”^[21] These events are the main catalyst for rapid growth of both active and passive support. Possible trigger events arise continually: natural disasters, political scandals, and other public events can all set up a wave of public interest in an issue.

When the right external conditions meet a calculated and skillful movement response, an event that would otherwise pass by with little public scrutiny takes over the national conversation.

There are many examples of how ordinary events can be turned into trigger events through the response of a mass protest movement. Police killings of unarmed black people are a far too common occurrence in our country, and they often pass with little public attention. These tragedies were transformed into national crises through the calls of #BlackLivesMatter. The construction of an oil pipeline became a national symbol of climate change via the movement against the Keystone XL pipeline, and another pipeline construction subsequently prompted a wave of indigenous resistance and visibility due to the actions of the ‘water protectors’ at Standing Rock. Like police killings, pipeline construction remained a tacitly accepted part

[21] Bill Moyer, JoAnn McAllister, Mary Lou Finley, and Steve Soifer, *Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing* (Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers, 2001).

of the status quo until movements reacted, targeting the public's sense of moral outrage. In some cases, what started as small symbolic actions became trigger events when they caught the media spotlight and sparked large waves of public support.

Movements can use a number of tactics to turn external events into trigger events. An immediate and scaled action — like the occupation of the Florida State House after George Zimmerman's non-indictment for killing Trayvon Martin in 2013 — can turn an event that might have passed quickly through the news cycle into a political crisis. Sometimes, actions organized by movements themselves can escalate into trigger events when they are duplicated at a large enough scale, meet unexpected levels of repression, or are otherwise made into viral sensations. During the Civil Rights movement, the Birmingham and Selma campaigns were examples of movement actions that exploded to become a trigger events of national significance.

In the case of Occupy Wall Street, a series of symbolic actions drew increasing attention to the issue of inequality until, despite a national political climate previously considered adverse to the movement, the issue exploded into public consciousness. In the time leading up to fall 2011, grassroots groups and national organizations had made several well-funded and concerted attempts to kick off an economic reform movement. A year before, in October 2010, some 175,000 people attended the “One Nation, Working for All” rally at the National Mall, mostly at the behest of progressive nonprofits and labor unions. Then, early in 2011, SEIU and other large unions launched Fight for a Fair Economy with over \$150 million in support. That summer, Van Jones’ Rebuild the Dream organization launched the “American Dream Movement,” a \$4 million coalition effort to highlight issues of economic inequality. Although each of these initiatives did important work, none of them were able to create and sustain the immense surge of national energy that Occupy Wall Street eventually spurred.

What made Occupy's efforts unique was its commitment to strategic escalation that targeted the American public through visible sacrifice and disruption. In the first weeks, Occupy leaders designed and staged multiple small symbolic actions that culminated in a successful shutdown of the Brooklyn Bridge. In a stunning act of repression by NYC authorities, over 700 people were arrested — one of the largest mass arrests in New York City's history. Building on the momentum of previous actions, the arrests sent shockwaves through the national media and spawned dozens of Occupy-branded occupations across the country and internationally, eventually totaling 951 sites around the world.^[22] Although the Occupy movement did not succeed in consolidating its energy towards a larger goal, it nevertheless made a critical contribution by shifting the ‘Overton window’ on economic disparity.^[23] (For more on the impact of Occupy see: [Policy, Legal, and Electoral Gains](#) in Part 3.)

[22] Simon Rogers, “Occupy Protests around the World: Full List Visualized,” *The Guardian*, November 14, 2011. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2011/oct/17/occupy-protests-world-list-map>.

[23] The Overton window, also known as the window of discourse, is the range of ideas tolerated in public discourse and considered politically viable.

Active and passive support spike during and after trigger events

As with Occupy Wall Street, movements often grow rapidly in size and scope after trigger events, sometimes seeing new efforts sprout up previously dormant places. One of the major drivers of this growth is media coverage. Since most of the American public gets its news from mainstream media outlets, when trigger events make their way into the news cycle, large numbers of people who are neutral on a given issue may become passive supporters of a movement, while many previously passive supporters are emboldened to take action.

We will examine how active and passive support can be measured in [Part 3](#). For now, it is important to understand that, at the most basic level, trigger events are the primary generator of shifts in active and passive support.

#BlackLivesMatter shifts passive support on racial inequality and policing

The #BlackLivesMatter mobilizations are an excellent example of how both active and passive support spike during trigger events. Polling data illustrates how they galvanized large segments of the public and moved them along the spectrum of support toward the movement's positions.

Unified under the banner of #BlackLivesMatter, the number of trigger events around police and race issues dramatically increased in 2014 and 2015 relative to previous years. Such a spike in trigger events is a good indicator of a movement that is rapidly gaining active support. After all, when new activists are flooding into a movement, they are well positioned to take advantage of news events and turn them into new trigger events.

As the number of movement trigger events during 2014 and 2015 grew substantially from previous years, Americans moved in large numbers into passive support for the movement. According to Gallup research, from 1992 to 2014, "the percentage of Americans saying race relations/racism is America's biggest problem has ranged from 0% to 5%." For example, in November 2014, 1% of the public ranked racism as the country's top problem. But in December 2014, that share jumped to 13% "on the heels of national protests of police treatment of blacks in the wake of incidents in Ferguson, Missouri, and Staten Island, New York, among others," Gallup explained.^[24] For context, race relations had barely registered with Americans as the top problem for two decades, and the jump put it on par with concerns for the economy, which traditionally falls as first or second priority.^[25]

The movement had a huge influence on levels of public concern with race relations, producing swings in polling data of a magnitude rarely seen. Between February 2000 and May 2014, more Americans said race relations were "good" than "bad" by double-digit margins. However, as the Pew research organization explains, after protests broke out in response to the death of Michael Brown, an unarmed black 18-year-old shot and killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, opinions changed significantly. Between May 2014 to August 2014, during which time Michael Brown was killed and massive

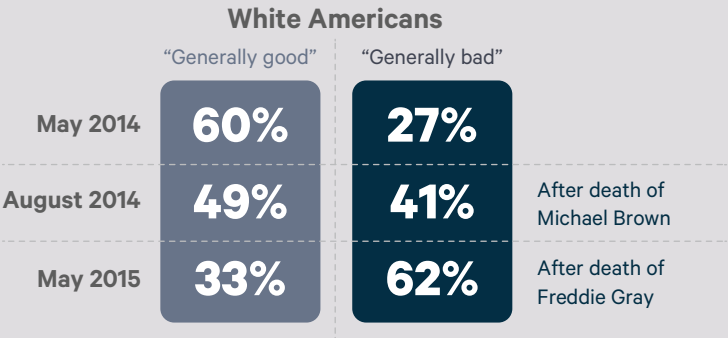
[24] Justin McCarthy, "As a Major U.S. Problem, Race Relations Sharply Rises," *Gallup News*, December 19, 2014. <http://news.gallup.com/poll/180257/major-problem-race-relations-sharply-rises.aspx>.

[25] Of course, if a respondent answers that race relations are "generally bad" that does not necessarily mean they support the movement's position. Opposition will inevitably inflame when a movement breaks through to the mainstream public. However, we can use other data to support the case that a larger portion of the public polarized positively towards the Movement for Black Lives, and the opposition remained small. In [Part 3](#), we go into more detail on how to use other metrics to flesh out the full story of active and passive support for a movement.

protest erupted, the ratio of Americans answering that race relations were generally “good” versus “bad” went from 55% good / 33% bad to 47% good / 44% bad.[26]

A significant impediment to racial justice in this country is continued denial by white people that the problem even exists — a problem that is self-evident to people of color. One of the successes of the movement has been creating a shift amongst those that previously denied or ignored both the existence of the problem and urgency for it to be addressed. White respondents likely drove that change, as black respondents showed only a 2% shift on either side of the question. The percentage of white people saying race relations were “generally bad” went from 27% to 41% in just a few short months. (“Generally good” decreased from 60% to 49% among white people, too.)

Shift is Largest Among White Americans
Are race relations in the U.S. generally good or generally bad?



Pew Research Center. “On Views of Race and Inequality, Blacks and Whites Are Worlds Apart.” 2016.

In just three years, from 2014 to 2017, there has been a 15-point jump in the percentage of white people who say we need to make more progress in addressing racial injustice. Given that #BlackLivesMatter mobilizations only officially began in 2013, this marked shift strongly suggests that the movement successfully exposed the problem of racism to a white population that might have previously denied its existence or severity.

The shift in public opinion among Americans reflects a corresponding increase in passive support for the movement, as people who were not previously attuned to the severity of racial injustice in the country began to express agreement with the idea that race relations were a serious problem that society needed to address.[27] Of course, changing attitudes is not an end in itself. In [Policy, Legal, and Electoral Gains](#) in Part 3, we will discuss how these kinds of changes in public opinion translate into concrete changes.

[26] According to the study, there has been dramatic growth in the number of Americans who believe our country still “needs to continue making changes to give blacks equal rights with whites” — a shift from 46% in 2014 to 61% in 2017. In 2014, 49% of Americans believed we had already “made the changes needed to give blacks equal rights with whites,” while only 35% of respondents opted for that choice in 2017. As Pew puts it, “The current balance of opinion has changed little over the past few years but marks a shift from 2014 and earlier when the public was more evenly divided on this question.”

“Race, Immigration and Discrimination,” in “The Partisan Divide on Political Values Grows Even Wider,” *Pew Research Center*, October 5, 2017. <http://www.people-press.org/2017/10/05/the-partisan-divide-on-political-values-grows-even-wider/>.

[27] Ibid

Movements need multiple cycles of trigger events to win

The most successful movements in American history spanned years or even decades. They built through multiple cycles of trigger events, adding to their credibility and power while amassing a large base of active supporters.

A movement's influence generally increases the longer it is able to sustain itself.

Although mass protest movements that do not last as long can still have impact, a movement's influence generally increases the longer it is able to sustain itself. Although its period of peak activity only lasted a few months, Occupy Wall Street had powerful lasting impacts. Not only did it permanently reframe the debate on economic inequality, but it also won concrete reforms, including 'Millionaire's Taxes' in several states that had previously languished. But Occupy did not last long enough to reach what might have been its full potential. It burst onto the scene with great force, but failed to secure national-scale victories.

The immigrant rights movement, on the other hand, sustained itself for long enough to create important protections for a significant population of undocumented immigrants — the young people known as 'Dreamers' who came to the country as children and have spent the majority of their lives as Americans.^[28] Through the largest immigrant youth movement in this country's history, the Dreamers changed the national debate on immigration and won the federal reforms known as DACA and DAPA, in spite of Congressional gridlock on immigration.

Starting as early as 2001, numerous versions of the DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act were introduced in Congress, with some iterations gaining bipartisan support. Each of the versions would have provided a pathway to legal status for undocumented youth who came to the U.S. as children, but none of the versions passed. Only when a youth-led movement emerged in 2010 did Dreamers finally gain the protection that had been impossible to win before.

In 2010, a series of symbolic actions precipitated the growth of the Dreamer movement. When movement leaders called for a march, four undocumented youth walked 1,500 miles to from Miami, Florida to Washington D.C. to dramatize the plight of the DREAM Act youth. They called the march, which took place from January 1, 2010 to April 28, 2010, the 'Trail of Dreams.' A few months later, beginning in May, sit-ins at senators' offices led to dramatic arrests, larger rallies, and escalating actions. Undocumented youth made use of symbolic tactics, including 'coming out' as undocumented at their schools and places of work. Rapid-response actions in response to deportations were particularly effective at exposing the harm wrought by the immigration policies then in place. They also drew in dozens of community members and local institutions. These actions laid the groundwork for future trigger events as the movement's growing core of active supporters reacted with speed to new opportunities and brought ever-larger crowds into the streets.

[28] In 2017, the Trump administration posed a grave threat to these protections, and the struggle to protect immigrants is ongoing. Nevertheless, protections for Dreamers has in many ways remained the most 'common-sense' position on immigration for most Democrats, and even many Republicans. While defending previous gains is still important, the fact that protection for Dreamers is a litmus test for a lot of politicians is a testament to the movement's ongoing impact.

These events led to an eventual victory in the House, but the movement still could not overcome obstacles in the Senate. Despite this setback, public opinion had swung in favor of Dreamers. By December 2010, polls showed that 54% of Americans would have voted for DACA if they could have. Two years later, after another round of symbolic actions and trigger events led by the Dreamer movement, the Obama administration enacted DACA. The polls showed that the executive order enjoyed majority support among the public.[29]

Absorption allows movements to sustain from one cycle to the next

One of the key factors in a mass protest movement's ability to sustain itself over time is its skill in what we call **absorption** — the capacity of a movement to bring in new supporters and inspire them to take further action or become volunteers. Well-developed mechanisms for absorption provide the main link between mass marches and sustained participation over time.

Mass meetings and trainings often make the difference between a social movement that digs in for the long haul and one that becomes merely a flash in the pan. Civil rights leaders, for example, saw mass meetings as a bridge between individual protests and long-term movement-building. They regularly gathered protesters in churches for sermons, freedom songs, tactical briefings, and trainings. Likewise, United We Dream, one of the main organizations fueling the Dreamer movement, was strategically oriented toward building as large a base of supporters as possible. It sought to take advantage of key media moments to create trigger events and draw in new volunteers. To do this, one of the main absorption mechanisms the group used was training.

Similar strategies have been used to great effect by groups outside the United States as well. The nonviolent civil resistance movement that successfully pushed for the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia in the early 2000s developed a technique to rapidly train tens of thousands of activists in the principles and strategies of their movement. The Serbian youth movement, known as Otpor — or 'resistance' — is one of the best-studied examples of a movement that, by sustaining participation through several cycles of boom and bust, expansion and contraction, successfully passed the critical threshold of actively engaging 3.5% of the population in its country.

Otpor concocted a steady stream of theatrical protests and comical spoofs that satirized the government and helped to create space for dissent within an atmosphere of pervasive fear. The actions attracted interest from new movement recruits, who would then be invited to a week's worth of content-rich classes that imparted core elements of the movement's tactics and principles. Participants came to the classes with little experience, but left united around the movement's goals and equipped to form small local chapters that could lead protests of their own. They also left with the inspiration they would need to keep moving forward in the face of an often-frightening opposition.

The Impact of Changing the Political Climate

Mass protest movements often become victims of their own success. When mass mobilizations build enough momentum to win big, members of the media and the public alike often give credit to other actors for creating the change. They focus only on the end of the story, lauding the politicians who pass the final bills into law, rather than those who laid the groundwork for legislative remedies to move forward in the first place. Moreover, because the movement's moral messaging becomes common sense amongst a majority of the public,

[29] "Active & Passive Support for DREAM Activism," Ayni Institute, 2018. <https://movementmetricsresearch.gitbooks.io/movement-metrics-research/content/chapter6/active-and-passive-support-for-dream-activism.html>.

some people are convinced that progress was inevitable. These kinds of dismissals erase the ways that mass protest movements can profoundly affect legislation, litigation, and elections.

The impact of movements is not limited to affecting public sentiment. Although they operate under a different theory of change, most effective strategists in the mass protest tradition often want the same kinds of reforms that progressive policymakers pursue. Their differing approach comes from an assessment that, without increasing public pressure, decision makers will not find the will to act. On many issues, gridlock and stagnation prevail. Without increased active popular support, victory remains out of reach. With this in mind, creating trigger events that move more people into active support is the most effective thing protest movements can do to foster a climate amenable to passing new reforms.

Swaying public opinion is a less direct route to change than making a demand targeted at a specific decision maker. Because mass movements are shaking the foundations, one cannot always predict which walls will buckle and fall. Yet the outcomes can be profound. Ivan Marovic, co-founder of the Serbian movement Otpor, explains it this way:

"In classical politics, you're interested in the direct route to victory. But in building a movement, you're interested in the more fundamental change that happens through the activation of citizens. It's indirect. And a lot of the things that are going to come from this, you're not going to see in advance."^[30]

Mass protest movements play a unique role in a healthy ecology of change. They alter political conditions by mobilizing active supporters and garnering passive support in the public. When a mass protest movement does this successfully, this change in conditions it creates will start to translate into concrete gains in legislation, litigation, and elections. But the movement does not always have control over the final outcomes it facilitates. The endgame of reform is often dependent on how other players in the ecology play their roles.

Because of this, for those pursuing legislative change, a strategy of shifting public support requires some faith that our democratic institutions can be compelled to translate public will into rule of law. The role of big money in politics and other such challenges complicate the terrain of democracy, and these complexities are critically important for strategists to keep in mind. Nevertheless, civil resistance studies have shown that mass protest has a remarkable ability to break through these kinds of constraints and win in both democratic and non-democratic contexts.

Movements that succeed in sustaining active support through multiple cycles can eventually pave the way for large national reforms, either through the courts, Congress, or power of the executive. But even before that, the movement will start to see other measurable impacts, including the growth of existing organizations, the creation of new organizations, incremental victories at the level of cities and local institutions, and deeper

[30] Quoted in: Mark Engler and Paul Engler, *This Is An Uprising*, (New York, Nation Books, 2016), p. 166.

alignment within the ecology. (*Part 3* will describe measurements that can be used to track the progress and success of mass protest movements over time, including methods for gauging intermediary successes before reaching a final objective for change.)

The Dreamer movement shows how multiple cycles of movement activity can lead to victory at the federal level. But even before large-scale reforms materialize, small symbolic actions and trigger events can stimulate genuine local gains. Often, these shifts occur at city and statewide institutions. Before winning a federal executive order, the Dreamer movement gained a critical mass of support in numerous states and localities, allowing it to secure key protections along the way. While states could not legalize undocumented youth, they could assist in addressing the collateral issues that came with being undocumented. Most notably, Dreamers were able to win new admissions and affordability rights at colleges and universities, from which they had been previously barred, both by outright denial of admission and inability to receive in-state tuition or financial aid.^[31] Mass protest movements can typically chart similar kinds of victories as they push for their ultimate goals. Victories achieved when active and passive support reach a critical mass in a particular city or state help build momentum towards large-scale national reform.

Mass protest changes what is possible

When current conditions are not sufficient to produce the change we want to see, there is little alternative but to alter the political climate. Without a thorough appreciation of the skills required to generate shifts in the political landscape — as well as the strategic foresight to look beyond current limitations and difficulties — we will not be able to achieve the change we need on issues that affect the lives of millions of Americans.

We must begin by understanding that building active popular support is the essential practice of mass protest movements. Once active popular support begins to move people along the spectrum of support, greater passive support follows. A protest movement's actions are primarily oriented towards creating trigger events, highly newsworthy and dramatic events that compel the public to choose a side. And after movements have created multiple cycles of trigger events, the possibilities for achieving transformative change dramatically increase.

What follows is a detailed exploration of the metrics that organizers and funders can use to track this vital work as it pushes toward transformative improvements in our social and economic systems.

[31] "The Dream Act, DACA, and Other Policies Designed to Protect Dreamers," *American Immigration Council*, September, 2017. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/dream-act-daca-and-other-policies-designed-protect-dreamers>

PART 3

Measuring the Impact of Mass Protest Movements

The background of the slide features a complex, abstract geometric pattern. It consists of numerous thin, teal-colored lines that intersect to form a series of overlapping triangles and other polygonal shapes. A prominent feature is a large, solid teal fan-shaped area that points downwards, serving as a backdrop for the subtitle text. The overall aesthetic is modern and analytical.

Key Points

- It is incumbent upon progressive funders to distinguish between strategic planning tools that actually aid social justice organizations and those which undermine the ability of grantees to build transformative movements.
- The level of philanthropic support for groups that drive mass protest movements remains very low. This partly stems from the fact that, in contrast to service, policy advocacy, and community organizing, mass protest movements have not benefited from accessible frameworks that can measure their impact.
- Proper metrics can help institutional funders clarify how mass protest spending aligns with a foundation's mission. Mass protest has a significant and measurable impact on the issues that grantmakers care about, and should make up an important part of any portfolio.
- Metrics of active support track how mass protest movements measure progress over time, showing changes in rates of participation in support of a cause. Active support metrics include: protests, organizational growth, digital engagement, fundraising, and new organizations.
- Metrics of passive support track how mass protest mobilizations measure success. That is, how activists know they have produced a change in social or political conditions. Passive support metrics include: public opinion polls, media coverage, narrative adoption, and voting trends.
- Active support, powered by trigger events, tends to generate passive support. Unlike other parts of the movement ecology, which are characterized by steady growth over time, mass protest movements achieve most of their impact during moments when public attention and participation rapidly surge.
- Increases in active and passive support pave the way for the movement to achieve policy, legal, and electoral gains. Tracking these concrete victories is a useful way to see how the entire ecology can harness a change in political conditions.

The Need for Metrics: A Social Movement Analysis

Strategic assessment: From business to philanthropy

Over the last several decades, the nonprofit and foundation worlds have focused their basic assumptions and operating principles on *strategic management*. Stemming from developments in for-profit business and other applied fields, strategic management addresses the complex challenge of how to get members of a company or organization to collectively produce efficient outcomes.^[32] The attempt to glean insights from the for-profit world and apply them in a philanthropic context has resulted in some benefits for social justice organizations, but it also has presented significant drawbacks for movements.

Well-known business theorist Peter Drucker, who has been described as “the founder of modern management,” laid much of the groundwork for strategic management as corporations practice it today.^[33] One of the cornerstones of his theory centers on efficiency — the idea that resources will always be limited and must be allocated to produce maximum outputs. Although this concept seems like common sense today, its application to large-scale business strategy is a relatively recent development. Jack Welch, the CEO of General Electric from 1981 to 2001, implemented Drucker’s insights by aggressively simplifying GE’s business strategy, axing any projects that did not fit his goal of keeping GE at the top of its industry. From Apple to IKEA, we have seen many successful corporations mirror this model.

The concepts of strategic management and resource efficiency have not been lost on philanthropy. ‘Strategic philanthropy’ has been a notable trend over the last several decades. The National Committee on Responsive Philanthropy refers to a quote from Paul Brest and Hal Harvey — both foundation executives and co-authors of the 2008 book *Money Well Spent: A Strategic Plan for Smart Philanthropy* — to summarize the term. “Strategic philanthropy,” they write, “consists of: Clearly defined goals, commensurate with resources; strategies for achieving the goals; strategies that are based on sound evidence; and feedback to keep the strategy on course. Strategic philanthropy deploys resources to have maximum impact to make the biggest possible difference.”^[34]

[32] Jim Collins has written about how the world’s top corporations incorporate this strategic alignment in his body of research, including the book *From Good to Great*. There is also a movement within churches to apply Druckerite concepts of strategic growth. Rick Warren, who studied under Drucker, is known as one of the leading figures pushing churches to move from “a pastoral ministry model to a CEO leadership model” focused on growth. Although social movements operate based on very different principles, a similar appreciation of strategic thinking can be cultivated among participants. For its part, the field of civil resistance is developing strategic capacity around international social movements. Moreover, in the field of structure organizing, Marshall Ganz has become known for systematizing methods that encourage community organizers to apply strategic thinking at all levels of the organization. His influence contributed to the success of the 2008 Obama campaign.

Bill Hybels and Rick Warren, “Who is Peter Drucker, and What Did He Do with Our Church?,” *Stand Up for the Truth*, Podcast audio. April 14, 2014. <https://standupfortheruth.com/2014/04/peter-drucker-church/>.

[33] Steve Denning. “The Best Of Peter Drucker.” *Forbes*, July 29, 2014. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2014/07/29/the-best-of-peter-drucker/#53d2eb805a96>.

[34] Quoted in: Niki Jagpal and Kevin Laskowski, “Real Results: Why Strategic Philanthropy is Social Justice, Philanthropy,” National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, January 2013. https://www.ncrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Real_Results_Why_Strategic_Philanthropy_is_Social_Justice_Philanthropy.pdf.

‘Effective altruism’ is a related philanthropic movement, originating from moral philosopher Peter Singer. Effective altruism aims to use quantifiable evidence to encourage philanthropic giving that benefits the most people possible. As a result, methods have been developed to judge the effectiveness of an initiative by metrics such as “lives saved per dollar.”^[35] The adoption of strategic logic by foundations and other funders has encouraged nonprofits to employ this kind of thinking, weaving it into the way they plan, execute, and document their programs.

Strategic thinking and planning have offered clear benefits to the social change world. They have encouraged leaders to take stock of resources before acting, and they have spurred more conscientious efforts to reflect and improve. If, as evaluation expert Victor Kuo argues in a presentation to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, “evaluation has become ubiquitous in foundations,” it is at least in part because evaluation is essential to the idea of strategic operations and strategic funding.^[36]

However, models of strategic planning and evaluation have also had drawbacks for the nonprofit sector. Although it is useful for social justice organizations to internally refine their strategic goals, too much imposition from funders can be burdensome and actually reduce the effectiveness of grantees.

Organizations consistently contend that the time necessary to apply for, report, and monitor grants that come with cumbersome requirements takes away from their capacity to do mission-oriented work.

The burden of evaluation is not the only difficulty. The anthology *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* discusses how philanthropic structures can problematically “monitor and control social justice movements” as well as “encourage social movements to model themselves after capitalist structures rather than to challenge them.”^[37]

It is incumbent on progressive funders who do not wish to stifle movement growth to distinguish between strategic planning tools that actually aid social justice organizations versus those which undermine their ability to build transformative movements.

Does evaluation distort the social movement ecology?

Another challenge that arises from the ubiquity of philanthropic evaluation is its impact in determining what funders deem legitimate enough to include in their funding portfolios. As journalist Mike Scutari writes in *Inside Philanthropy*: “Coming up with solid metrics can be

[35] Mike Scutari, “The Mallet Effect: The Compelling Metric behind a Historic Gift,” *Inside Philanthropy*, September 27, 2016. <https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2016/9/27/the-mallet-effect-the-compelling-metric-behind-a-historic-gift.html>.

[36] Victor Kuo, “Performance Metrics and Evaluation in Large Foundation,” Slideshow, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, November 10, 2007. <http://comm.eval.org/HigherLogic/System/DownloadDocumentFile.ashx?DocumentFileKey=87b26505-3742-4dac-9b0c-fb3439c238cd>.

[37] Focusing too heavily on the professionalization of staff is a good example of how for-profit business models can undermine the mission of a nonprofit. Social justice organizations that develop overly professionalized cultures and rigid staff structures can inadvertently restrict their ability to engage volunteers en masse. (For more on the role of volunteers, see: [Short-Term Funding Recommendations](#) in Part 4.)

even tougher when working on domestic social issues, where it can be hard in many cases to nail down a clear causal link between a nonprofit's activities and outcomes in policy or people's lives. Absent a significant investment in professional evaluation studies, which many nonprofits can't afford, grantseekers are left touting a variety of indicators of success that can feel pretty mushy to funders."^[38] This challenge becomes even more salient when we consider differences in theory of change. Put simply, the outcomes of some approaches are easier to track than others, but that does not necessarily reflect which strategies are needed most at a given time.

Work by organizations that provide direct services or charitable assistance to people in need has been the simplest to fit into the model of strategic resource allocation and measurement of direct impact. An entire sub-industry of evaluation and reporting agencies has emerged to facilitate this process, developing tools and algorithms to communicate 'return on investment' for direct services. This makes it a simple matter for program officers to justify their spending and prove that donor dollars are making an impact.

Although metrics for their work tend to be more complicated, leaders in the field of policy advocacy have helped funders understand how their efforts support outcomes on a systemic level. As Nan Aron, President of the Alliance For Justice (AFJ), writes in the introduction to AFJ's 2015 *Philanthropy Advocacy Playbook*, "By changing the underlying policies and laws, countless lives can be affected for decades to come. Without question, when a foundation provides support to a program that provides a direct community service, the impact is seen immediately. But there is also great value in simultaneously supporting advocacy work that produces changes to laws, regulations, and policies that have long-term impacts and address the broader context in which problems exist."^[39]

AFJ also cites a 2012 report by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy which documented a "\$115-to-\$1 return on investment from public policy grantmaking." Reflecting on such statistics, AFJ concluded that "advocacy stretches the impact of grants and can help far more people than any single organization providing direct services." AFJ also created a useful means for organizations to self-evaluate their advocacy efforts called the Advocacy Capacity Tool.^[40]

Finally, attempts to evaluate community and structure organizing focus on how these groups build grassroots power. A 2009 report by Grantcraft called "Funding Community Organizing" described at least one attempt to quantify the impacts of community organizing:^[41]

"There are challenges when attempting to analyze dollars won for the community through organizing campaigns: challenges of methodology and of attribution, particularly when the work has been done through a coalition. Most studies acknowledge the challenges and are conservative in their estimates, but results are nonetheless

[38] Scutari, 2016.

[39] "Philanthropy Advocacy Playbook: Leveraging Your Dollars," *Alliance for Justice*, 2015.
<https://bolderadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/AFJ-Advocacy-Playbook-web.pdf?key=44829017>

[40] "Advocacy Capacity Tool (Act!)," *Bolder Advocacy* 2018.
<https://www.bolderadvocacy.org/tools-for-effective-advocacy/evaluating-advocacy>.

[41] "Funding Community Organizing through Social Change Civic Participation," *Grantcraft*, 2008,
<http://www.grantcraft.org/assets/content/resources/commorg.pdf>.

eye-catching in magnitude. Working with a consultant, one major national network of local affiliates estimated its monetary impact over the decade from 1995 to 2004 to average \$1.5 billion annually as a result of campaigns for living and minimum wage raises, predatory lending, loan counseling, local infrastructure and public services, and budget cutbacks averted or restored.”

The same report noted the sentiments of a foundation director who stated,

“Organizing is a very economical tool to bring about social change. I say ‘economical’ because, relatively speaking, a small investment, in terms of a salary for a trained organizer, can activate and motivate and help train and develop hundreds of volunteers to be active on a particular issue or around a particular focus of social change.”

These reports, and others, encourage funders to evaluate community organizing by interim standards, such as volunteer engagement, in addition to looking at final outcomes of whether policy or corporate behavior was changed.

Direct service is the part of the social movement ecology that conventional metrics can most easily track, and by far the most philanthropic funding flows there. However, because of work that has been done to translate the impact of policy advocacy and community organizing, foundations have grown more receptive to supporting those areas as well.

Nevertheless, foundation support is still not evenly balanced across the social movement ecology. Arguably, the more the transformative the social change sought, the harder it is to measure. It is far easier to gauge the per-meal cost of feeding homeless people than to determine the value of addressing why homelessness exists in the first place. Those who are working on systemic problems are the least likely to fit into corporate-designed evaluation models.^[42]

This leads to a number of imbalances in funding various theories of change. In particular, the level of philanthropic support for groups that drive mass protest movements remains very low. This partly stems from the fact that, in contrast to service, policy advocacy, and community organizing, mass protest movements have not benefited from accessible frameworks that can convey their impact.

The level of philanthropic support for groups that drive mass protest movements remains very low. This partly stems from the fact that, in contrast to service, policy advocacy, and community organizing, mass protest movements have not benefited from accessible frameworks that can convey their impact.

[42] This touches upon a deeper critique of philanthropy which forms the basis of books like Michael Edwards' *Small Change* and underlies articles such as Alix Rule's "Good As Money" (*Dissent*, Spring 2009. <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/good-as-money>). The idea that social injustices can be solved with technocratic fixes and the application of corporate practices misses the fact that profit-seeking business models may create many of those very injustices. Measuring social problems like widgets and maximizing the efficiency of the clean-up efforts avoids assessment of root causes and considerations of complicity in the perpetuation of injustice.

There are some unique hurdles to overcome when mass movements and strategic funders come together. In a much-cited 2011 article in *The Foundation Review* entitled “Social Movements and Philanthropy: How Foundations Can Support Movement Building,” nonprofit consultant Barbara Masters and longtime community organizer Torie Osborn explain:

“Foundations tend to prefer projects that have specific goals and outcomes, whereas movement building requires investments in infrastructure, including capacity building and leadership development, often without the kind of tangible successes that can be clearly identified and credited. [...] [T]raditional evaluation methods do not apply to movement building.”^[43]

In another formative study on funding social movements, University of Southern California professor Manuel Pastor points to the fact that movement drives can have ripple effects that defy easy measurement: “Movement success can be a difficult thing to gauge,” he writes. “[T]he passage of a living wage may benefit few people directly but it can signal a shift in power that soon translates to widespread improvements in living standards.”^[44]

In recent years, institutions like Solidaire, the Movement Strategy Center, and the Ford Foundation have begun to provide guidance and support to grantmakers on how to fund mass protest movements. Still missing, however, are metrics grounded in research on how mass protest succeeds and that might empower philanthropists to engage confidently with the emerging movements of our time.

The purpose of movement metrics

In our work, the Ayni Institute and our partners frequently encounter funders who ask questions along the lines of, “How can you expect us to support more mass protest when we don’t know how to assess its effectiveness?” Without getting caught in the cycle of onerous grantee accountability, it is still necessary to develop language, frameworks, and metrics to help foundation officers, presidents, and boards work more effectively with mass protest movements.

We have systematized what we believe to be the most helpful indicators for tracking the progress and impact of mass protest movements over time. The metrics framework outlined here is meant to provide strategic guideposts for organizers and funders alike. In light of the challenges mentioned above, it is helpful to reflect on both the usefulness and limitations of these measures.

The primary purpose of the metrics below are to make legible how mass protest movements make progress over time and ultimately produce change. For us, the metrics serve a twofold purpose:

[43] Barbara Masters and Torie Osborn, “Social Movements and Philanthropy: How Foundations Can Support Movement Building,” *The Foundation Review*, 2, no. 2, (2010). <http://evaluationinnovation.org/publications/social-movements-and-philanthropy-how-foundations-can-support-movement-building>.

[44] Manuel Pastor and Rhonda Ortiz, “Making Change: How Social Movements Work and How to Support Them,” *University of Southern California*, March 2009. <https://dornsife.usc.edu/pere/making-change/>.

1. Metrics help funders, practitioners, and analysts more clearly understand the mass protest theory of change. This lets funders:

- a) See intermediary steps towards final outcomes;
- b) Understand how the theory of change unfolds as a movement develops; and
- c) Recognize how measurable criteria can reflect specific concepts in the organizing model (e.g. trigger events).

Metrics provide a helpful mechanism to clarify a theory of change. Peter Drucker famously said, “If you can't measure it, you can't manage it.” Establishing accurate measurements of progress lets funders properly contextualize mass protest work, and it prevents them from subjecting grantees to expectations that are incompatible with a mass protest theory of change. For instance, for the majority of a movement's development, it makes more sense to measure how mobilizations affect public opinion polls than to focus on passing discrete policies. Such measurement sharpens the focus on the role of mass protest in changing public attitudes.

Because successful mass protest movements shift underlying conditions, it is more challenging to attribute outcomes. Nevertheless, we believe it is useful to measure how mass protest moves the ball forward for the entire movement ecology by creating conditions for political and legal victories.

2. Metrics provide guideposts by which spending on mass protest movements can be judged and their contributions appreciated. This lets funders:

- a) Apply reasonable expectations to grantees working in different parts of the ecology, including those using mass mobilization strategies;
- b) Adjust reporting, evaluation, and assessment requirements to reflect and reinforce the mass protest theory of change; and
- c) Support mass protest leaders in making strategic decisions.

Although metrics are imperfect tools, they can help institutional funders clarify how mass protest spending aligns with a foundation's mission. In interviews, foundation program officers have consistently expressed the need not only to *understand* the impact of mass movements, but also to *communicate* how spending on mass protest aligns with established priorities. Regardless of their personal commitments, program officers are ultimately accountable to larger structures and must be able to justify their grantmaking with compelling evidence of impact. The same applies to directors communicating to foundation boards, and so on.

Our hope is that our metrics will help grantees and funders collaboratively fuel mass protest movements. As they do so, it is crucial that the funders prioritize the autonomy of organizations and leaders, rather than presuming control. For both philanthropists and practitioners, a common language and common expectations about how to judge on-the-ground efforts can enhance mutual respect and understanding.

The limitations of movement metrics

We should be clear that in the day-to-day work of mass movement building, the kinds of measurements we present below have limited value as ‘evaluation metrics’ in the way some

foundations are accustomed to reporting. We do not think that evaluation- or assessment-oriented metrics are helpful when they are used in a strict and burdensome way. The metrics we provide are less about rigidly holding organizations accountable than they are about tracking how mass protest movements move forward and succeed.

It is quite difficult to formally assess movement capacity and progress, and it is further challenging to translate that into a quarterly or yearly grant cycle. Deep, long-term engagement is required to know how mass protest organizations can best equip themselves to build and sustain momentum. The ecological nature of movements further complicates things. Although a single mass protest group may *drive* mobilization activity, a movement that reaches significant scale will inevitably involve many pieces of the ecology. Therefore, overall movement capacity, progress, and success can be measured across many organizations.

Because of these complexities, we have not developed specific criteria to judge an organization's capacity to spark or support mass mobilization. Instead, we have applied our metrics to a set of recommendations for funders in [Part 4](#), developed based on multiple different criteria derived from research conducted over the last five years. These recommendations are what our research shows will best increase capacity for mass mobilization within the ecology. We see these as the immediate next steps for application for funders.

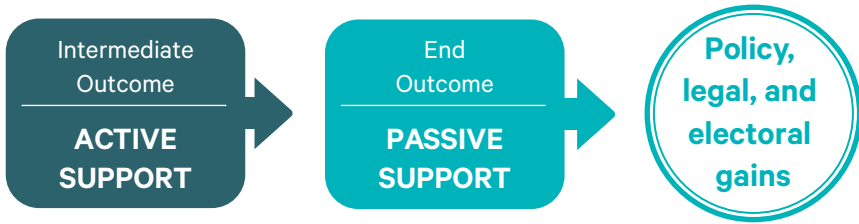
Mass protest should be part of the portfolio

While we aim to provide an overarching framework for how to understand and measure the impact of mass protest, this guide represents a first step toward a larger goal. Ultimately, we hope to see it supplemented by other contributions, and we hope that others will examine aspects of this topic that are beyond the scope of this guide. For instance, future work might provide legal guidance for how funders can stay within 501(c)(3) regulations while supporting mass protest movements. Hopefully, others will step forward to elaborate as the field becomes more confident in measuring and communicating just how effective mass protest can be.

In the following section, we contend that appropriate metrics can allow funders track how mass protest transforms possibilities for the entire movement ecology, making way for a broader vision of social change. We argue that mass protest has a significant and measurable impact on the issues that grantmakers care about, and should make up an important part of any portfolio.

Two Key Outcomes: Active and Passive Support

Strategic Impact Measurements



The chart above is adapted from the Balanced Scorecard Institute, as a way to visualize strategic impact.

With any drive for social change, if the desired outcome is concrete reform — whether through laws, rulings, or other decisions — getting there requires many intermediate steps. Appropriate metrics can help track those steps. Although many pieces of the ecology might contribute to the overall development and success of a movement, our focus here is on tracking how mass protest strategies progress and succeed.

Toward this objective, we have developed metrics for both intermediate and end outcomes of mass protest movements. The intermediate metrics of **active support** track how mass protest movements measure *progress* over time. These measurements generally show changes in rates of participation in support of a cause. The metrics of **passive support** track how mass protest mobilizations measure *success*. That is, how activists know they have produced a change in social or political conditions. Increases in active and passive support pave the way for the movement to achieve **policy, legal, and electoral gains**. Measuring these concrete victories is a useful way to track and conceptualize how the entire ecology can harness changing political conditions to win concrete victories, such as legislation at the local and national level.^[45]

These metrics help us understand that mass protest movements cannot be measured solely by policy, legal, and electoral gains — results that often will not register until late in a movement’s development. Instead, it is helpful to remain attentive to how mass protest paves the way for those gains, particularly by tracking advances on the local level before they become feasible nationwide. Primarily, however, mass protest movements should be measured by how they boost participation (active support) and shift underlying social and political conditions (passive support).

A variety of **metrics** can be used to track those shifts, measuring how active and passive support rises and falls. We outline these indicators in detail below, providing examples from recent mass mobilizations. Our list of metrics is not comprehensive; there may be other

[45] As we elaborated in [Part 2](#), the role of a mass protest movement is to change the social landscape, making it possible for political advocates and campaigners to win previously unfeasible victories. But mass protest does not achieve those victories alone; it relies on other players in the movement ecology to step in at the right moments to push local and national reform. Tracking policy, legal, and electoral gains in relation to mass mobilization makes apparent the effect that a change in underlying conditions can have.

yardsticks that funders and organizers can use to track shifts in active and passive support, as well as their impact on concrete reform. However, we believe these to be among the most promising standards for measurement available.

Strategic impact measurements

OUTCOMES	WHAT DOES IT MEASURE?	GUIDING QUESTIONS	METRICS
Active support	Change in participation	• Is there more participation in the mass protest movement? • Is there more participation in the movement ecology at large?	• Trigger events • Protests • Organizational growth • Digital engagement • Fundraising • New organizations
Passive support	Change in social or political conditions	• Is the public shifting support towards the movement? • Is the movement’s narrative being elevated in public discourse?	• Public opinion polls • Media coverage • Narrative adoption • Voting trends
Policy, legal, and electoral gains	Translation of new conditions into concrete victories	• Are concrete victories being won that were not possible or less successful prior to the change in conditions?	• Policy victories • Litigation victories • Electoral gains

Measuring Active Support

Active support indicates how many people in a given population are dedicating sustained effort to moving a movement forward, by volunteering, protesting, donating, and the like. In essence, being an active supporter means participating — showing up and doing your part to help the movement succeed.

We have already discussed why participation is one of the most important indicators of a mass protest movement’s success in [Part 2](#). When a movement gains participants, it gets ever closer to achieving its goals. But how do we measure rising participation? Based on the trends we have observed across a variety of movements, we recommend the following indicators to measure changes in active support.

Metrics of active support:

1. Protests
2. Organizational growth
3. Digital engagement
4. Fundraising
5. New organizations

Below, we discuss each of these measurements and include examples of how to use them to track a movement's intermediate steps forward. Funders can use these measures together to assess how a mass protest movement is making intermediary progress in its development. These metrics can also inform which programs funders might look to resource.

But first, it is important to understand that while other pieces of the movement ecology might measure success by a steady climb in their metrics over time, mass protest typically advances in cyclical waves.

Movements advance in cycles, and so will active support metrics

When tracking active support, it is important to consider the distinction between incremental growth and punctuated spikes in movement activity. Unlike most pieces of a social movement ecology, which are characterized by steady growth over time, mass protest movements achieve most of their impact during major moments when public attention and participation surge. Incremental growth only happens *between* these punctuated moments.

To understand what to look for when using mass protest metrics, it is important to understand the life cycle of mass protest mobilizations.

Incremental growth:

Active support can rise slowly over time via local participation, primarily by means of small symbolic actions (see: [Part 2](#)). This participation is critical to forming and sustaining a base of engaged members, and it can be measured over time. During a period of incremental growth, measurement should focus not only on **small increases** in active support, but also on the relative **consistency** of active support. In other words, it is valuable to track whether the movement sustains a committed base of active supporters that grows incrementally and consistently stages small actions.

However, in most cases, mass protest movements tend not to advance in a slow, incremental way. Rather, trigger events drive them forward. Trigger events provide the most effective means of increasing both active and passive support.

Rapid growth:

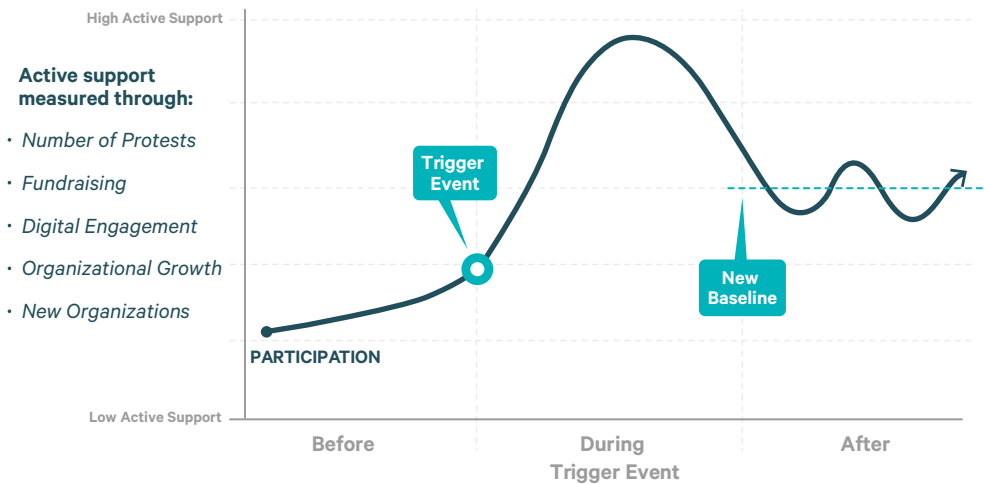
Trigger events are spikes in social movement activity that quickly change the political landscape, bringing on widespread participation and attention in a short period of time. Our research shows that the **frequency and duration of trigger events** most reliably indicates whether or not people are mobilized in a given period. The number of trigger events over time signifies **frequency** of mobilization, while how long a trigger event peak lasts signifies its **duration**. Spikes in multiple other active support metrics (such as number of protests, number of dollars fundraised, or level of digital engagement) are indicative of trigger events.

TYPE OF GROWTH	COMMON ACTIVITY	WHEN IN THE MOVEMENT CYCLE	WHAT TO MEASURE
Incremental	Small symbolic actions	Between trigger event mobilizations	1. Small increases of active support 2. Consistency of active support
Rapid	Mass mobilizations	Sparked by trigger events	1. Large spikes in active support 2. Frequency and duration of trigger events

In the aftermath of a trigger event and the peak period it generates, we can anticipate that *active support will decrease*. Such contraction is not a bad sign; it is merely the nature of movement cycles. In terms of measurement, the important thing to determine during periods of contraction is the **new baseline** — that is, whether participants have been able to establish levels of activity, fundraising, and organization greater than those in place prior to the last period of intensified activity. If the absorption capacity of a mass protest movement is strong, this will be the case. A higher baseline of active support indicates successful absorption.^[46]

The chart below shows how active support can fluctuate before, during, and after a trigger event:

Measuring Active Support Over Time



[46] As we discussed in [Part 2](#), absorption refers to the capacity to bring in new leaders and members into the structure of the movement.

1) Protests

A relatively straightforward indicator of active support is the **frequency and size of protest activity** over time. Protests include any kind of public-facing demonstration, event, or direct action. Collective actions such as street marches are often the easiest to document and quantify. Individual actions like consumer boycotts are harder to track but nevertheless play a significant role when they are visibly united with collective ones.

Protests are not limited to ‘official’ actions orchestrated or publicized by the movement or an organization representing the movement. In fact, they commonly emerge outside those organizations, led by everyday citizens inspired to take action. This is especially true when a trigger event occurs, prompting new supporters to come out of the woodwork. While the unstructured nature of this protest activity can make tracking less precise, hashtags or a common narrative frame can aid efforts to measure its scope.

On one hand, tracking protests seems easy: simply count the number of events and the number of participants. In practice, however, variability in sources is a challenge. Media coverage is the most common resource used to gauge the frequency and size of protest actions. But because the content of media reports on protests can vary between different sources, precise tracking can be difficult.^[47]

Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to collect and evaluate the best data available for any given mobilization. Although this has often been neglected in the past, in recent years movement analysts have been improving their counting efforts. Some collective projects have led the way, including the Crowd Counting Consortium and Count Love, collaborative and open-source databases of protest demonstrations that track variables including size, frequency, location, and topic. The data collected by Crowd Counting Consortium has been consistently cited in mainstream news coverage, helping validate movement activity in the mind of the public.

Example: Growth of racial justice protest events

The website Elephrame bills itself as “the only comprehensive record of worldwide Black Lives Matter demonstrations.” Started by Alisa Robinson — a graduate of the political science department at the University of Chicago — it lists protest events (verified through news links) by location, topic, and estimated attendance. The website keeps a running tally of total protests over time as well as maps of protest sites. On January 17, 2018, Robinson wrote: “At least 2,322 Black Lives Matter protests and other demonstrations have been held in the past 1,278 days.”

[47] For instance, a *FiveThirtyEight* report shows that around half of the 2,021 articles reporting on the People’s Climate March, the largest climate protest in US history, pegged participation at 400,000 marchers, while about 40% of articles reported a smaller number of participants. Hayley Munguia, “How Many People Really Showed Up to the People’s Climate March?,” *FiveThirtyEight*, September 30, 2014. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/peoples-climate-march-attendance/>.

The database begins on July 19, 2014. On that date, the only point on the map marks the first demonstration protesting Eric Garner's murder by members of the New York Police Department. For August 9th through 12th, the map shows a daily local protest in Ferguson, Missouri prompted by the death of 18-year-old Michael Brown. By August 14th, only five days after Brown's murder, the database shows protests taking place in more than one hundred cities, involving thousands of participants.^[48]

The rapid spike in participation following local protests after Garner and Brown's deaths demonstrates how the movement's call to action successfully captured and drew in the public. Over the next year, the frequency and size of protests tracked through Elephrame's database shows constant movement escalation, both through proactive efforts like national days of action as well as reactive efforts, where activists responded to further cases of police brutality.

Example: High-sacrifice actions at Occupy Wall Street

In the decades-long fight for Indian independence from Britain, Gandhi frequently spoke about the power of sacrifice. While, for him, there was a spiritual dimension to sacrificial action, modern civil resistance has drawn out the more practical side of his thinking. Civil resistance theory demonstrates that sacrifice can be a highly effective way to persuade public onlookers, who are often moved by participants willing to risk their physical safety or their jobs for a cause. When protesters put themselves in a position of risk, they demonstrate commitment to their cause. This both draws attention and invites empathy — it is harder for bystanders to remain neutral and detached, increasing the likelihood that they too will get involved.

Tracking certain types of protest, such as arrest events, can be a useful measure of active support. The following example demonstrates how high-sacrifice actions during Occupy Wall Street fostered increased media coverage, elevating the movement's presence in the public eye.

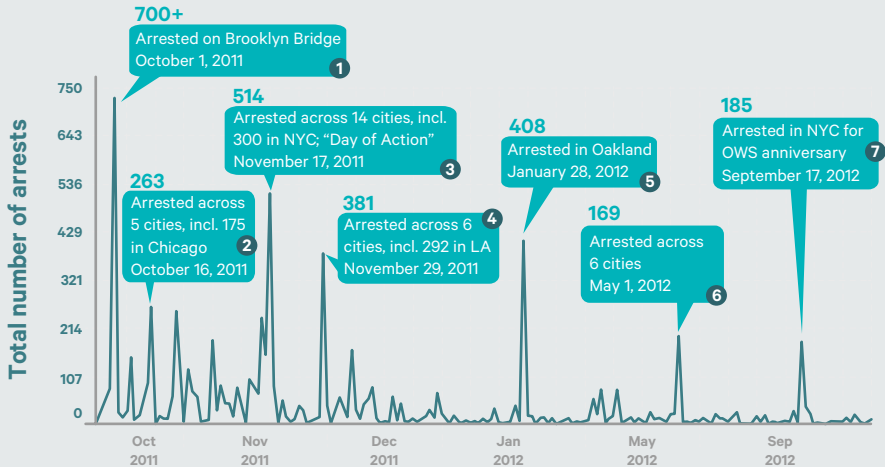
The Occupy Wall Street movement went viral using the tactic of occupying public space. This tactic demands a much higher level of commitment from participants than showing up to a single march. A database from the *Guardian* estimates that there were 951 Occupy sites around the world, spread over 82 countries.^[49] In some cities, Occupy participants risked arrest to further dramatize the movement. Both occupations and arrests can be considered high-sacrifice actions.

[48] For interactive map, see: "Charts: Black Lives Matter," *Elephrame*, 2018.
<https://elephrame.com/textbook/BLM/chart>

[49] Rogers, 2011.

The first graph below shows the number of Occupy-related arrests over a three-year period.^[50]

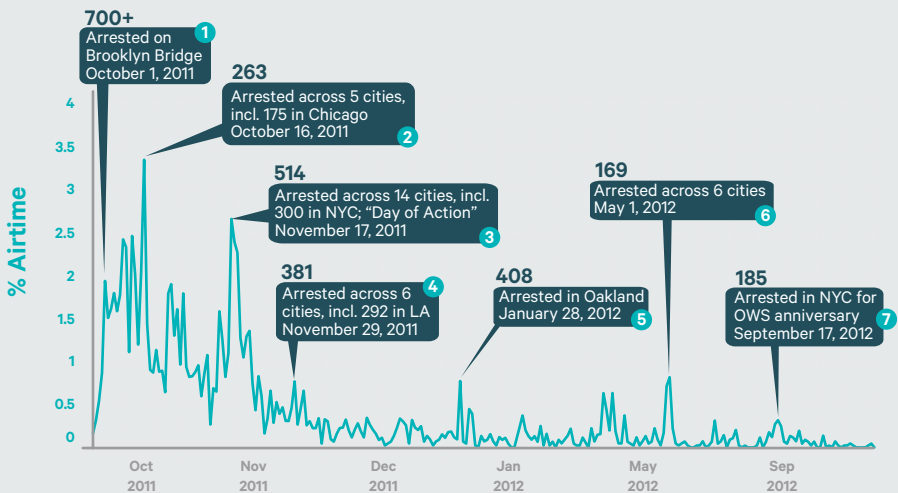
Occupy Wall Street Arrests



Data sourced from St. Pete for Peace with some changes made through media corroboration.

In the second comparison, we can see the relationship between spikes in arrests and percent airtime of "Occupy Wall Street" on national television news as shown on GDELT's Television Explorer.^[51]

Occupy Wall Street Arrests versus Mentions of "Occupy Wall Street" on TV News



Data sourced from GDELT Television Explorer.

[50] Data for graph sourced through <https://www.stpete4peace.org/occupyarrests> with some changes made through media corroboration.

[51] "Television Explorer," GDELT Project, 2018. http://api.gdeltproject.org/api/v2/summary/summary?./television.gdeltproject.org/cgi-bin/iatv_ftxtsearch/iatv_ftxtsearch?

Comparing the two graphs shows that spikes in arrest numbers correlates with spikes in television airtime, particularly in the first two months of activity.^[52] The implication: High-sacrifice escalation can lead to increases in media attention — and therefore, increased public awareness and urgency to support the issue.^[53] Notably, arrest events made more of an impact when the movement as a whole was gaining steam through a variety of other tactics and efforts — demonstrating that it was not arrests alone that generated overall attention. Still, though the movement as a whole lost momentum in 2012, arrestable events managed to generate more airtime relative to previous weeks.

As this example shows, measurable criteria can reflect the concept of sacrifice. When measuring protest frequency and size, it may be useful to track specific tactics, such as arrests, to gain a more refined understanding of the intensity of active support. Data on media coverage also lets us see the theory of change in action — how active support contributes to increased attention in the public.

2) Organizational growth

In [Part 2](#), we talked about the importance of *sustained* participation that grows through multiple cycles of movement activity. Sustained participation requires movements to retain leadership and consistently build an increasing baseline of participation over time, even while recognizing that participation may fluctuate. Although there are many ways to measure organizational development and growth, our primary focus here is **growth of leadership and membership**.

Because successful movements are designed to scale, a mass protest group's organizational model must be fundamentally volunteer-focused. While staff or full-time volunteers may anchor a mass protest organization, the group must ultimately rely on a large base of active supporters to build momentum and shift passive support over time. (For more on volunteer structures see: [Short-Term Funding Recommendations](#) in Part IV.) The growth of an organization's membership lists is a key metric here. Of course, people on those lists must be engaged in a meaningful manner, so that the membership does not remain stagnant or relegated to passively receiving emails. In the example of how [IfNotNow measures growth through training](#), we provide an example of training as a meaningful indicator of leadership and membership growth.

[52] Of course, not all large arrest events produced the same levels of coverage on national television news. On November 19, 381 people were arrested across six cities, including 292 in Los Angeles as protesters attempted to halt city officials from shutting down their public encampment. Yet national TV does not reflect as dramatic of a surge in mentions as with previous arrest events. Like any tactic, high-sacrifice actions are not guaranteed to produce media results. A complex set of factors contributes to the success of a single tactic, including framing and communications efforts. Because of this, it is important for funders to approach movements with a spirit of experimentation.

[53] As we will discuss in the following section, [Measuring Passive Support](#), increased media attention correlates with public support shifting in favor of an issue.

Example: IfNotNow measures growth through training

One example of a group whose growth can be meaningfully tracked by membership size is IfNotNow, a mass protest organization made up of young Jews working to end the American Jewish community's support of the occupation in Palestine. A majority of the group's volunteers go through a one- to two-day orientation training to become active participants in the movement. During the training, new members receive essential knowledge about the movement's principles and strategy and are empowered to take action. With this model in mind, the number of participants trained becomes a critical metric for IfNotNow to track organizational growth.

Over the first two years of its development, IfNotNow trained roughly 1500 people to take on volunteer roles within the movement. Because IfNotNow is an upstart organization with a small budget and only three staffers, the training program was run almost entirely by volunteers.

Toward the end of 2016, far-right media icon and former Trump advisor Steve Bannon was invited to speak at a prominent Jewish organization. IfNotNow used the opportunity to create a trigger event, mobilizing hundreds of people to show up to the event and demonstrate that young Jews would not let Jewish leadership embrace a white nationalist. After protests throughout the country, registrations for IfNotNow trainings spiked. In the first quarter of 2017, average numbers of people trained per month increased by three times the previous average.

3) Digital engagement

Digital engagement encompasses a wide array of activities on platforms including social media, email, and text messaging. Ever since campaigners at organizations such as *MoveOn.org* pioneered methods for making online participation a means of engagement in elections and civic causes, the vast field of online organizing has developed best practices for digital engagement, including a variety of useful measurements.

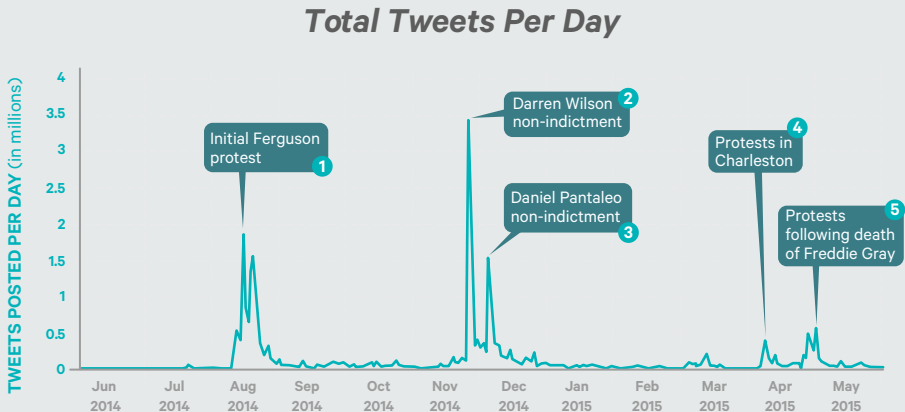
The level of digital engagement among a mass protest movement's participants is a key metric of active support. Participants often first take action online. Measuring digital engagement involves tracking the number of people sharing, liking, posting, or clicking materials supportive of the movement and its messaging. Specific measurements can depend on the platform. For instance, a variety of protest groups have turned to live-streaming videos on Facebook to expand the reach of in-person actions. An indication of more active participation might be the number of 'shares' on the livestream, whereas the number of total 'views' or 'reach' of the post could indicate a rise in passive support.

Example: #BlackLivesMatter social media activity

Social media data clearly demonstrates the success of the mobilizations around police violence against black people that took off in 2014. Not only was the movement's overarching banner of #BlackLivesMatter used over 12 million times on Twitter, protesters in the little-known midwestern town that first sparked the movement propelled #Ferguson to become the top hashtag for a social cause in Twitter's history.^[54]

The movement did not just shake the moral conscience of the nation; it successfully mobilized active supporters, taking people who might previously have been neutral or complacent and moving them toward its side. Although the slogan of #AllLivesMatter emerged in opposition, it never competed with the level of popular participation that the racial justice movement enjoyed. Pew research data on social media trends shows that between July 12, 2013 and March 31, 2016, #BlackLivesMatter was used eight times as often as #AllLivesMatter. Additionally, within the same time period, Pew found that tweets using the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter were far more likely to express support rather than opposition, by more than a three-to-one margin.^[55]

Social media data on #BlackLivesMatter also corresponds closely with trigger events. Social media propelled the movement's most highly visible moments in 2014. One way to look at this is to examine the correlation between number of protests and number of hashtag mentions on Twitter.^[56]



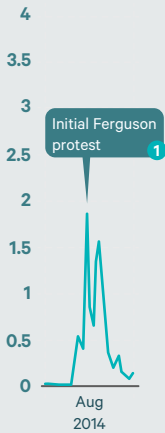
Data sourced from the website Elephrame, created by Alisa Robinson.

[54] Twitter data as of March 2016: Wesley Lowery, "Black Lives Matter: Birth of a Movement," *The Guardian*, January 17, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/17/black-lives-matter-birth-of-a-movement>

[55] Monica Anderson and Paul Hitlin, "Social Media Conversations about Race: How Social Media Users See, Share and Discuss Race and the Rise of Hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter," *Pew Research Center*, August 15, 2016, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/08/15/social-media-conversations-about-race/>

[56] The maps of protest activity are from the website Elephrame (<https://elephrame.com>), created by Alisa Robinson, which catalogues ideas and data including records of #BlackLivesMatter-related protests.

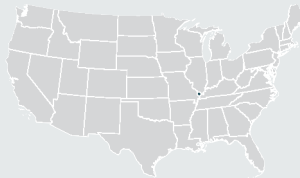
**Tweets posted
per day (in millions)**



Map of Protest Events

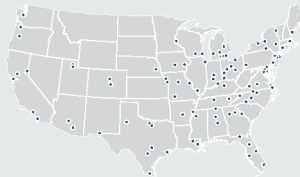
After initial Ferguson protest

● = one protest

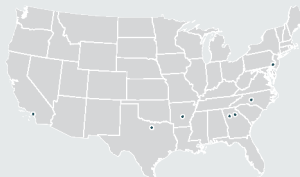


August 10, 2014

Protest in Ferguson, MI the day after the death of Michael Brown



August 14, 2014

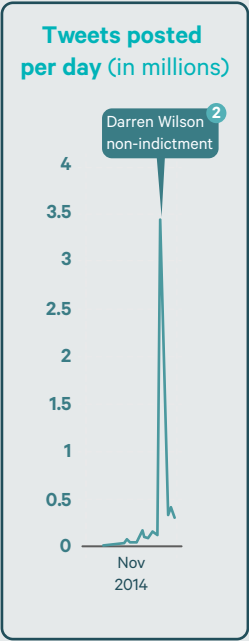


August 18, 2014

Data sourced from the website Elephrame, created by Alisa Robinson.

In the comparison above, the single dot on the August 10, 2014 protest map represents the first protest after the death of Michael Brown. This local protest sparked more than 120 protests across the nation on August 14, as Twitter mentions spiked up to almost 2 million a day. After Missouri governor Jay Nixon called the National Guard on protesters in Ferguson, Missouri, the public responded in outrage, shown by the second peak in the Twitter snapshot above.

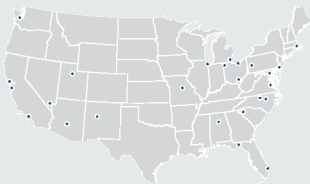
Below is an example of the national spread of protests in the few days after the announcement of the non-indictment of Darren Wilson (Brown’s killer). That day represents the highest tweet volume recorded in the dataset.



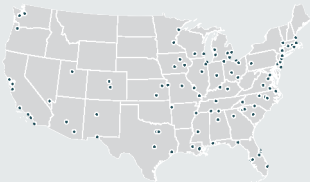
Map of Protest Events

After non-indictment of Darren Wilson

● = one protest



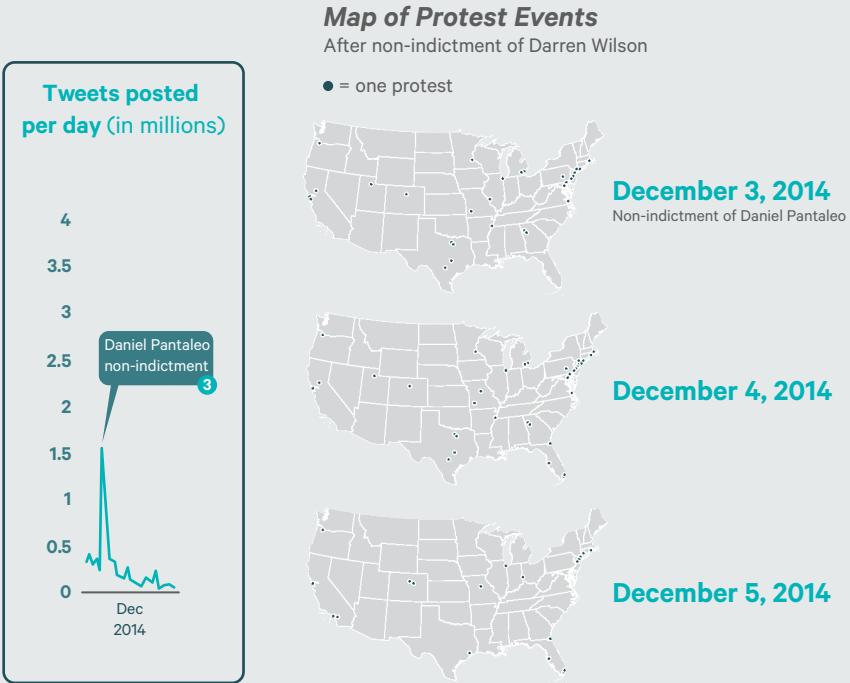
November 24, 2014
Non-indictment of Darren Wilson



November 25, 2014

Data sourced from the website Elephrame, created by Alisa Robinson.

The largest Twitter peak corresponds to the largest day of demonstrations, when more than 170 cities protested Wilson’s non-indictment. Roughly half of this number of protests broke out just over one week later, sparked by the non-indictment of Daniel Pantaleo, who choked Eric Garner to death in Staten Island, New York. This second wave of protests corresponds to roughly half the total tweets, which can be seen in the first spike in December on the graph below:



Data sourced from the website Elephrame, created by Alisa Robinson.

The “Beyond the Hashtags” Twitter data is based on tweets with dozens of associated keywords, in addition to those with the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag. The report makes a key conclusion:

“#Ferguson was by far the most-mentioned, appearing in more than half of all tweets. Michael Brown was mentioned more than any other victim, followed by Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, and Walter Scott. Few clear patterns emerge among those who are widely and seldom discussed — at both the high and low ends there are cases that span a wide range of ages, locations, and dates, with and without accompanying video evidence [...] This suggests that while social media may have played a critical role in helping activists push police violence to the forefront of public consciousness, this was by no means an automatic process. The mere presence of articles about police killings on social media was not enough: a critical mass of concerned parties had to decide to aggregate their anger into a movement.”^[57]

"Protest mobilization was the most decisive variable between police killings that skyrocketed on social media and those that did not."

This excerpt makes a salient point about the relationship between social media and on-the-ground protest activity. It highlights that there are no common conditional factors leading to social media virality (such as whether it was the death of a child, or whether the murder was caught on tape). Protest mobilization was the most decisive variable between police killings

that skyrocketed on social media and those that did not. Accompanied by a lesser movement response, many victims' deaths were far less amplified in the public dialogue.

The level of active support in this set of social media data also illustrates how successful movement cycles raise the baseline of support. Interviewed by *USA Today* in August 2016, Deen Freelon, one of the authors of the “Beyond the Hashtag” report, said, “The lack of an indictment against Wilson [...] was the tipping point. Twitter activity around the movement never fell to its former levels and a higher baseline emerged.” As we stated earlier in [Movements advance in cycles, and so will active support metrics](#), momentum will dramatically increase around a trigger event and then inevitably contract. The key to a successful trigger event is that even after active support contracts, a new baseline of support exists that exceeds levels prior to the spike.

[57] Deen Freelon, Charlton D. McIlwain, and Meredith D. Clark, “Beyond the Hashtags: #Ferguson, #Blacklivesmatter, and the Online Struggle for Offline Justice,” Center for Media and Social Impact, February 29, 2016. <http://cmsimpact.org/resource/beyond-hashtags-ferguson-blacklivesmatter-online-struggle-offline-justice>.

4) Fundraising

Both **individual and institutional dollars raised** can be relevant measures of active support.

Individual donations are a useful metric of active support for a variety of reasons. Donations, after all, are one of the easiest entry points for individuals to begin taking action with a group. Clicking through to a donation link may seem like a minimal gesture, but actually putting money towards the movement signifies greater support than other low-effort tasks such as signing a petition.

A mass protest leader we interviewed said that his goal for digital fundraising, although it might appear counterintuitive, was to *decrease* average donation size. He explained that it is a good marker of increased participation to be generating more donors, even if they give at smaller amounts.^[58] Whereas other fundraisers might only look at total dollars, this leader pays attention to how fundraising — and a growing donor pool — can act as a metric of participation.

When movements generate attention through trigger events, individual giving rates increase dramatically. The field of online organizing and digital campaigns has formed considerable infrastructure around this concept — creating channels through which publicity can be funneled into individual giving. Although institutional funders may be slower to act, the same dynamic is true for foundations. When a movement breaks through into the public narrative, its success at gaining public exposure lends it credibility, and it is more likely to attract institutional and major donors.

Like other metrics, an increase in funds raised by a movement can either be tracked within a single organization or across multiple organizations. Groups affiliated with the movement will often experience a surge of resources when mass protest activity successfully engages the public. For example, after Dr. Martin Luther King led a dramatic escalation campaign against segregation in Birmingham, a swell of fundraising activity from both large and small donors benefitted both SCLC and the entire ecology of the Civil Rights movement. As historian Taylor Branch recounts, “A single week’s events had brought some \$150,000 to the SCLC.”^[59] That week launched the organization into its most well-resourced year yet, as the annual budget approached \$1 million for the first time in 1964.^[60]

[58] This concept has become popular in grassroots election campaigning. Howard Dean was one of the first ‘outsider’ politicians to experiment with small donation fundraising, an approach which has since been refined by the presidential campaigns of both Barack Obama and Bernie Sanders. Wired Staff, “How the Internet Invented Howard Dean,” *Wired*, January 1, 2004. <https://www.wired.com/2004/01/dean>

[59] Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), p. 806.

[60] Southern Christian Leadership Conference Income Statement, September 1, 1963 to August 31, 1964, The King Center Archive, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/sclc-annual-financial-report>

Example: The Movement for Black Lives Fund

In 2016, a host of diverse organizations came together to create the [Movement for Black Lives](#) (M4BL), a unified effort working to change unjust conditions for black people in America. The groups aimed to coordinate across the racial justice movement ecology. This led to a desire to pool funds, to maximize efficiency in fundraising, and to make distribution of funds more autonomous. Understanding that they could do more by working together, the groups decided to use the pooled fund for a variety of mission-related purposes, including directing money to specific local initiatives and rapid-response political actions.

When large mobilizations occurred, the fund became a key piece of infrastructure that supported mobilization on the ground and captured new donations as attention to the cause increased. Powered by the support of the Borealis Philanthropy and Solidaire, the M4BL pooled fund is a great example of how philanthropy can engage in strategic partnerships to support mass protest builders.

5) New organizations

Our research demonstrates that when a booming protest movement breaks into the public consciousness, many **new organizations** form across the ecology. Energized by new people flocking to the movement, these organizations may directly use the movement's brand, or choose to highlight a sub-issue. Regardless, they benefit from the energy and enthusiasm the mass protest efforts have created.

Many new organizations and initiatives appear *during* the height of a mass protest movement, meeting emergent needs or amplifying the message. These include: external communications (i.e. newspapers), internal communications (i.e. online forums), housing networks, food drives, volunteer training programs, and more. Sometimes these temporary initiatives go on to establish themselves as lasting organizations, with valuable institutional memory on how to engage a moment of mobilization.

Additionally, other new organizations often form *after* the peak mobilization dies down as leaders regroup and reform into specific entities. These organizations may position themselves within other areas of the movement ecology, as leaders find opportunities to channel the movement's message and energy into new alternative institutions, neighborhood campaigns, or even candidate platforms. (See: [New organizations that emerged from Occupy Wall Street](#) and [New organizations that emerged from #BlackLivesMatter mobilizations](#).)

Example: New organizations that emerged from Occupy Wall Street

Some of the organizations that emerged in the wake the Occupy movement included:

- **Strike Debt, Rolling Jubilee, and The Debt Collective** were all initiatives founded by former Occupy leaders to call attention to the burdensome realities of debt and fight for economic justice. As of 2018, Rolling Jubilee has abolished over \$31 million in loans by buying back people's unfair debts.
- **Occupy Sandy** formed as a rapid-response disaster relief effort during Hurricane Sandy in New York City, directly making use of the communications and network platforms that had been established by the mass protest movement one year earlier. Journalists and public officials credited Occupy Sandy with a greater impact than FEMA.
- **The Crown Heights Tenant Union** was established by former Occupy leaders to help tenants gain greater rights in one of the most rapidly-gentrifying neighborhoods in New York City.
- **Movement NetLab** is a think tank and community of practitioners that emerged out of its founders' experiences with and study of the decentralized networks of Occupy Wall Street and Occupy Sandy. It continues to support new movements and organizations.
- **Fight for \$15** is an ambitious campaign to raise the minimum wage for fast food workers to \$15 per hour that has clocked many city, state, and corporate wins. Although it had an existence independent of Occupy, the mass mobilization helped to revitalize its efforts. One offshoot organization, 15 Now, points to a clear connection between this union-driven fight and the Occupy protests: "The movement for a minimum wage of \$15/hour is an expression of this enormous problem of inequality. The support for the fast food workers actions for \$15 showed that the aspirations of Occupy to fight against poverty and inequality are alive and growing among millions."^[61]
- **The Bernie Sanders presidential campaign** utilized a burgeoning national opposition to corporate greed and corrupt politics as its central message, and demonstrated strong ties (including staffing) to the social movements that aligned with that message throughout the run.

[61] "About," 15 Now, 2018. <https://15now.org/about/>

Example: New organizations emerged from #BlackLivesMatter mobilizations

Organizations that came directly out of mass protest events or convenings associated with the #BlackLivesMatter movement include:

- **The Movement for Black Lives** is a coalition that brought together many racial justice organizations to develop a comprehensive platform that has been used to advocate for concrete judicial and legislative reform.
- **BlackOUT Collective** is a black-led direct action training and organizing group based in Oakland, which was inspired to meet a growing need for black-led direct action trainers at the Ferguson protests in the fall of 2014.
- **Million Hoodies Movement for Justice and Black Youth Project 100** are both member-based organizations that were formed in the wake of the acquittal of George Zimmerman in 2013 and expanded to major cities across the country during the height of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in 2014.
- **Black Liberation Collective** was founded in 2015 after the Movement for Black Lives convening in Cleveland and is specifically dedicated to engaging institutions of higher education around racial justice.
- Other groups include the Ferguson Response Network (2014), HandsUp United (2014), NYC Shut It Down (2014), and WhiteCoats4BlackLives (2014).

Measuring Passive Support

Mass protest movements exert their main influence by changing overall social and political conditions, affecting what is considered social common sense and what measures are feasible to pursue politically. While active support metrics are useful to track intermediate steps as mass movements develop, passive support metrics can be used to track how political conditions change.

Passive support is a measure of the number of people who support a movement's overall goals, even if they have not necessarily acted on those opinions. As with active support, there are a variety of ways to measure shifts in passive support. We recommend the following metrics to track how a mass protest movement is influencing the political climate.

Metrics of passive support:

1. **Public opinion polls**
2. **Media coverage**
3. **Narrative adoption**
4. **Voting trends**

These measurements are barometers of discourse and attitudes among the general public, the primary terrain where mass protest makes its influence known. Where others might track outcomes by how politicians shift their commitments or how corporations adjust their

behavior, we focus on the viewpoints of broad public constituencies. Public opinion polling is perhaps the most commonly used of these metrics, but our research has shown that the other three can also point to shifts in public discourse. Because each are proxies for what broad public constituencies believe, using multiple measurements together will produce a more accurate read on the political climate at any point in time.

Below, we explain each metric in detail and provide examples of how they can be used to track the impact of mass protest activity. By embracing these metrics, funders can set reasonable expectations for mass protest grantees when assessing their impact. These metrics can also inform the activities funders might look to resource — activities that interface directly with the public and the media.^[62]

Active support tends to generate passive support

There is often a clear link between shifts in active and passive support. The data consistently shows an increase in passive support during or directly after an increase in active support. In other words, public opinion tends to shift with increased movement activity.

Of course, the relationship between movement activity and passive support is not always directly linear. Sometimes an inverse relationship exists where an issue has significant latent public support, but the relevant movement has been demobilized and active support is low. Until the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida, gun control was one of the more dramatic examples of this inverse relationship. For decades, a vast majority of the American public has supported stricter gun laws, but there has been very little mobilization to activate that latent support. Active and passive support must work together to succeed — one is not sufficient without the other.

Over the course of any movement's development, a lot of participation can take place without significant media coverage or spikes in public attention. Small symbolic actions can sustain a base of active supporters, and they can have incremental effects on passive support over time. But just as trigger events generate rapid increases in movement participation, they can also prompt rapid shifts in public opinion. Throughout the data, we see a frequent correlation between trigger events and spikes in passive support indicators.

1) Public opinion polls

Public opinion polls are a key tool to understand how passive support changes over time. Polling provides an approximation of how people understand the issues. Although polling

[62] Our focus here is to highlight how funders can use passive support metrics, but understanding the level of passive support around any given issue is also useful for mass protest leaders, who can use that information to identify strategic opportunities for action. Some of these applications include:

- At the onset of a movement, passive support metrics can be used to assess the current social and political landscape and determine a strategy that shifts those conditions.
- Passive support metrics can be used to track shifts in support among particular public constituencies, allowing organizers to identify which populations and sub-groups could potentially advance the movement's goals as active supporters.
- Leaders can use passive support metrics to understand which issues resonate with certain audiences, and therefore assess whether tactics or messaging will be received positively or negatively.

is imperfect, when pollsters ask broad, values-based questions consistently over time, the answers can give us a sense of where the public stands on a particular issue. This lets us track how public sentiment fluctuates relative to movement activity.

It is important to note that we are more concerned with polling data showing public support for underlying issues, not necessarily support for movements themselves. As referenced in [Active Popular Support](#) in Part 2, the public can dislike a mass protest movement's *tactics* but still grow more sympathetic to the movement's position. (In the case of the Civil Rights movement, for example, it was not uncommon for respondents to indicate that they disliked student lunch-counter sit-ins, while at the same time indicating that they believed more needed to be done to address discrimination and racial inequality.) Even if a movement is unpopular with a large swath of the public, it can be deemed successful if it wins a majority of people over to its cause.

In reference to movements, we look at polling differently than some. Political analysts typically focus on the middle of the graph, as election campaigns strategize how to draw middle-ground respondents towards their side. They craft their political messaging to appeal to that middle ground. As we outlined in [Active and passive support shift by drawing moral lines in the sand](#) in Part 2, mass protest movements employ a different approach. By activating the most loyal and ardent supporters, polarization pulls neutrals towards the movement's side. As in a tug of war, movements pull support from one end to the other.

Shifts in public support look different depending on the issue, and they can reflect a complex process. When the immigrant rights movement peaked in 2006, for instance, the polls show that (majority white) middle America remained relatively unchanged in its views. However, the country's Latino population became extremely polarized at this time, shifting large numbers of voters away from away from the Republican Party. That trend was seen as an expansion of the 'Prop 187 Effect.'^[63] A detailed breakdown of public opinion, providing disaggregated data on specific demographic groups, is not always publicly available. But when it is, that data can offer an invaluable picture of how the public is relating to a mass protest movement.

In general, analyzing polling data is a complex endeavor, and over-specialization in this one metric offers limited returns. We do not recommend that funders or social movement organizations go down the rabbit hole of analyzing large amounts of public opinion data, which sometimes presents conflicting indications of public perceptions (for more, see: [Addendum #1: Limitations of Public Opinion Polling](#)). The most clear and relevant kind of data for mass protest movements comes from looking at a single, values-based question over a period of multiple years, highlighting shifts over time.

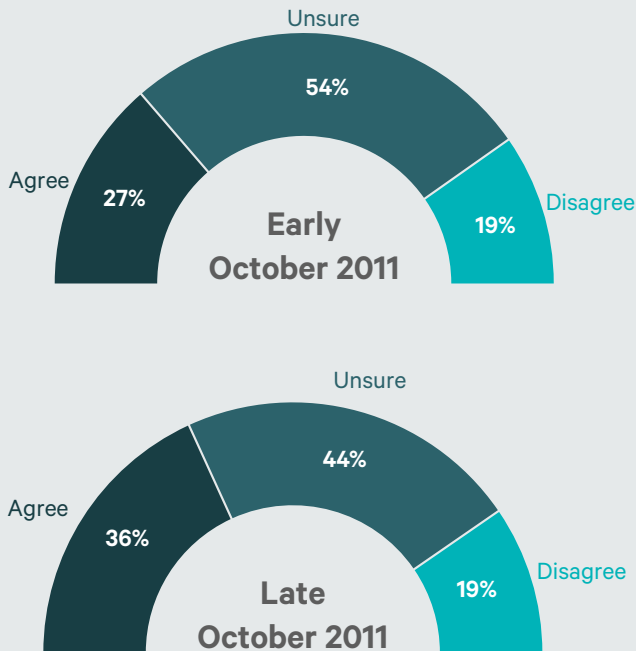
[63] The 'Prop 187 Effect' refers to a major polarization in California following the passage of an anti-immigrant ballot measure put forward by the state's Republicans in 1994. Proposition 187 signaled a large shift in public opinion away from the Republican Party, particularly among Latinos. Between 1968 and 1988, the state's electoral votes had gone to the Republican candidate in every presidential election. But organizing against Proposition 187 helped turn the tide. From 1992 to 2012, Democrats swept 6 of 6 presidential elections in California. Latino Decisions senior analysts Dr. David Damore and Dr. Adrian Pantoja argue that this is primarily due to the Latino vote. Matt Barreto, "The Prop 187 Effect: How the California GOP lost their way and implications for 2014 and beyond," *Latino Decisions*, October 17, 2013. <http://www.latinodecisions.com/blog/2013/10/17/prop187effect/>.

Example: Occupy Wall Street creates rapid polling shifts

Occupy Wall Street is a great example of a mass protest movement that many people have written off as unsuccessful, but nevertheless played an important role in building public support for economic justice.

A combination of polls over the course of a few months shows that support for the movement's issues increased significantly during Occupy's most intensive period of activity. In October 2011, ORC International surveyed 1,050 adult Americans on whether they were becoming more supportive of the movement's positions. Early in the month, just as the Occupy movement was commencing, only 27% of those polled said they agreed with Occupy's position. ORC polled again between October 28 and 31, and the results showed 36% in support, reflecting a significant increase in support that month.^[64] Finally, in early December, a separate poll conducted by Pew reported 48% in agreement with "the concerns the protests have raised" — an increase of 21 points in just six weeks.^[65]

Do You Support the Occupy Wall Street Movement's Positions?

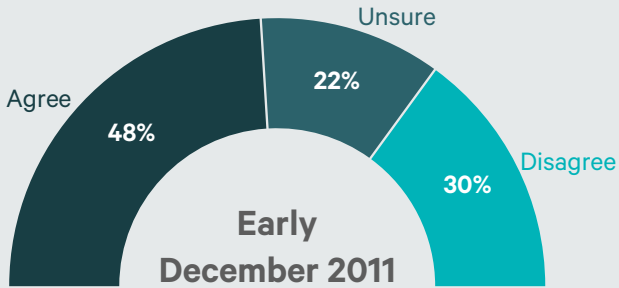


Kevin Liptak. "More Americans supporting Occupy Wall Street." CNN, 2011.

[64] Kevin Liptak, "More Americans Supporting Occupy Wall Street," *CNN Politics*, November 3, 2011. <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2011/11/03/more-americans-supporting-occupy-wall-street/>.

[65] "Frustration with Congress Could Hurt Republican Incumbents," Pew Research Center, December 15, 2011. <http://www.people-press.org/2011/12/15/frustration-with-congress-could-hurt-republican-incumbents/>

Do You Agree With Concerns the Protests Have Raised?



Pew Research Center. "Frustration with Congress Could Hurt Republican Incumbents." 2011.

This set of polls provides a vivid example of how movement activity moves people across the spectrum of support. A main indicator of shifts in public support is that the number of people in the *neutral* category shrinks as people are compelled to 'choose a side.' As this happens, the percentages of people who either *agree* or *disagree* with Occupy's aims grow. But because Occupy attracted greater passive support than opposition, the movement effectively shifted the public towards the movement's position.

Because Occupy Wall Street's main cycle of escalation only lasted around three months (New York City's Zuccotti Park stood from September to November 2011), its long-term impact was limited. Yet the shift in public opinion it caused should not be underestimated. In the following section on [Policy, Legal, and Electoral Gains](#), we will see how this boost in passive support not only allowed adjacent organizations to benefit from a surge in participants and resources, but also opened up space for key policy work in state legislatures and altered critical political narratives at the national level.

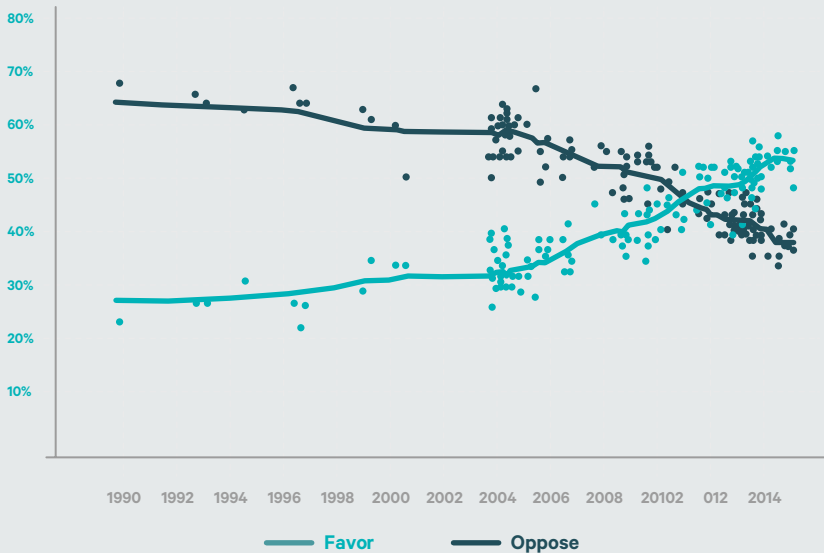
Example: The marriage equality movement's effect on public opinion

Support for same-sex marriage was once seen as a politically fatal stance. In 1990, in polls, three-fourths of Americans responded that gay sex was immoral and less than one-third indicated that they would support same-sex marriage. In line with this sentiment, the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act defined marriage as a union between man and woman. In 2004, conservative strategist Karl Rove saw same-sex marriage as a “potent wedge issue” and pushed for “marriage protection” amendments to be placed on the ballot in 13 states. This resulted in what the Baltimore Sun dubbed a “coast-to-coast rejection of gay marriage.”^[66] For many advocates, the cause seemed doomed.

As we argue in [Part 2](#), the fight for marriage equality battled on the terrain of public opinion, shifting attitudes to pave the way for court decisions and political wins. By embracing a public opinion strategy, the movement was able to alter the landscape around marriage equality and LGBTQ rights with remarkable speed.

In a 2014 study entitled “National Trends in Public Opinion on LGBT Rights in the United States,” political scientist Andrew Flores analyzed more than 325 national public opinion surveys on LGBTQ rights issues, dating back to June 1977. The study showed that support for marriage equality in polls had doubled between the early 2000s and 2014.^[67]

Marriage Equality National Trends in Public Opinion



Andrew Flores. "National Trends in Public Opinion on LGBT Rights in the United States." Williams Institute, 2014.

[66] Mark and Paul Engler, *Waging Nonviolence*, "When the pillars fall — How social movements can win more victories like same-sex marriage," July 9, 2014. <https://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/pillars-fall-social-movements-can-win-victories-like-sex-marriage/>

[67] Andrew Flores. "National Trends in Public Opinion on LGBT Rights in the United States." Williams Institute, 2014. <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/72t8q7pg>.

Why did public attitudes change so abruptly? Flores describes three categories of potential influences:

- *Age effects*, or “changing your mind on issues as you get older/accumulate experiences.”
- *Period effects*, or variations over time that affect all groups simultaneously, usually from a change in social, cultural, or physical environments.
- *Cohort effects*, or changes across groups of individuals who experience an initial event such as birth or marriage in the same year or years.

Although many people think that attitudes about LGBTQ rights depend primarily on age — younger generations being more accepting than older ones — Flores’ study proved otherwise. Flores explained that culture change (or what he classifies as period effects) was undoubtedly the most significant explanation for the shift. As he wrote:

“The data suggests that intergenerational change is less important than it would popularly seem as the shift in favorable public support has come from people of all ages and ideologies in the US. Period effects explain substantially more of the attitude change, indicating that social and cultural shifts affecting the entire population are responsible for a majority of the change in attitudes [on marriage equality].”^[68]

Note that this analysis was from 2014, before the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision ruling that same-sex couples are guaranteed the right to marry. Flores explains the change further:

“Studies report that the national trends in favor have increased quite quickly (Flores 2014; Silver 2013). About 66% of the over-time change is due to people modifying their preexisting opinions on the issue (Baunach 2011, 2012). This upward trend also corresponds with a number of state and federal courts overturning state laws that ban marriages for same-sex couples. Legalization may actually motivate greater support for marriages equality (Barclay and Flores 2014; Flores and Barclay 2014; Kreitzer, Hamilton, and Tolbert 2014). Public opinion backlash from the courts, which was apparent in Lawrence in 2003 (Egan and Persily 2009), appears to no longer describe how the public responds to the Court.”^[69]

The marriage equality movement made sophisticated use of a variety of approaches within the movement ecology. When it found itself up against extremely unfavorable political conditions, it shrewdly chose to shift the public’s commonsense views on LGBTQ rights. Measuring its impact through public opinion polling demonstrates that this approach enabled the movement to completely upend what was considered politically viable in a remarkably short period of time.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

Opportunities for better public opinion polling on movements

We believe movement researchers would benefit from several more effective types of polling, including:

- Polling that asks the right questions — including questions about broader issues and values, separate from polling on the mass protest tactics themselves.
- Polling that asks the same questions consistently over time — including by assessing broad social issues, regardless of whether levels of movement activity are currently high.
- Polling that measures ‘intensity’ of support (see more below) that could be used to categorize segments of the public into a ‘spectrum of support.’
- Polling that is available to the public or to non-profit organizations for free, or for an affordable price.

It is rare but valuable when pollsters approximate how social movement organizers map the ‘spectrum of support’ on an issue. This occurs when pollsters solicit responses of “strongly support,” “somewhat support,” “neutral,” “somewhat oppose,” and “strongly oppose.”

Some recent polling on climate change from the Yale Center on Climate Change Communications (YCCC) maps nicely onto that spectrum, providing a good example of polling data that is particularly relevant to the climate movement.[70] The YCCC’s May-June 2017 report revealed that:

"Six in ten Americans (63%) say the issue of global warming is either “extremely” (10%), “very” (16%), or “somewhat” (38%) important to them personally. Four in ten (37%) say it is either “not too” (22%) or “not at all” (15%) important personally."

The YCCC also asked how often people talk about climate change with friends and family — “often,” “occasionally,” “rarely,” or “never.” Collecting these kinds of responses paints a more nuanced picture of passive support. Those willing to talk about an issue with others are often more likely to act on their beliefs, which may indicate a level of passive support that borders on active movement participation. The YCCC report stated:

"Only one in three Americans (33%) discuss global warming with family and friends “often” or “occasionally,” while most say they “rarely” or “never” discuss it (67%). Additionally, fewer than half of Americans (43%) hear about global warming in the media at least once a month, and only one in five (19%) hear people they know talk about global warming at least once a month."

This is one case in which polling reveals patterns in public opinion that mass protest movements can use. More polling like this could be invaluable to both funders and organizers.

[70] *Climate Change in the American Mind* (Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication, May 2017). <http://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/climate-change-american-mind-may-2017/>

2) Media coverage

In the battle of public opinion, the media is always a prime field of engagement. The more a mass protest movement is mentioned in the media, the more likely its message will become widely understood and accepted. Of course, interplay between public opinion and the media is complex. While media exerts a powerful influence over our lives, it also responds to the behavior and decisions of the public. Yet in spite of those complexities, there is a clear link between how the press portrays a mass movement and how successfully the movement gains support. Successful mobilizations gain attention that fits into the category of ‘earned media,’ or stories and coverage that are not advertising or paid content. Business and political marketers value earned media as one of the most trusted forms of advertising, and therefore a most effective means of influencing the public.^[71]

There are many in-depth ways to analyze media coverage. One straightforward way is to study the *mentions* or *airtime* a movement receives in television, print, and radio journalism. That data can be further broken down into positive or negative coverage, which helps track whether the movement is creating shifts in support or opposition. (For more on the complexities of tracking media coverage see: [Addendum #2: Challenges of Studying News and Social Media Coverage](#).)

In general, the democratization of media through online social platforms has benefited mass protest movements. The at-your-fingertips nature of shares, posts, and hashtags enhances the capacity of an emerging movement to generate earned media. Active support on social media not only expands a mass protest movement’s potential reach; it also fosters coverage additional coverage in the mainstream media.^[72]

Example: #BlackLivesMatter in social and traditional media

Tracking the viral hashtag #BlackLivesMatter shows how active support through social media has a direct influence on mainstream media coverage.

To understand the relationship between social media activity, mainstream media coverage of #BlackLivesMatter, and trigger events, we compared Twitter activity documented in the “Beyond the Hashtags” report (conducted by the Center for Media and Social Impact) to data on percent airtime on television news networks from GDELT’s Television News Explorer.^[73] Looking at three keywords related to the themes of the movement, we can see that spikes in Twitter activity and TV airtime repeatedly correspond.

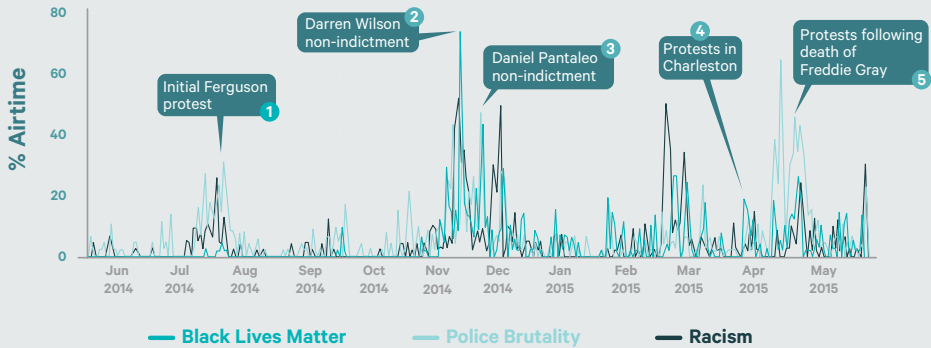
[71] “Nielsen: Earned Advertising Remains Most Credible among Consumers; Trust in Owned Advertising on the Rise,” *Nielsen*, September 17, 2017. <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/press-room/2013/nielsen--earned-advertising-remains-most-credible-among-consumer.html>

[72] We categorize most social media activity as an indicator of active support.

[73] We compared several related terms, including “Black Lives Matter,” “police brutality,” and “racism” (context keyword: “police”) using the GDELT dataset.

Trigger events on Twitter versus TV Airtime

TV airtime keyword search:
Black Lives Matter, police brutality,
racism (context keyword: police)



Television data sourced from GDELT Television Explorer.

Twitter data sourced from the report "Beyond the Hashtags": Deen Freelon, Charlton D. McIlwain, Meredith D Clark.

"Beyond the hashtags: #Ferguson, #Blacklivesmatter, and the online struggle for offline justice." Center for Media & Social Impact, 2016.

While the relationship between social media and institutional journalism is complex, it is largely accepted that decentralized media platforms like Twitter generate attention for events that might not have otherwise been prioritized in the mainstream news.^[74] Here, however, we are not trying to show a causal relationship between the two, but to show how measures of both active and passive support can be tracked in tandem.

Between the three keywords, the overall trend is that the six major spikes in active support (representing total tweets of at least 500,000 per day) each correlate directly to a spike in television media coverage.^[75] Those spikes — both in social media participation and television media coverage — correspond to high-profile trigger events such as the non-indictment of Darren Wilson and the death of Freddie Gray. Thus, participation rose in tandem with the movement's position in the national dialogue. It is also interesting to note that the small symbolic action of protestors

[74] A study by Bethany A. Conway, Kate Kenski, and Di Wang summarizes: "While the newspaper-to-Twitter relationship suggests news media are influencing candidate and party reactions on Twitter, the reverse indicates Twitter may constitute a resource to bypass media gatekeepers, serving as a new source for journalistic content. Our results suggest both are taking place — the influence between Twitter and the top newspapers in the U.S. is reciprocal, generally speaking."

Bethany A. Conway, Kate Kenski and Di Wang, "The Rise of twitter in the Political Campaign: Searching for Intermedia Agenda-Setting Effects in the Presidential Primary," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 2, no. 4, July 1, 2015. <https://academic.oup.com/jcmc/article/20/4/363/4067549>

[75] The graph shows that while the media started picking up on the moral frames of "racism" and "police brutality" as early as Ferguson's first protests in August 2014, the identification of "Black Lives Matter" as the movement's brand did not take place until the movement escalated in response to the non-indictment of Darren Wilson in November 2014. Longtime Ohio organizer James Hayes confirmed that "Black Lives Matter" did not become synonymous with the movement coming out of Ferguson until the winter of 2014.

shutting down the Mall of America in December 2014 garnered coverage on TV, but the same event did not make as much of a splash on Twitter. This shows us that while the impact of movement escalations on active and passive support can vary, an overall escalation has a traceable effect on public engagement and attention.

3) Narrative adoption

Among social movement practitioners, an emerging field is developing better means to understand and document narrative change. This work has created a lot of innovation around social marketing and how narrative frames influence behavior. But often, what is possible to change through narrative is much more narrow without access to larger amounts of earned media. Narrative change campaigns can make incremental adjustments within specific populations, which might be useful for passing a bill. But these campaigns have the same limitations as structure organizing: they may affect a specific population but typically are not designed to produce broad shifts across a variety of constituencies. Many of the most substantial, national-level narrative shifts have happened in conjunction with mass protest movements that have the capacity to raise the dialogue to critical heights and reframe entire political debates.

Example: Occupy media framing

The example of Occupy Wall Street (OWS) demonstrates how a mass protest movement can insert a message into the media discussion or reframe how an issue is being covered. Occupy Wall Street substantially impacted the media conversation by making *income inequality* a key topic in public discourse.

A study published by *Communication, Culture, and Critique* in November 2012 collected numerous instances of mainstream commentators who acknowledge Occupy's impact on the tenor of mainstream debate. Authors Kevin M. DeLuca, Sean Lawson, and Ye Sun list some of the more prominent examples:

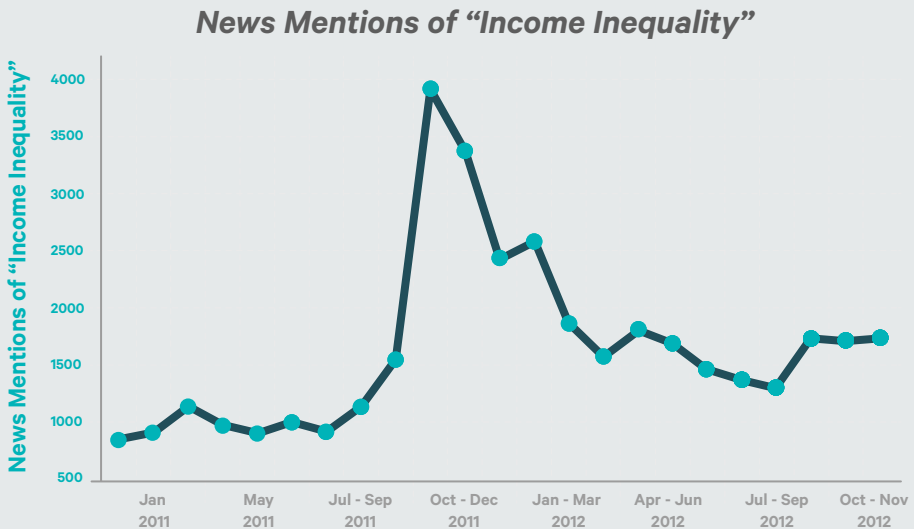
"Politico's Ben Smith declared that 'Occupy Wall Street is Winning' (Smith, 2011). Nobel laureate and New York Times columnist Paul Krugman noted after the first weeks of OWS, 'Inequality is back in the news, thanks largely to Occupy Wall Street' (Krugman, 2011). Businessweek acknowledged, 'The protest against income inequality that has taken over a park near Wall Street and public squares around the world is also occupying the U.S. political debate' (Deprez & Dodge, 2011). Even Matthew Continetti, opinion editor of the conservative Weekly Standard, admitted, 'Over the last few weeks the ground of American politics has

shifted to the left [...] The Congressional Budget Office then released a report highlighting increased income inequality and seeming to prove Occupy Wall Street's claim that the top 1 percent of Americans might as well live in a different country' (Continetti, 2011)."^[76]

Two years after the movement died out, Dan Cantor, Director of the Working Families Party, reflected on how the movement fostered attention to inequality among politicians and the public alike:

"We are living in the world Occupy made. We are the beneficiaries of what they did in terms of making this about inequality, which is, from our point of view, the core issue of our time — economic inequality, racial inequality, environmental inequality, and so on [...] It's impossible to overstate what that 99 percent meant in terms of people's consciousness."^[77]

The following graph, adapted from a report by Ruth Milkman, Stephanie Luce, and Penny Lewis, shows how the number of mentions of "income inequality" in the news changed in the period between January 2011 and November 2012:



Ruth Milkman, Stephanie Luce and Penny Lewis.

"Changing the Subject: A Bottom-Up Account of Occupy Wall Street in New York City." *Journal of the Social Sciences*, 2013.

[76] Kevin M. DeLuca, Sean Lawson and Ye Sun, "Occupy Wall Street on the Public Screens of Social Media: The Many Framings of the Birth of a Protest Movement," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 5, no. 4, November 9, 2012. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1753-9137.2012.01141.x>.

[77] Dan Cantor, Interview by Juan González, "'We Are Living in the World Occupy Made': New York City Voters Elect Mayor Who Vows to Tax the Rich," *Democracy Now*, November 8, 2013. https://www.democracynow.org/2013/11/8/we_are_living_in_the_world.

We can see that news mentions of “income inequality” spiked during Occupy’s peak escalation period in September and November 2011. But we can also clearly tell that the level of mentions attains a higher baseline after the movement’s peak — an increase of about a third relative to pre-Occupy levels. In other words, even after mass protest activity died down, the activism had a lasting impact on public conversation.

As Jonathan Matthew Smucker, an Occupy organizer quoted in Milkman, Luce, and Lewis’ report, states:

“Its success to me is in changing the national narrative, naming the huge elephant in the room: economic inequality and a political system that’s rigged to serve the few at the cost of the many. In a very short time this became the new common sense. The character of news stories and the national conversation just changed. It’s not that the conservative narrative went away, but it lost a lot of credibility and stopped being the driving force.”^[78]

In a later update released in 2014, Milkman wrote about how Occupy’s underlying reframe of economic inequality led to a new baseline of discussion that persisted even years later:

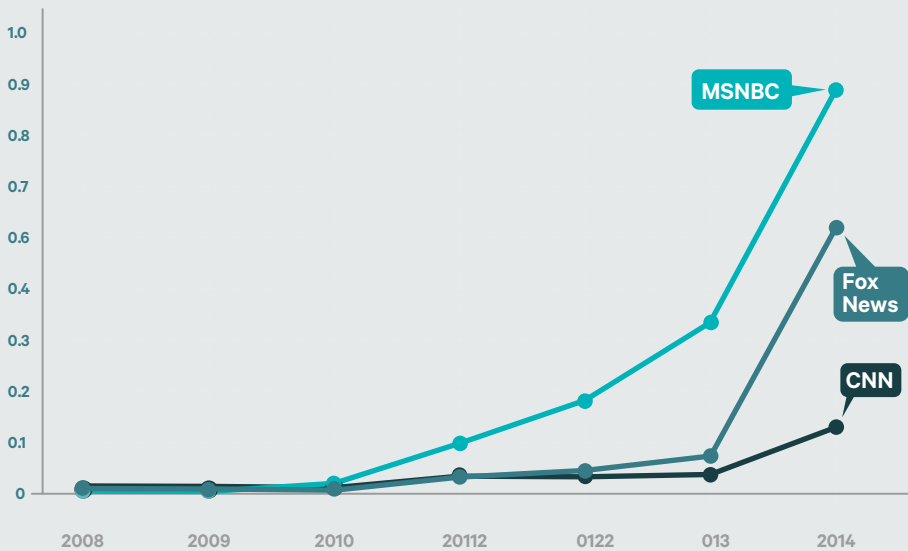
“I ran the numbers again this week, and I have to admit I was surprised by the results. As we’d seen before, in the year after Occupy’s peak, the numbers stayed higher: 30-50 percent above the pre-Occupy discussion. But beginning in the fall of 2013, the numbers reached Occupy levels again, and this time rising to over 2,000 mentions of the phrase ‘income inequality’ in December 2013 — over 50 percent more than Occupy’s peak. Of course, I shouldn’t have been surprised to see this rise. The occupations have gone away, but neither the crisis nor the resistance has disappeared. Low-wage and precarious workers are at the forefront of the fights today, and they are keeping inequality in the spotlight.”

A 2014 study by the *FiveThirtyEight* team found that mentions of “inequality” in the media rose along with the Occupy protests, on both MSNBC and Fox (although less so on CNN), and continued to rise afterwards, with the shift in narrative outlasting the movement itself:

[78] Ruth Milkman, Stephanie Luce and Penny Lewis, “Changing the Subject: A Bottom-Up Account of Occupy Wall Street in New York City,” *Journal of the Social Sciences*, January 2013. <https://www.russellsage.org/research/reports/occupy-wall-street-movement>

Mentions of “Inequality” Per Hour of Programming

Original news programming only



Nate Silver. "Inequality' Booms on MSNBC And Fox News (CNN's Looking For Flight 370)." *FiveThirtyEight*, 2014.

As *FiveThirtyEight* writer Nate Silver notes, once inequality became an important topic of public concern, it remained in the headlines and gained momentum from subsequent trigger events:

"In 2008, the year Barack Obama was elected the first African-American president and the global economy teetered near collapse, the word 'inequality' was used just 14 times on the liberal-leaning cable network MSNBC. So far in

2014, which is barely more than a third over, the word has been said 647 times on the network. [...]

A good amount of the increase came in 2011, the year of the Occupy Wall Street protests, when MSNBC used 'inequality' about five times more often than it did in 2010. But the term's frequency has continued to increase since then. This year, as the economist Thomas Piketty's treatise on inequality has topped best-seller lists, the word is on pace to be used more than twice as often on MSNBC as it was in 2013."^[79]

[79] Nate Silver, Nate. "Inequality' Booms on MSNBC And Fox News (CNN's Looking For Flight 370)." *FiveThirtyEight*. May 7, 2014. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/inequality-booms-on-msnbc-and-fox-news-cnns-looking-for-flight-370/>

The brilliance of Occupy's popular messaging — framing our core national problem as inequality between the 99% and the 1% — is that it created an umbrella that could accommodate a variety of sub-issues, ranging from the housing crisis to student debt to inadequate health care. But Occupy did not merely come up with clever ways to frame these issues; the movement used mass mobilization to force its issues onto the public map. Liberal think tanks and left-wing economists had been talking for years about the growing gap between America's rich and poor. But it was not until Occupy made global headlines, through a series of successful trigger events, that this message made a lasting impact upon the public debate.

4) Voting trends

Another way to track passive support is by analyzing voting patterns around particular issues. One relatively straightforward indicator is the results of votes on **propositions and referenda**. In these cases, the public is voting directly on an issue — rather than on a candidate who takes stances on multiple issues — and the outcomes allow observers to more easily gauge public sentiment on that topic. However, geography typically limits these votes. They are helpful in gaining insight on the local or state level, but less so for establishing national trends.

Political analysts can also study wider **voting trends**, such as how specific demographic groups interact with a given political party. When support for Republicans declined among the Latino community in the early 2000s, analysts concluded that changing sentiments on immigration drove the shift. There is strong evidence to suggest that heightened immigrant rights movement activity — most notably the spring 2006 mass marches that activated millions of participants — was a key factor in altering community attitudes. After 2006, Latinos became a more solidly Democratic voting block, due in large part to GOP stances on immigration. (See: [Immigrant rights voting](#).)

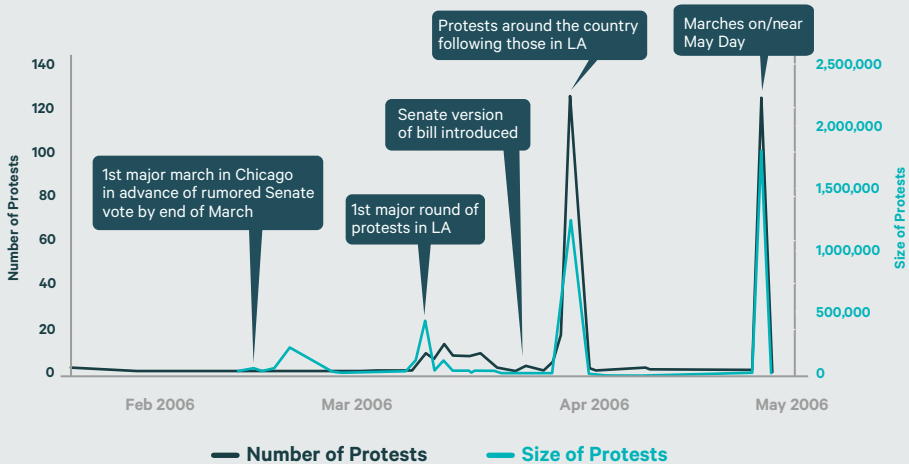
Analyzing voting data does present some difficulties. The fact that most elections touch on a variety of issues the public cares about — in addition to candidates' personalities and backgrounds — makes it difficult to reach definitive conclusions about how election results reflect passive support. But when careful analysis is available, voting can be a useful window into public sentiment. Sometimes, it can also provide compelling evidence for how mass protest may be shifting viewpoints.

Example: Immigrant rights voting

In 2005, Representative F. James Sensenbrenner (R-Wisconsin) introduced House Resolution 4437. The legislation proposed a series of draconian anti-immigrant measures that would have made being in the U.S. without authorization (also known as being ‘undocumented’) a criminal infraction rather than a civil one. The bill would have also made providing support to undocumented immigrants a crime; in addition, it required companies to use E-Verify to make sure their employees were documented, and called for new border fencing. The bill passed the House on December 16, 2005 by a vote of 239 to 182 (with 92% of Republicans supporting and 82% of Democrats opposing). Known as the “Sensenbrenner bill,” HR 4437 catalyzed widespread outrage and protest.

In the spring of 2006, the immigrant rights movement mobilized against the extremist legislation. An estimated total of between 3.5 million and 5.1 million people participated in marches, which took place in more than 140 cities and 39 states. Two of the first cities to hold marches — with hundreds of thousands of people in Chicago and more than one million participants in Los Angeles — launched the issue into the public spotlight. These initial demonstrations so effectively established opposition to the proposal that when a version of the bill came to the Senate floor, nationwide protests ensued involving millions of participants.^[80] The movement channeled this momentum into a call for more national protests on May 1, which garnered similar levels of active support.

Spikes in Immigrant Rights Protests



Graph by Michael Jones-Correa, Sophia J. Wallace and Chris Zepeda-Millán.

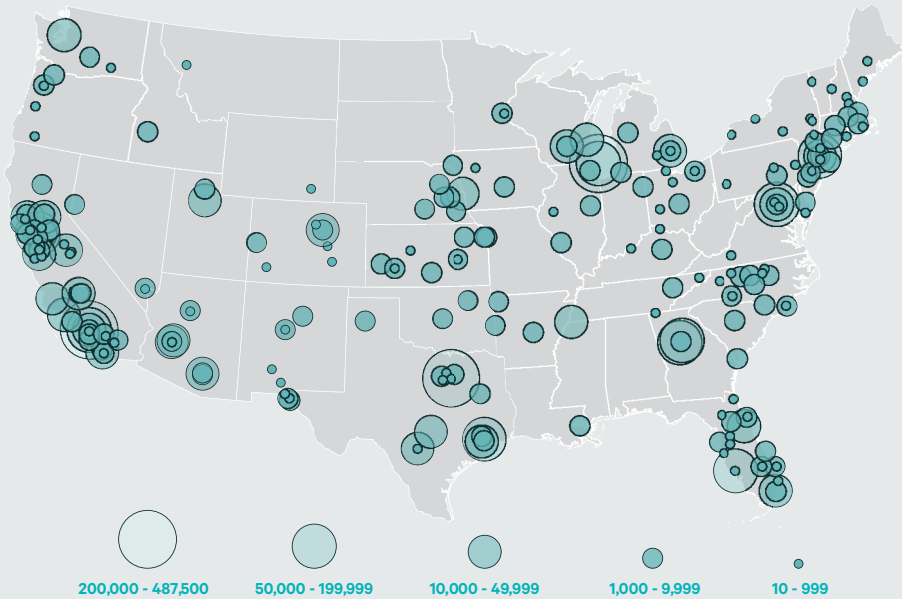
"The large-scale protests over immigrants' rights in 2006 shifted how Latinos view the U.S. political system and their own abilities to influence government outcomes." *United States Politics and Policy*, 2013. Dates added.

[80] Full per-city estimates can be found in a dataset compiled by Xóchitl Bada, Jonathan Fox, Elvia Zazueta, and Ingrid García for the Wilson Center. They estimated total participation in the spring 2006 marches to be about 3.5 million to 5.1 million.

Xóchitl Bada, Jonathan Fox, Elvia Zazueta, and Ingrid García, *Immigrant Rights Marches, Spring 2006*, produced and distributed by the Wilson Center. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Data.pdf>.

Size and Location of Immigrant Rights Protests

Feb 2006 - May 2006



Michael Jones-Correa, Sophia J. Wallace and Chris Zepeda-Millán.

"The large-scale protests over immigrants' rights in 2006 shifted how Latinos view the U.S. political system and their own abilities to influence government outcomes." *United States Politics and Policy*, 2013.

[81]

The intensity of protest participation offered an impressive display of active support. It also provided an interesting look at how active participation translated into passive support shifts across the entire Latino community. One of the slogans of the 2006 marches was "Hoy marchamos, mañana votamos." ("Today we march, tomorrow we vote.") This raises the question: did Latino voters vote differently in the aftermath of the marches?

Although there is little evidence for an increased number of overall voters, compelling data indicates that an increasing number of Latino voters switched their vote away from Republicans to the Democratic Party. An academic study of the 2006 midterms, published in 2008, suggests a significant shift in Latino voting. As University of Chicago sociologist Kathryn Hoban explained: "Latinos were much more likely to vote Democrat, turning away from the party of the Republican Representative Sensenbrenner."^[82] In comparison to how they voted in the previous

[81] A study by Michael Jones-Correa, Sophia J. Wallace and Chris Zepeda-Millán created a map of protests in terms of size and location from Feb 14th 2006 - May 1 2006:

"The large-scale protests over immigrants' rights in 2006 shifted how Latinos view the U.S. political system and their own abilities to influence government outcomes," *USAPP*, September 2013.

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2013/10/14/latino-immigration-protests-government-attitudes/>.

[82] Kathryn Hoban, "The Emergence and Obstacles of the Immigrant Rights Movement," *Advocates' Forum*, 2008. <http://ssa.uchicago.edu/emergence-and-obstacles-immigrant-rights-movement>.

presidential election, the shift in Latino voting patterns was stark. *The Orange County Register* reported immediately after the election:

“73 percent of Hispanics voted for the Democratic Party on Tuesday, while only 26 percent voted for Republican candidates, [a] CNN exit poll shows. In the 2004 presidential elections, 55 percent of Hispanics voted Democrat and about 42 percent voted Republican... Many candidates who campaigned on get-tough-against-illegal-immigrants were defeated. Randy Graf, an Arizona Republican who centered his campaign on immigrant bashing and supported the Minuteman group, was among the many defeated anti-immigration candidates. Of 15 races where immigration was the center of the debate, tracked by immigration2006.org, 12 were won by immigration moderates and only two by hard-line anti-immigration activists.”^[83]

Witnessing a major demographic group shift nearly 20 points in favor of any political party is a remarkable development. In this case, there is good reason to believe that movement activity catalyzed the shift. By mobilizing large displays of active support for immigrant rights, the movement polarized a key constituency, the Latino community, prompting large numbers of individuals to cross party lines.^[84] Between the movement’s intensive activity in 2006 and continued advocacy to gain legal protections for the Dreamers in the years following, the GOP has been unable to wrest back significant loyalty from the Latino population. This demonstrates how the presence of active support around an issue can have a lasting impact on the political behavior of a sizable slice of the public.

[83] Orange County Register, “The Oppenheimer Report: Immigration issue May Have Doomed GOP in Midterm Vote,” *The Orange County Register*, November 12, 2016. <https://www.ocregister.com/2006/11/12/the-oppenheimer-report-immigration-issue-may-have-doomed-gop-in-midterm-vote/>.

[84] In terms of Latino polarization, the movement response to Sensenbrenner did for the country what Proposition 187 had done for California. (See previous footnote on the ‘Prop 187 Effect.’)

Policy, Legal, and Electoral Gains

By increasing active and passive support, mass protest movements lay the groundwork for key policy, legal, and electoral gains. As we highlighted in [Part 2](#), taking an ecological view is key to understanding how mass protest enables concrete reforms. Mass protest is an inherently indirect strategy. It focuses on creating ‘tectonic shifts’ in the public, changes that rearrange underlying political loyalties and alignments. The skills required to drive that change differ markedly from those needed to negotiate policy compromises or steer court cases. But when it is part of a healthy movement ecology, mass protest can establish the groundwork for such concrete reforms.

Mass protest movements do not always control how changes in the political landscape translate into specific reforms. It is nevertheless important to track the victories that mass protest efforts facilitate, even though this is an effect that often can only be seen in hindsight. Thinking in terms of social movement ecology involves appreciating how each group contributes to a victory, rather than simply ascribing successes to those who managed the endgame of negotiating reforms.

Successful mass protest can have an effect on:

1. **Policy changes**
2. **Litigation**
3. **Candidate platforms and electoral outcomes**

It is perhaps easiest to connect the dots between large, national reforms and the mass movements that foster them, whether the Civil Rights Act, the Supreme Court ruling on marriage equality, or other changes. But it is also useful to see how mass movements pave the way for smaller wins in local and statewide institutions. Before a movement achieves critical mass in active popular support, it can still have a dramatic impact on policy, litigation, and elections, making a real difference in people’s lives. Even a small uptick in active popular support can lead to new wins in schools, churches, local and state governments, and courts.

The Dreamer movement provides an example of smaller wins paving the way to federal reform. Even before DACA — the 2012 executive order that established deferred action for 800,000 childhood arrivals — pressure generated by local active supporters in the immigrant rights movement spurred small victories in universities, city governments, churches, and in the Democratic Party. In symbolic acts of support, local churches gave sanctuary to undocumented people throughout the 2000s. Municipalities with large immigrant populations took stances against cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). And in 2010, during the Dreamer movement’s peak period of activity, several state university systems came out in support of undocumented students. Cumulatively, these stepping-stone changes, combined with a national public outcry, shifted the political climate in favor of protections for Dreamers. That prompted a response from the Obama administration and ultimately paved the way for DACA.

Below, we use contemporary movement examples to illustrate how mass mobilizations helped create the conditions that allowed for important victories.

1) Policy changes

Occupy Wall Street is one example of a movement that leveraged the power of active popular support to secure state and local gains. Prior to the Occupy movement, political strategists pegged the chances of passing new taxes on millionaires as virtually non-existent. That quickly changed as Occupy got underway; activists helped secure a new tax law in New York State only months after the occupations began. In November 2012, California also passed a new 'millionaires tax.'^[85] *Business Insider* directly credited the movement for the two wins:

"Hollywood moguls and Manhattan stock brokers are facing a slap by the Occupy Wall Street movement as California and New York again target high-wage earners to address a continued fiscal crisis in the states. [...] 'Occupy turned the political conversation on its head,' said Richard Brodsky, a senior fellow at the Wagner School at New York University. 'Time was austerity and tax cuts were the only acceptable place to be. Now, income inequality and the 99 percent dominate practical politics. Occupy Wall Street paved the way; [Governors] Cuomo and Brown seized the moment.'^[86]

The #BlackLivesMatter movement has also provoked a groundswell of policy changes in states and localities throughout the country. According to Campaign Zero, a platform that tracks legislative progress on policing and racial justice, 127 pieces of relevant legislation were passed at those levels in just the first two years of the movement. Among these:

- At least 102 laws were enacted between 2015 and 2018 to address police violence.
- New legislation has been enacted in 40 states since 2014.
- 10 states (CA, CO, CT, IL, LA, MD, OR, UT, TX, WA) have enacted legislation addressing three or more Campaign Zero policy categories.
- At least 46 bills are currently being considered in 19 states to address police violence.^[87]

Although #BlackLivesMatter has been criticized for not securing major federal reforms, it has shifted the landscape around police violence enough to produce significant early victories locally. The movement's ultimate impact has yet to be determined.

2) Litigation

It is commonly understood that public opinion affects the decisions of elected candidates and legislators, but many view the court system as detached from the larger public. Social movements prove the contrary. Not only do shifts in the political climate sway court decisions, litigation itself can be a powerful symbolic statement that encourages further changes. "In the real world, before the courts will act, there is almost always some shift in social legitimacy," writes Linda Hirshman, author of *Victory: The Triumphant Gay Revolution*,

[85] "California Proposition 30, Sales and Income Tax Increase (2012)," *Ballotpedia*, 2018.

[https://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_30_Sales_and_Income_Tax_Increase_\(2012\)](https://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_30_Sales_and_Income_Tax_Increase_(2012)).

[86] "Associated Press, "You Can Thank The Occupy Movement For These New Taxes On Millionaires In California And New York," *Business Insider*, December 10, 2011.

<http://www.businessinsider.com/occupy-taxes-millionaires-2011-12>.

[87] Statistics up to date as of March 2018. "Track of Progress Legislation," Campaign Zero, Accessed March 2018. <https://www.joincampaignzero.org/#action>.

a history of the struggle for LGBT rights in the United States. "Civil rights litigation often speeds up the process of social legitimation, because it forces people to take sides in public, but it is almost never the first step."^[88]

In recent memory, there are few better examples of this than the fight for marriage equality. Before marriage equality became feasible at the federal level, growing active popular support for LGBTQ rights led to many small victories in churches, schools, city government, and in professions like therapy and medicine. Such stepping-stone victories created a public climate that made for increasingly successful litigation, as well as for rulings that held better, avoiding reversals. Eventually, the political climate shifted enough that court rulings were no longer ahead of legislation. Iowa's Supreme Court, for instance, decided in 2009 to uphold same-sex marriage, acting significantly out of step with what was possible in the state's legislature. Yet by the time the U.S. Supreme Court guaranteed the right to marry in 2015, legislation had already passed in 19 states, making court action unnecessary in growing swaths of the country. (For more on this example, see: *Same-sex marriage: Hearts and minds, then courts.*)

Same-sex marriage: Hearts and minds, then courts

Many political commentators see the 2015 victory for marriage equality as a primarily the product of Supreme Court jurisprudence and as a the result of dedicated lawyers pushing the issue through the courts. However, this view is incomplete at best. Certainly, legal advocates did critical work. But to tell only their story is to miss the wider picture of social change — and to distort the process by which important legal and political victories are achieved. Take it from one of the lawyers who fought for decades to secure that win: Evan Wolfson.

In 1996, Wolfson was a young lawyer working in Hawaii who was asked to join a landmark case on marriage discrimination. Being in a progressive state like Hawaii, he thought they had a shot at winning marriage equality, and, in fact, they did. In 1996, the Hawaiian Supreme Court made a historic ruling legalizing unions among same-sex couples. Just two years later, however, what seemed like a victory turned into defeat when voters overturned the ruling.

Wolfson was devastated. But this early loss gave him a crucial strategic lesson that would later steer the movement towards national victory. The setback at the polls in Hawaii made him come to a profound realization: That court victories alone were simply not enough. As Wolfson later told *Slate*, "What our movement needed was not just a good case, a good lawyer, one battle here and there. We needed to be able to mount a sustained affirmative campaign to drive a strategy all the way to completion through ups and downs."^[89]

In the 2000s, Wolfson continued pushing forward legal cases in pivotal states such as Massachusetts. But now, he did not limit his work to the courtroom. Instead, he insisted that legal challenges be supplemented with organizing campaigns to engage the public. Campaigns that Wolfson supported set out to tackle public sentiment state by state. In many cases, they sparked mobilizations of tens of thousands of people, including protests that responded to key developments such as the passage of the discriminatory Proposition 8 in California.

[88] Cited in Flores, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/72t8q7pg>

[89] Mark Joseph Stern, "The Marriage Mastermind: How Evan Wolfson Transformed American Society," *Slate*, April 26, 2015. http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/jurisprudence/2015/04/evan_wolfson_freedom_to_marry_he_invented_the_gay_marriage_liberty_and_morality.html

Beyond classic demonstrations, the broader movement for marriage equality worked to gain acceptance within specific institutions, pulling down each pillar that propped up discrimination. Youth constituencies activated campuses around discrimination by establishing LGBTQ clubs at a majority of colleges around the country. Within major religious institutions, there were significant efforts to gain acceptance within congregations and leadership positions. Even professional institutions were pulled into the public debate, like the American Psychiatric Association which was pressured to remove homosexuality from its list of psychological dysfunctions.

Activists used a slew of tactics that ranged from traditional door-knocking campaigns to more creative cultural interventions. The movement actively encouraged people to come out of the closet in their communities — to go beyond revealing their sexual orientation to friends and family, but to make pride in their identity a public statement. That small but significant act of bravery, multiplied by many and strategically placed in the media, helped change America's idea of what it meant to be gay and uplifted the popular banner of 'love = love.' (In fact, the tactic was so effective at shifting public sentiment that it was later replicated by young Dreamers fighting for immigrant rights who 'came out' by the thousands as undocumented in a compelling act of risk and defiance.)

As movement activity expanded, cultural shifts began taking place and marriage equality gained more support across many different constituencies. Although these shifts eventually affected mainstream opinions, they were driven by a smaller minority of people who pushed the issue onto the priority list. As Mark and Paul Engler write in the book *This Is an Uprising*:

"In the case of same-sex marriage, the work of dedicated activists was [...] essential. It was helpful to have families in Middle America approvingly watch Ellen or Will & Grace. But the vast majority of these people were not going to force the issue in their workplaces or make it their top electoral concern. The few who actually pushed at the pillars — petitioning their churches to accept their same-sex weddings, calling for their employers to extend health benefits to same-sex partners, attending rallies, filing lawsuits, defending same-sex couples at their schools' proms, knocking on doors, and demonstrating the electoral muscle of LGBT voters at the polls — were the movement's active supporters."^[90]

Changing the tides of public opinion proved effective. By the time of the Supreme Court's 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling, which legalized same-sex marriage nationally, 37 states and the District of Columbia were already recognizing such unions — a huge shift from 2006, when same-sex marriage was regarded as a third-rail political issue and 26 states had passed amendments explicitly prohibiting it. When the court made its decision, polling showed that a significant majority of Americans cheered this stark reversal.

In an interview on the eve of the Supreme Court ruling, Wolfson painted this picture clearly. He explained how the movement for marriage equality had been priming the American public for this moment by "creat[ing] the climate to encourage the justices to do the right thing." To illustrate the core strategic thrust of the movement, he cited a ruling in Utah in which a judge wrote, "It's not the constitution that has changed, it's our knowledge of what it means to be lesbian or gay."^[91]

What Wolfson's experience showed was that action of the courts was not based solely on legal advocacy but was also a response to public sentiment. Many of us understand instinctively that politicians respond to pressure. But the story of how same-sex marriage was ultimately won shows that public pressure does not just affect legislators wary of re-election, but that it has ramifications in the legal system as well. To get legal victories that would stick, the movement needed campaigns that engaged the public.

[90] Engler and Engler, *This Is an Uprising*, (2016), p. 113.

[91] Colleen Curry, "America Is Ready: Freedom to Marry Founder Evan Wolfson on Gay Marriage and the Supreme Court," *Vice News*, April 27, 2015 <https://news.vice.com/article/america-is-ready-freedom-to-marry-founder-evan-wolfson-on-gay-marriage-and-the-supreme-court>.

3) Elections and candidate platforms

By engaging a vibrant base of public supporters, mass protest movements can give political cover to politicians who might not otherwise take a more progressive stance. To continue with the previous example, the marriage equality movement shifted LGBTQ rights from an issue that was considered toxic to most Democrats' campaigns into a standard plank of mainstream Democratic platforms.

Legislators began acting on gay marriage only when public support reached a critical mass. In 2005, only two Senators — Ron Wyden of Oregon and Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts — openly supported same-sex marriage. Six years later, in 2011, polls showed that public approval of same-sex marriage in the U.S. surpassed 50% for the first time. Soon after, politicians began 'evolving' their positions on the issue *en masse*. What started as a trickle became a river of conversions. In 2012, after Vice President Joe Biden announced his support for same-sex marriage, the floodgates opened. Suddenly, dozens of politicians at all levels of government rushed to pledge their support for marriage equality. In just one week in April 2013, six senators came out in favor. Officials who had never before associated with the decades-old movement suddenly painted themselves as long-time supporters.

By the time the Supreme Court began debating the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act in 2013, the Democratic Party's entire center of gravity had shifted. The Obama administration opted not only to stop defending the act; it filed an amicus brief arguing that the law violated the equal protection clause. Within only a handful of election cycles, the movement completely reversed politicians' calculations on whether to take a stand. By dramatizing the issue's moral dimension and calling upon people to choose a side, the marriage equality movement built massive public awareness and completely changed what was politically 'safe' to support.

In addition to influencing Washington, D.C., the active support garnered by mass protest can fuel a variety of local efforts, including electoral drives. In these cases, a re-energized base of supporters can unseat politicians that do not align with movement goals. Take, for example, the successful 2016 campaign to oust State's Attorney Anita Alvarez in Chicago.^[92] Alvarez had been involved in the mishandling of several cases in which white police officers had shot and killed young, black Chicago residents. In the spring of 2016, local activists who had come together in the #BlackLivesMatter movement worked with established political groups to campaign against Alvarez's reelection. Through concentrated electoral efforts, highly symbolic direct actions, and several large protests, Alvarez went from a 34-point lead in polls to an election loss by over 30 points.

By linking the local election directly to national issues — specifically, the debate about policing that had been amplified through multiple cycles of trigger events and grassroots mobilization since 2014 — the Chicago organizers united a range of disparate groups with widely varying theories of change to secure a targeted instrumental victory. Moreover, they were able to convince traditional political operatives that mobilizing around issues of

[92] For more on this campaign see: "Case Study: #ByeAnita Campaign," *Movement Metrics Research*, Ayni Institute, 2018. <https://movementmetricsresearch.gitbooks.io/movement-metrics-research/content/chapter5/case-study-byeanita-campaign.html>

race and policing could be a winning strategy in the local context. They were able to create greater alignment throughout the social movement ecology — and to reap an important win as a result.^[93]

Conclusion: Movements produce a nexus of outcomes

Whether it is through direct policy change, litigation, or electoral races and candidate platforms, successful mass protest movements can have significant effects. From the perspective of political insiders, change that comes through each of those areas might seem very divergent, because they each draw on different specialists and use different processes (e.g. lobbying versus lawsuits versus electoral campaigning). From the perspective of the movement as a whole, however, these three areas can overlap. For a mass protest effort, it is not always advantageous to favor one avenue over another. Instead, movements focus on shifting conditions and letting the chips fall where they may. In many of our country's most successful movements, stepping stones of legal decisions and legislation went hand in hand. Commonly, by the time the conditions are ripe for these kinds of victories, multiple interventions are secured and reinforce one another. Thus, social movement victory is never a single outcome, but a nexus of outcomes.

Given this reality, funders may find it helpful to trace how mass protest efforts pave the way to securing concrete gains. But they will do movements a disservice by expecting them to produce highly specific policy, legal, or electoral wins. Those advances typically accumulate through a span of years, if not decades, and will inevitably fall outside the scope of a normal grant cycle. We encourage funders to play the long game by resourcing the underlying activities that will best secure wins over time. In the next section, we elaborate on precisely what those activities are and how funders can support them.

[93] The campaign to unseat Alvarez demonstrates another important effect, albeit one that is hard to quantify: Mass protest movements can create greater alignment between different areas of the movement ecology, both across organizations and across theories of change. Because mass mobilizations are meant to capture the widest audience possible, their brand and message can have a unifying effect. Organizations that are split along specific lines of disagreement can find common ground by coming together under the movement's message.

PART 4

Funding Mass Protest Movements

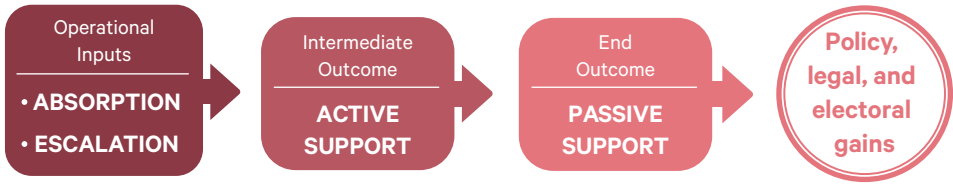
The background features a large, solid red fan-shaped element pointing downwards, centered on the page. Overlaid on this and the rest of the page are several thin, dark red lines that intersect to form various geometric shapes, including triangles and polygons, creating a complex, abstract pattern.

Key Points

- Receiving the right support at the right time in the movement cycle can turn an emergent mobilization into a movement that sustains and wins.
- The primary capacities that are needed to build mass protest movements are the capacities to escalate and absorb.
- Many leaders who emerge during moments of mass protest come from outside established organizations. There is nothing better to arm a multitude of new volunteer leaders than training.
- Creating mechanisms to prevent the most valuable volunteers from burning out is a major need for fledgling movements. Funders can help by giving more resources to groups that have a strategy of absorption to convert one-time participants into ongoing activists. In the U.S., and abroad, the most enduring mass protest movements have incorporated some form of volunteer infrastructure to provide basic needs such as: housing, food, retreat centers, and other in-kind donations.
- Incubating new groups to drive mass protest is often more effective than encouraging established organizations to experiment with mobilizations. In order to encourage movements to take the kinds of risks that can produce breakout moments, there needs to be an extra level of support channeled to organizers willing to plan actions that are most likely to set off trigger events.
- For funders, having the support of a community of peers engaged in the same process, as well as expert advice from a coach to support integration and alignment, increases the odds that they can succeed in resourcing mass protest movements.
- Open dialogue with other funders builds the groundwork for pooled grantmaking that can move different pieces of the ecology and achieve a level of scale that is beyond the reach of any single institution.

What Mass Protest Movements Need to Succeed

Strategic Impact Measurements



Adapted from Balanced Scorecard Institute.

The metrics we outline in [Part 3](#) provide a set of tools that can adequately track the impact of mass protest movements. But in order to maximize success by these measurements, what capacities do groups need to develop? **Operational inputs** can be thought of as the activities needed in order to achieve outcomes. In this case, they are useful to assess the capacity of a single organization to successfully drive mass protest activity. The primary capacities that are needed to build mass protest movements are the capacity to **escalate** and the capacity to **absorb**.

We have discussed at length in [Part 2](#), small symbolic actions and trigger events are the primary forms of mass protest escalation. Absorption is what takes place between escalation cycles. It serves to channel the momentum generated by successful escalation into a new baseline of ongoing active support.

The ability to successfully escalate and absorb largely depends on **leadership capacity** to design successful absorption programs and escalation plans. In other words, the skill of top leaders to understand the complex cycles and dynamics of mass protest is one of the biggest determinants of the success of a mass protest organization. This places significant importance on developing leaders that have depth of understanding within the mass protest tradition.

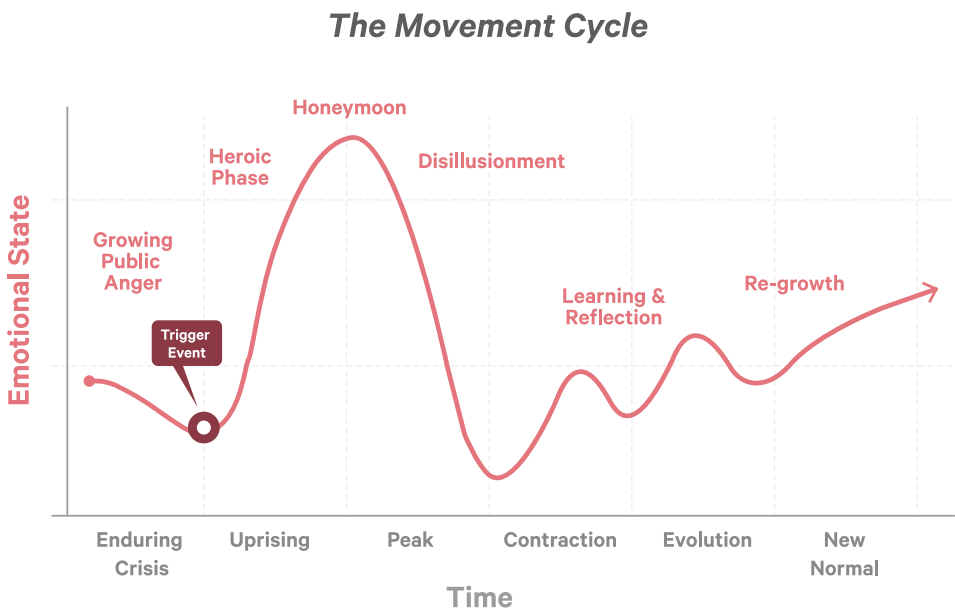
In the sections below, we provide our recommendations on how to philanthropists can fund escalation and absorption, as well as the leadership capacity to design them. Our first set of recommendations are for funders who are interested in making direct interventions in the cycle of escalation and absorption in the **short term**. These are key supports that movements need at the height of mobilization and in order to build towards the next cycle. Our second set of recommendations are for funders who are interested in how to set up **long-term** resources and infrastructure. These are necessary both for mass protest efforts themselves and for funders who need structures of support in order to engage with the mass protest space on an ongoing basis.

Short-Term Funding Recommendations

When mobilizations are at their height, foundations and other major donors are often interested in supporting them, but they do not always know the best approach. Gaining familiarity with the cycles and dynamics of movement growth can help funders assess what support is needed at what time. Below are five tips for how funders can support mass protest movements at different points of their development.

Gauging the movement cycle

When thinking about how funders can best support social movements, it is important to remember that movements go through ups and downs. Mobilizations are easy to spot during their peak moments, when thousands of people are in the streets. But the organizing and capacity building that takes place during slower, quieter times are essential to consolidating movement gains and laying the groundwork for future outbreaks. For funders, the important thing is recognizing what stage a movement is progressing through at a given moment and adapting their support to that moment’s needs.



Based on a chart by Movement NetLab.

This chart, designed by Movement NetLab, illustrates how the emotional state of participants fluctuate as social movements cycle through different phases.

The moments of highest energy are sparked by ‘trigger events,’ which we elaborate on in [Part 2](#). To reiterate, trigger events are the times when a galvanizing incident — such as a public tragedy, a political announcement, a creative action, a journalistic exposé, or the

violent repression of protesters — breaks through the regular news cycle and grabs the public’s attention. Offering movements a rare moment in the spotlight, a trigger event creates an unparalleled opportunity for leading activists and organizers to dramatize their issue, powerfully frame their concerns, and directly engage droves of newly interested people.

As we previously discussed in more detail, these are thrilling times, pregnant with opportunity. However, after periods of exhilarating growth and promise, there will always be periods of disillusionment and contraction as opponents adapt, change slows, and hope dims. Participants and observers alike often experience the decrescendo as a defeat. Yet it need not be seen as such. Downturns are a normal and inevitable part of social movement life.

The key difference between a mobilization that disappears for good and a lasting movement that gains critical victories is one that goes through multiple cycles. Receiving the right support at the right time in the cycle can turn an emergent mobilization into a movement that sustains and wins.

In this section, we provide an overview of the three main parts of the mass protest movement cycle. With each part, we give corresponding tips for how funders can best support.

Responding at the right time, with the right support

With an understanding of movement cycles in mind, we can explore how people with resources can support social movements at different points in their development. A trigger event at its peak requires a different type of support than when attention dies down and the movement prepares for the next outbreak. Major donors and grantmakers can support organizing that drives public opinion shifts by injecting resources at these key points in the movement cycle:

PHASE OF THE MOVEMENT CYCLE	PRIMARY RESOURCE NEEDS
During trigger events	1) Training 2) Volunteer support
As trigger events wind down	3) Absorption 4) Infrastructure to sustain volunteers
Planning for the next trigger event	5) Funding for future escalation

Funding the cycle, phase I: During trigger events

Many donors get involved in a movement for the first time during trigger events, or at moments of peak activity. A new and exciting mobilization appears on the scene, seemingly out of nowhere, to dramatize an important issue. Foundations and individuals alike are inspired to help.

To understand what kind of support movements need during trigger events, it is important to know that the outbreaks surrounding trigger events are rarely driven by established organizations (groups with pre-existing infrastructure, staff, budgets, partnerships, and political access). Instead, leaders who emerge during moments of mass protest often come from outside established organizations, and they may have little experience in leading a movement at mass scale.

As one example, Millions March NYC — a protest during the height of the #BlackLivesMatter mobilizations in 2014 — was instigated by two women, ages 19 and 23, who had never done political organizing before but were fed up with police violence.^[94] The march ended up drawing more than 30,000 people into action.

Established organizations can sometimes be taken by surprise when thousands of people from outside their structures suddenly take the streets. Leaders and staff within these organizations, whether in political advocacy groups or community-based organizations, are accustomed to a certain set of rules that define their work on a day-to-day basis: how many people they can expect to volunteer, how receptive insider politicians will be to their proposals, and so on. Because trigger events can suspend the usual rules of political engagement, leaders and staff are not always prepared with the skills to respond to the unique opportunities of a moment fueled by the energy of mass protest. Nor are they trained in how to spark new upheavals when initial disruptions die down. Usually, their instinct is to return to familiar routines — to stay on track with a predetermined plan for the year, to preserve their relationships with political insiders, and to adhere to funders' expectations.

In contrast, newcomers and small, upstart groups are more likely to say, "What do we have to lose?" They are positioned well to respond nimbly to trigger events and to undertake the types of actions that amplify and renew mass protests.

Without adequate access to resources, movements made up of volunteer leaders are precarious. Major donors and grantmakers who support protest and organizing activity in the midst of a trigger event can make a key difference in transforming a single mobilization 'moment' into a sustained and growing movement.

[94] Taylor Lewis, "History Makers: Millions March NYC Organizers Synead Nichols and Umaara Elliot," *Essence*, February 18, 2015. <https://www.essence.com/2015/02/19/history-makers-millions-march-nyc-organizers-synead-nichols-and-umaara-elliott>.

In the heat of a trigger event, funders can support in two important ways:

#1 Fund trainings that will empower people to make the most of a social movement upheaval.

Emerging leaders need training that is specific to the challenges they face. They need to learn best practices that can help them harness the energy presented when thousands of people show up asking, “What can I do?”

In our research, we found that there is nothing better to arm a multitude of volunteers than training.^[95] In the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, organizers used mass meetings to rally the community and unify participants during heightened moments of movement activity. Freedom songs and impassioned sermons by Dr. King are well known to be regular features of these meetings, but lesser known is the training that was conducted. In order to prepare supporters to take further action, organizers trained volunteers in practical skills, including how maintain nonviolence under repression. These types of trainings were also used by students in Nashville and helped to undergird the lunch-counter sit-ins of 1960, one of the most famous and successful mass actions of the Civil Rights movement.^[96]

During trigger events, participants need to acquire roles and skills relevant to a moment of heightened public attention and participation — topics not necessarily covered in typical community organizing trainings. Some of these topics include how to: maintain nonviolent discipline; plan direct actions and and deploy escalation tactics to keep the movement’s momentum going; manage public relations and social media; conduct rapid response fundraising; and absorb masses of people very quickly into movement structures, using email lists and further cycles of training.

The new mass protest leaders who emerge during trigger events may not have the existing relationships required to get relevant training themselves, let alone to call for a training program at large, even national, scale.

In August 2017, in the wake of white supremacist attacks on racial justice protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, Kazu Haga, a Kingian-nonviolence trainer based in Oakland, got calls from all over the country with requests to do trainings for response actions. But his resources and capacity to respond were limited, and he could not match the demand. This situation is not atypical. At peak moments, protests can quickly spread across large areas, drawing in scores of new people who would benefit from training that, unfortunately, is rarely resourced well enough to be offered at a large scale.

[95] George Lakey, “8 Skills of a Well-trained Activist,” *Waging Nonviolence*, June 11, 2013. <https://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/8-skills-of-a-well-trained-activist/>.

[96] “Nashville - We Were Warriors,” *A Force More Powerful*. Accessed 2018. <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/resource/a-force-more-powerful/>

Of course, there are many types of leadership development and trainings available to volunteers who want to join both advocacy efforts and organizing campaigns. These opportunities, however, need to be funded and designed to accommodate the large number of volunteers that can be activated by a trigger event, ranging from hundreds of people in a local area to many thousands dispersed throughout the country. **Because the success of a movement is highly correlated with increasing rates of participation, the most important distinction is that the trainings required for mass protests are ones designed to scale.**^[97]

Funding trainings on a diversity of skills relevant to mass mobilization can fill in a key institutional gap and support the growth of new leaders. Training institutes in particular are uniquely prepared to develop the necessary infrastructure for both rapid-response and long-term training. Examples of institutes that do such training today include Momentum, Training for Change, and the East Point Peace Academy. Beyond these existing institutes, many types of organizations could receive project-based funding to build a mass training program.

#2 In the midst of trigger events, give small stipends to sustain ‘anchor volunteers.’

In any movement, some of the people who become most involved come from established organizations. That said, *most* of those who show up during mass mobilizations are people who ‘drop out’ of their normal lives because they feel deeply motivated by the urgency of the issue at hand. We call the most committed and essential of these participants ‘anchor volunteers.’ They are people who either bring unique, hard-to-replace skills or ‘anchor’ a larger group of participants by managing group work and growing the skills of others.

Anchor volunteers often have basic reserves to sustain themselves, such as some money in savings that allows them to take time off work or a support network of family and friends that can help watch their kids. But those reserves of support can run out very quickly.

As their personal resources grow scarce, anchor volunteers who have been embedded in mobilizing during the first months of an emerging movement experience tremendous tension. They simultaneously feel pressure to hold the needs of the new movement and to go back to supporting their families and resuming their normal lives. To avoid burnout, these leaders need a new injection of support, so that they can stay in the movement until the peak phase dies down and there is a transition into a more stable phase of the movement.

The alternative, for new movements, is dire. Losing anchor volunteers leads to the loss of social infrastructure and capacity for fledgling mobilizations. We see over and over that mass protest movements fizzle out before they have realized their full potential, in part because anchor volunteers do not receive adequate assistance.

[97] Eric Stoner, “Participation is Everything - A Conversation with Erica Chenoweth,” *Waging Nonviolence*, July 14, 2012. <https://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/participation-is-everything-a-conversation-with-erica-chenoweth/>.

We believe that the way to best way to support anchor volunteers is to provide small stipends that are designed to help cover their basic necessities over a two to four month period. Such stipends allow people to continue playing a critical emergency role, giving the movement more time to grow at its own pace. In a typical movement cycle, two to four months is a common period for peak mobilization, after which activity naturally slows down and the movement begins to recollect and plan for its next cycle.

We acknowledge that there can exist tension between large donors and frontline leaders. It is never possible to give every movement participant a stipend, and mass movements must primarily be led and organized by volunteers in order to reach scale. Given this, it is critical to address the challenge of finding the volunteer leaders who have the most need and who are the most essential to sustaining the movement. A selection process would need to be created to identify key anchor volunteers and to prevent simply channeling more funds to pre-existing relationships. This process should be informed by the right expertise, such as on-the-ground leaders, local community organizations and foundations, and experts who understand mass mobilization.

Although these challenges do not have easy, one-size-fits-all solutions, creating mechanisms to prevent the most valuable volunteers from burning out is a major need for fledgling movements. Increasing volunteers' skills and their capacities to meet day-to-day needs with rapid-response stipends would do much to support emergent

movements, and it can make a significant difference in extending the high-energy period of a movement cycle.

Creating mechanisms to prevent the most valuable volunteers from burning out is a major need for fledgling movements.

Eventually, however, every trigger event ends. Whether after days, weeks, or months, the people in the streets go home. At that point, funders must respond to a different set of needs, which leads us to our second key moment.

Funding the cycle, phase II: As trigger events wind down

After a trigger event dies down, it is common for outside critics to announce a movement's defeat, and even those inside the movement may feel a sense of failure. But the truth is that movements win by shifting public opinion over time.^[98] In order for a protest movement to reach the high participation rates needed for success, multiple cycles of activity are necessary to win over larger and larger segments of the public.

So how can movements build momentum from one trigger event to the next, in order to build a wider and wider base of active support? We think that the answer is what we call absorption. **During each wave of heightened public interest, movement activists must draw in the most energetic volunteers and plug them into structures of sustained training and engagement, so that when the next wave comes, those same people can become leaders and continue to expand movement participation.** The crowds may go home, but if a movement is able to absorb increasing numbers of people into ongoing work, it will eventually reach a critical mass.

For example, in the Women's March, documented as the largest single-day protest in U.S. history, up to a third of participants reported that they were attending their first-ever protest.^[99] Many other participants had not protested for decades. Having an absorption strategy in place before these kind of peak moments is critical for allowing movements to engage and build on these new connections, rather than letting everyone go home without a clear sense of how to move forward.

Funders can bolster mass movements after trigger events have passed by supporting a robust absorption strategy for the newly interested and also by re-absorbing the most involved volunteers back into the long-term movement.

#3 Help groups absorb new people from movement moments.

Both established organizations and mass protest groups can develop the capacity to keep people involved in a sustainable way — as long as they are committed to engaging volunteers in meaningful work over the long term.

Too often, absorption in mass movements is simply left to chance. Basic activities that would greatly increase the capacity of a mobilization to retain participants and develop them as leaders never get done. To avoid this, movement leaders can think through a strategy of absorption to convert one-time participants into ongoing activists.

Absorption is the bridge that takes a movement from the heat of the moment into long-term engagement; it begins when mobilization is still ongoing and continues afterwards.

[98] Erica Chenoweth, "It May Only Take 3.5% of the Population to Topple a Dictator – with Civil Resistance," *The Guardian*, February 1, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/feb/01/worried-american-democracy-study-activist-techniques>

[99] Erica Chenoweth and Jeremy Pressman, "This is What We Learned by Counting the Women's Marches," *The Washington Post*, February 7, 2017. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/02/07/this-is-what-we-learned-by-counting-the-womens-marches/>.

Absorption activities can include gathering names for an email list, holding information sessions, registering participants for trainings, and putting a plan in place to build relationships and structures for ongoing engagement.

Many traditional, established organizations are not used to recruiting and making meaningful use of an army of volunteers. And those that do have volunteer programs rely on methods that scale at a much slower pace, such as one-to-one meetings. Paid teams are often not enough to absorb surges in active support. Consistently, these organizational models struggle to capture even a fraction of the energy of an explosive mass mobilization.

"[M]ass participation won't lead to mass power without organization. We don't have the money to pay enough staff to manage a movement big enough to win."

— Becky Bond and Zack Exley,
authors of Rules for Revolutionaries

One example can be drawn from an electoral campaign that took advantage of movement-like strategies. During Bernie Sanders' presidential run, a notable share of the campaign's success was made possible by a massive influx of volunteers. In

a piece for *The Nation*, distributed-campaign organizers Becky Bond and Zack Exley, who were the engineers behind much of the Bernie campaign's volunteer-led system, reflected, "One of the greatest lessons from the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign was that a relatively tiny number of staff using fairly basic technology can unleash hundreds of thousands of volunteers to do serious work to advance a nationwide movement."^[100]

Bond and Exley emphasize that prioritizing volunteers is not a "hippie-dippie" sentiment that glorifies structurelessness for the sake of inclusivity. It is an effective solution to the need for high-levels of participation in order to succeed. They put it this way, "[M]ass participation won't lead to mass power without organization. We don't have the money to pay enough staff to manage a movement big enough to win."

Their solution was to harness the energy of thousands of committed volunteers throughout the country, plugging them into teams and roles that collectively launched the once unlikely candidate onto the national stage.

Funders can help by giving more resources to both mass protest groups and established organizations that do have volunteer programs, incentivizing the ones that don't to create them, and helping organizations innovate better models of volunteer engagement. Absorption is a great place for established organizations to play a big role in synergy with mass protest leaders.

[100] Becky Bond and Zack Exley, "The Revolution Will Not Be Staffed: How Big Organizing Can Take Down Trump", *The Nation*, November 30, 2016. <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-revolution-will-not-be-staffed-how-big-organizing-can-take-down-trump/>.

Finally, sometimes, established organizations are cautious to become involved with mass protest activity not only because they lack a history of engaging volunteers, but because they fear losing funding over their involvement. Funders can counter that fear by offering support for organizations that want to do absorption activities in moments of mass protest — encouraging them to include volunteer involvement as part of their master plan.

#4 Fund infrastructure to support the basic needs of movement organizers.

Funding absorption activities can help engage newly-interested supporters in work that sustains the movement for the long term. But another need that emerges as trigger events wind down is the need to create a productive transitional space for the anchor volunteers who may have left jobs, school, or family obligations during the movement's high-energy period.

People who dedicate themselves to mass mobilization and receive no support when the peak energy dies out — or when responsibilities call them out of the movement — can feel burned out, prompting a sense of failure. New leaders need places to temporarily live and be fed. They also need to reach the next stage in their leadership development through training, skill building, and reflection. If their basic needs are met, these people can re-engage in the next movement cycle or become mentors for the next generation of leaders.

Funders can provide the resources that will let volunteers reflect and regroup for the future. The type of infrastructure that is useful for these purposes can include: volunteer housing and food systems, retreat centers, and in-kind donation structures. This kind of basic support translates into long-term commitment to the movement. In our [Long-Term Funding Recommendations](#), we will say more about how this type of infrastructure can be built across movements and in more sustained time periods, in a way that would supplement emergency infrastructure that is provided in the heat of the moment.

With adequate support, movement organizers and volunteers will be better positioned to strategize and prepare for the next mobilization. But in order to spark another burst of public energy and complete the cycle, a movement also needs funders who are willing to invest in escalation.

Funding the cycle phase III: Planning the next trigger event

Finally, after a wave of heightened activity has passed, a key task for movements is to prepare for the next trigger event.

To the casual observer, outbreaks of movement activity often look ‘spontaneous’ or out of the blue. However, we know that social movements at their best reflect a purposeful craft: there is much that skilled organizers can do to enhance and extend trigger events, and sometimes they can have the key role in making a trigger go off in the first place.

The highly visible events that trigger mass protest need not be thought of as lightning strikes that we have to sit around and wait for. Rather, they are the combination of external conditions and skillful action. While movements cannot fully control the social and political circumstances in which they operate, they can maneuver to make the most of whatever opportunities present themselves.

The trigger events that give rise to mass action are rarely the result of unexpected incidents alone; rather, movement moments result at the intersection of an event and the determination of a community to respond and skillfully turn it into something bigger. For decades, there have been daily incidents of violence by police against communities of color that provoke little public response. For Michael Brown’s death to become something more than a forgotten tragedy — and indeed to trigger the creation of the #BlackLivesMatter movement — it took persistent and creative escalation and determined organizing to make the incident into an event of national importance.

Skilled mobilizers work to draw greater attention to unexpected events, activate more people around an unfolding crisis, and create avenues into which public outrage can be effectively channeled. Other times, organizers are able to do even more: they can strategically plan and spark moments of heightened attention themselves, as the Civil Rights movement did with its daring 1963 campaign in Birmingham, Alabama.^[101]

In order to encourage movements to take the kinds of risks that can produce breakout moments, there needs to be an extra level of support channeled to those willing to plan actions that are high-disruption and high-sacrifice — in other words, the actions most likely to set off trigger events.

This leads us to our last recommendation:

[101] Mark Engler and Paul Engler, “Three Times When ‘Impractical’ Movements Led to Real Change,”

Fund those courageous enough to escalate.

#5 Escalation refers to any set of actions that increasingly up the ante in terms of participants' disruptiveness and sacrifice. Going on hunger strike, setting up an occupation, or risking arrest — these types of action are capable of keeping the momentum of a trigger event alive and are also capable of *creating* triggers that set off chains of protests across the country.

Funders can look at supporting movement escalation as akin to the calculated risk-taking in which venture capitalists routinely engage. They can recognize that some investments may fizzle, and that many escalations will be only moderately successful. But occasionally, one will explode and become successful beyond anything that might have been expected. Investments in movement entrepreneurs must embrace a risk-tolerant approach, with the expectation that most experiments will generate positive development, but only some will produce exceptional results.

In the summer of 2011, activists attempted an encampment in front of City Hall in lower Manhattan to protest budget cuts and layoffs; the number of occupants in camp rarely exceeded 150 people. Yet, only a few months later, Occupy Wall Street started with the same number of people and — through a series of symbolic actions — drew increasing amounts of attention to the issue of inequality. In this second case, momentum built until the issue exploded into public consciousness — in spite of a national political climate previous considered adverse to the movement. While funders can make efforts to identify mobilizations with the greatest likelihood of impact, there will nevertheless be cases in which deployments of similar tactics will have very different outcomes, and it is unavoidable that movements seeking to break new ground will have as many failed experiments as successful ones.

Funders should be focused on resourcing actions with high stakes that are designed to grab the attention of the public and shift the tide of public opinion quickly. As we mentioned earlier, established organizations are often wary of taking action that could risk relationships, antagonize, or stray off program. Upstart mass protest groups have less to lose in taking bold action, but are far less resourced. This is why funders oriented toward this part of the ecology can play a critical role.

We think there need to be new avenues to support leaders who want to plan the types of creative interventions and escalating direct actions that are proven to generate public attention and build momentum. For instance, the creation of a dedicated fund to encourage nonviolent direct action could spur innovation in tactics, as well as provide a lifeline to groups that want to experiment with actions that involve high levels of sacrifice and disruption.

By dedicating resources towards escalation, funders can place themselves among the few who see promise and potential in a movement before the world knows its name. They can also be the difference between a one-hit wonder that fizzles out and a

movement that can generate momentum again and again.

Conclusion: Boosting movements when it matters most

The process of escalation, absorption, and preparation for new waves of activity should be seen as a natural cycle that movements repeat until they capture widespread public support and win their demands. Understanding this cycle is critical for funders seeking to determine how they can best contribute to the expansion and sustainability of mass protest movements. A willingness and commitment to embrace bold and unconventional players is a critical precondition to fostering change that truly transforms national conversations and decisions. And knowing how to inject the right kind of support into social movements at the right time allows this commitment to produce greater impact.

Long-Term Funding Recommendations

We believe that funders who act on our [Short-Term Funding Recommendations](#) can play a critical role in filling immediate gaps and distributing much-needed resources to mass protest mobilizations. However, to reach their full potential, mass protest movements require a long-term strategy of building infrastructure that engages movement leaders and philanthropists alike. The following is an explanation of what long-term infrastructure that can support mass protest could look like, as well as actions that the funding community can take to resource the building of this infrastructure.

The first two recommendations involve the types of support that mass protest movements need to achieve higher levels of impact and scale:

- 1) Fund long-term infrastructure to support the basic needs of movement organizers.**
- 2) Incubate and develop mass protest organizations.**

The final three describe interventions that could take place within the funding community itself to enable more consistent and effective support for these movements:

- 3) Support philanthropists through social movement ecology trainings.**
- 4) Utilize consulting and resource development to apply frameworks to specific foundations and portfolios.**
- 5) Build a funding alliance to support the mass protest segment of the ecology.**

#1 Fund long-term infrastructure to support the basic needs of movement organizers.

Mass protest movements need the right infrastructure to sustain themselves through multiple cycles of trigger events, growth, and re-emergence. As movements grow in complexity and power, the infrastructure required to keep them moving can be extensive. Historical movements that reach mass scale, especially those surviving for decades, have developed structures to meet common needs. Examples include the network of activist black churches during the Civil Rights movement in the U.S., and the collective farming communities built by the Landless Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra, MST) in Brazil. As a result of this kind of long-term infrastructure, the Civil Rights movement sustained for over a decade. For its part, the Landless Workers Movement has lasted over 30 years and is still thriving today, gaining key rights and protections for the rural communities of Brazil.

In our [Short-term Funding Recommendations](#), we already talked about how anchor volunteers need basic supports during high-energy protest moments. We referenced some of this infrastructure as critical temporary supports during a trigger event. While this short-term support is critical, funders also need to think about volunteer support on a timeline of multiple years. There is a big difference in resources needed to house and feed volunteers for mass mobilizations lasting two months than to support a core network of volunteers for two years.

Some of the most necessary infrastructure includes the following:

- 1) Volunteer and staff housing** has played an important role throughout many movements (see: [Movement housing](#)). It can be very difficult for movements to secure housing for leaders, due to the high costs of property and the relative scarcity of affordable alternatives. Adequate funding for housing, including collective ‘movement houses,’ could dramatically increase the number of volunteer and staff leaders available to participate in key moments of movement activity and growth. The logistics could be handled in a number of ways, including housing resources marked for particular movements, networks of properties managed to provide free and reduced-cost housing, or volunteer leaders who live together to maximize resources.
- 2) Basic food needs** are another cost that often adds up for mass protest movements. Securing the resources to feed large numbers of volunteers during periods of high movement activity would enable many new volunteers — especially from the communities most affected by injustice — to volunteer full-time. The service programs that labor unions provide for striking workers are an excellent model. In one example, the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor developed a food drive system to assist striking workers with meals, which has been deployed alongside several other assistance services during strikes.
- 3) Retreat centers** provide space for leaders when they need time between peak cycles to regenerate, reflect, and strategize. Because movements are constantly recruiting and developing new volunteers, infrastructure must be in place to absorb and train as many

people as possible over long periods of time. Retreat centers can create valuable space for that process. One example is the Highlander Center, where generations of movement leaders and volunteers have developed their organizing skills. Many of these retreat centers already exist. What is absent are dedicated resources to make these locations accessible to large numbers of volunteers over the long term.

4) In-kind donations can be a critical part of mass protest movement growth. Beyond basic needs, full-time volunteers need a wide variety of resources and items to carry out their work. These include vehicles, computers, office supplies, furniture, and more. Often, newly-inspired passive supporters are ready to donate in-kind offerings, but the infrastructure to facilitate those exchanges often does not exist. Innovative solutions have been developed to tackle this gap, including the ‘wedding registry’ created by a local Black Lives Matter chapter in Minneapolis. The registry was a website that matched donors with the needs of the volunteer organizers occupying the 4th police precinct in the winter of 2015. This is an example of how a need for in-kind donations were met in the moment, but the idea could be adapted to longer-term solutions. Often, trigger events bring about in-kind donations of labor, but these offerings can be piecemeal and inefficient. With the right resourcing and design, in-kind donation infrastructure could substantially increase the impact of mass protest movements.

Meeting basic needs is an efficient way to prevent leader burnout and increase volunteer retention of those that want to heighten their commitment over the long term. This support can be channeled through existing religious institutions, retreat centers, or training centers. The list above includes examples of common infrastructure needs, but funders should also collaborate with mass protest leaders directly to address the specific needs that arise in their unique contexts.

Funders do not need to limit their infrastructural support to a single issue. Beyond supporting specific movements as they emerge, institutions like the Highlander Center have supported decades of organizers, not limited to a specific cause. Funders can support the provision of lasting infrastructure across diverse movements, which could impact the success of mobilizations across the spectrum of progressive issues.

Movement housing

Many mass protest movements have developed housing infrastructure to support their volunteer leaders.

- In the 1960s and 1970s, United Farm Workers volunteers received communal housing, allowing the organization to build a corps of more than 300 volunteer organizers and lead one of the most successful boycotts in American history.
- In the mid-1900s, the Catholic Worker movement had dozens of houses dedicated to supporting poor and homeless individuals. During both the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam eras, movements made use of these houses to host volunteer activists and war resisters.
- During the Indian Independence movement, rural ‘ashrams’ (small monastic communities) were used to house and train volunteers, giving them temporary food, housing, and community work. Over the course of 40 years, hundreds of thousands of Indians mobilized through multiple movement cycles, during which time many top leaders lived at the ashrams. Living at the ashrams gave leaders time to develop and prepare for future campaign cycles, bolstering the independence movement’s scale and longevity.

#2 Incubate and develop mass protest organizations.

Although mass protest can arise from the work of many organizations in the ecology, groups with different theories of change are often slow to capitalize on the opportunities of trigger events and are unprepared to sustain momentum through multiple cycles of escalation. While training hundreds of organizers from dozens of progressive organizations, we have consistently found that incubating new groups to drive mass protest is often more effective than encouraging established organizations to experiment with mobilizations. Our historical research echos this finding; new, enterprising endeavors have often driven mass protest throughout the history of modern social movements.

We recommended that, in the short term, funders can support experiments to spark the next trigger event. But there is also a need for even longer-term planning. A critical resource gap is currently holding back the development of movements with the right story, strategy, and structure to catch fire in the public and sustain active support. The mass protest ecology needs a robust funding stream dedicated to the kind of innovation that only incubation and strategic development can seed.

Incubating new groups to drive mass protest is often more effective than encouraging established organizations to experiment with mobilizations.

Currently, there is a lack of sustainable resources and skilled organizations that can incubate and develop new mass protest movements. Momentum is an example of a training institute that also incubates new mass protest groups. Over the course of three years, Momentum has trained, coached, and incubated three national mass protest organizations that have launched, and the program is actively incubating more. These movements are experimenting with some of the best practices of mass mobilization, and, even in their early stages, have found success in using the skills and resources that Momentum provides.

One of these groups is Cosecha, which led three out of the five major mobilizations in 2017 to protect against a repeal of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) legislation. The Sanctuary Campus actions were perhaps the most notable, representing one of the largest student walkouts to protest Trump's policies in the first year of the administration.^[102] Momentum also incubated IfNotNow, a Jewish movement working for freedom and dignity for Israelis and Palestinians. In the two years since its founding, IfNotNow has established itself as a vital actor in the Jewish anti-occupation space. In March 2017, prominent Jewish journalist Peter Beinart remarked that IfNotNow was doing for the Jewish community what #BlackLivesMatter had done for the black community.^[103] Relatively few resources went into incubating these movements, and yet they are already beginning to build ranks of active participants and engender passive support in their target publics.

#3 Support philanthropists through social movement ecology trainings.

In typical training and convening spaces, individuals and organizations often exchange ideas with others who are pursuing similar strategies. When people work only with those pursuing similar strategies, it can be easy to focus on just one way of making change rather than recognizing the important contributions of all parts of the movement ecology. These very natural tendencies can, unfortunately, lead to a myopic understanding of what is necessary to actually win at scale. Establishing an ecological view of the movement is critical to shifting the funding community's long-term impact.

To develop a sense of the movement ecology as a whole, funders need to be in dialogue with a wide variety of organizations, gaining an appreciation for the views and strategies that others are putting forward. To this end, **it is beneficial to have a shared framework for recognizing, respecting, and collaborating across strategic difference.**

It is much harder for individuals or organizations to achieve an ecological view when isolated. We believe people need to learn and experiment in a training space, alongside a community of practice. To this end, we see it as vital to provide social movement ecology trainings that cater to philanthropists and the funding community. These trainings can be excellent opportunities for funders to relate their own theories of change to others' and hold dialogue across strategies. Our model of social movement ecology is only one of several frameworks

[102] Catherine E. Shoichet and Azadeh Ansari, "'Sanctuary Campus' Protests Target Trump Immigration Policies," *CNN Politics*, November 16, 2016.

<https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/16/politics/sanctuary-campus-protests/index.html>

[103] Peter Beinart, "If Not Now is the Jewish Black Lives Matter," *Forward*, April 4, 2017.

<https://forward.com/opinion/368082/ifnotnow-is-the-jewish-black-lives-matter/>.

that look at changemaking from a systems perspective. Others who look at movements as complex systems include [Movement NetLab](#) and [Movement Strategy Center](#).

For funders and philanthropists, social movement ecology trainings can achieve three unique results:

1) Create a space of confidentiality. Funders need to feel confident that they can carry out open dialogue that is not complicated by the presence of shareholders and grantees.

2) Foster complex thinking. Through trainings, funders can examine specific needs in their respective fields, as well as draw on the wider movement ecosystem to learn and share approaches that work. Drawing upon the expertise of funders with different theories of change can facilitate shared learning and problem solving of dilemmas in a specific issue area or field. It provides a space to share what is needed, and what is currently being done, to address current challenges and opportunities.

3) Open possibilities for collaborative vision. The confidentiality and complexity of a funder-specific training also supports creative visioning and collaboration. Having different resource networks in the room opens up new possibilities to envision larger pools of funding for specific issues and theories of change. (See: [Long-term recommendation #5](#))

At the Ayni Institute, we currently offer Social Movement Ecology trainings for both movement leaders and funders. Other training institutions such as Resource Generation and Solidaire have also recognized the value in a specific focus on funders. There is a critical need to foster dialogue among funders on theories of change and how they can apply those lessons. A strong community of practice, emerging from the shared experience of a training program, also helps establish the theoretical and practical grounding funders need to effectively support mass protest.

#4 Use consulting and resource development to apply frameworks to specific foundations and portfolios.

Even for funders that have adopted a movement ecology perspective and possess the desire to fund mass protest movements, it can still be difficult to adapt these frameworks to the specifics of their grantmaking. A coaching and consulting program for funders that want to support mass protest grantees is essential to help funders apply the theory to their specific work, identify strategic opportunities, and troubleshoot potential challenges.

Expert consulting opens funders to complex dialogue about how to meld support for mass protest with their preexisting priorities, metrics, and organizational structure. This is no small task. We often encounter training participants who believe they will be able to realign their whole organization around movement ecology and strategy, only to find that their existing organizational culture complicates the task. **Having the support of a community of peers engaged in the same process, as well as expert advice from a coach to support integration and alignment, increases the odds that philanthropists can succeed in resourcing mass protest movements.**

#5 Build a funding alliance to support the mass protest segment of the ecology.

Training and consulting can help new alliances of funders commit to supporting mass protest as a part of a broader movement ecology. Currently, funding alliances may encounter confusion when they attempt to move resources to mass protest movements. For a strong new alliance to emerge, funders need clarity on theory of change, best facilitated by training and consulting. From that foundation, like-minded donors could establish a much larger pool of resources than is currently available. Organizing a broader funding alliance would create a critical base of resources to develop interventions in the field and open up new, creative ways to achieve transformational change.

Open dialogue with other funders builds the groundwork for pooled grantmaking that can move different pieces of the ecology and achieve a level of scale that is beyond the reach of any single institution.

Initiatives such as the Democracy Alliance, a large network of donors committed to building collaboration and infrastructure for progressive causes in the U.S., are good models for these alliances. Open dialogue with other funders builds the groundwork for pooled grantmaking that can move different pieces of the ecology and achieve a level of scale that is beyond the reach of any single institution.

An example of this type of alliance specific to mass protest is Solidaire's Emergent Fund, a rapid response network that has been vital to many contemporary movements by quickly mobilizing resources in moments of critical growth and escalation. More of these funding structures need to be built, both to respond to trigger events and to help create trigger events when the opportunities are ripe.

Funding alliances could focus, for instance, on the development of mass protest 'entrepreneurs' who experiment and test new ventures in the field. Having designated capital in place for these new ventures would go a long way toward ensuring creativity and strategic innovation.

Funders seeded innovation in the environmental movement

The environmental movement of the 1980s and 1990s is an instructive model of how a handful of funders resourcing mass protest can make a major impact. During that cycle of movement activity, activists used direct action to block targeted development projects, including logging in the redwoods of the Headwaters Forest Reserve in Northern California. At the time, most available resources were being funneled to large nonprofits focused around lobbying in Washington, D.C. But a handful of funders supported the highly symbolic direct actions, believing in their strategic relevance.^[104]

The environmental movement's mass protest activity — including both direct actions and large public demonstrations — successfully captured the public's attention, generating an influx of active and passive support around environmental degradation. This support reframed the debate around issues like old growth forest protection and logging in national forests. Between 1988 and 1999, logging in national forests dropped by 78%.^[105] The handful of funders who recognized the strategic and symbolic impact of redwood protection had a major role in ensuring the movement's long-term success.

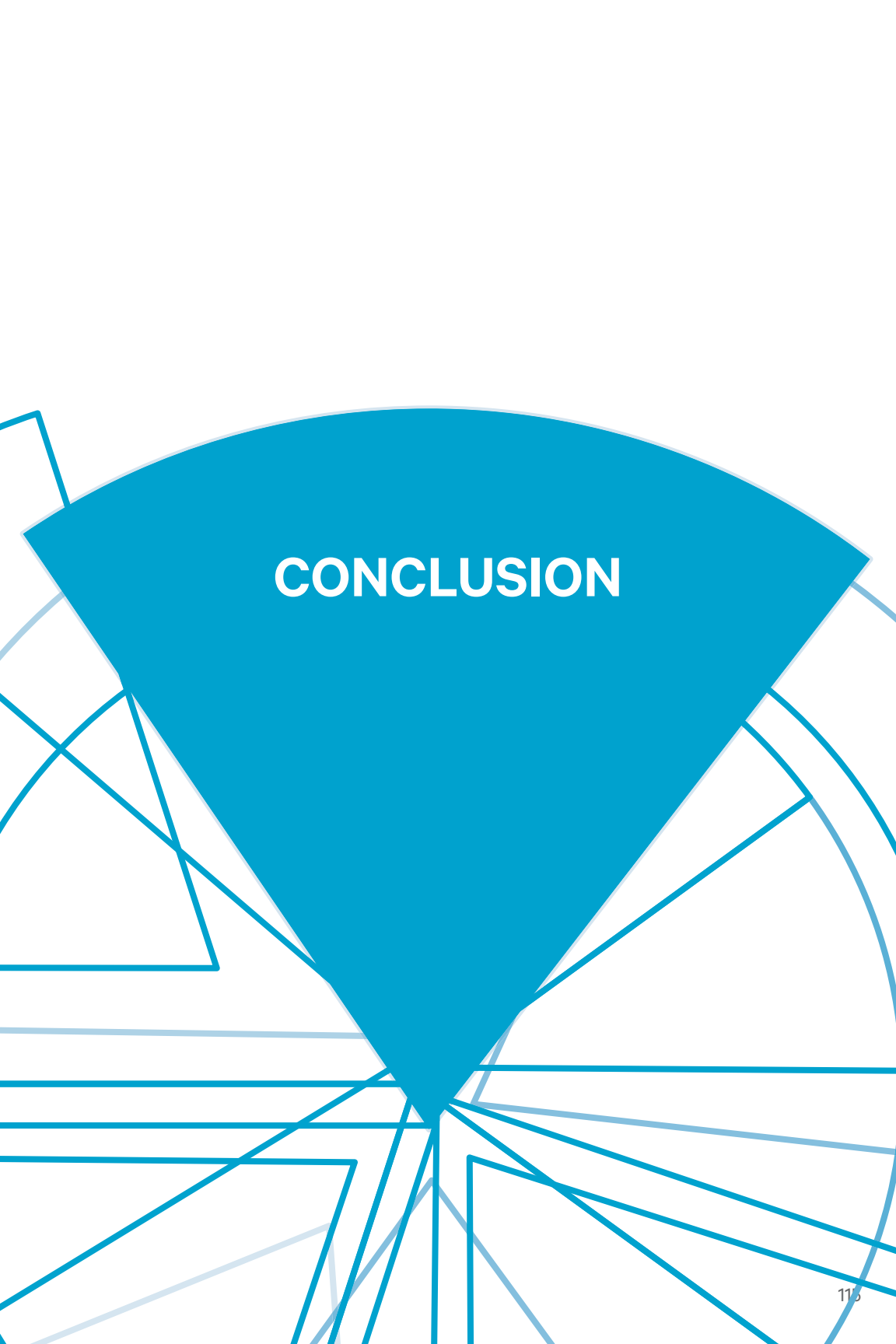
Funders can capture key opportunities when they look beyond the inside game. The success of these environmental activists was bolstered only by a select few funders who believed in their potential, showing how even modest resources can have a outsized impact when public action and mobilization takes root.

Conclusion: Playing the long game

A successful drive to empower mass protest movements will rely on a long-term strategy of building infrastructure. This infrastructure is needed to provide vital support to both the movements themselves as well as philanthropists seeking to make the most impactful funding choices possible. Mass protest incubation and basic infrastructure are the first and most vital interventions needed. To facilitate consistent support for these needs, the funding community would benefit from a dedicated attempt to build its internal infrastructure around mass protest grantmaking. Developing a training program in tandem with a well-resourced coaching program will lay the groundwork for additional strategic capacity within the funding community. In turn, these changes can undergird new alliances and pooled funding initiatives to further support and engage with mass protest movements.

[104] For more on this movement, see: Engler and Engler, *This Is An Uprising*, (2016), p. 229-236

[105] Douglas Bevington, *Rebirth of Environmentalism*, (Washington: Island Press, 2009), p. 149

The image features a large, solid blue fan-shaped sector pointing downwards, centered on the page. The word "CONCLUSION" is written in white, bold, uppercase letters within this blue sector. The background is white and filled with a complex network of thin blue lines. These lines radiate from the bottom point of the blue sector, extending outwards and upwards, some following the curve of the sector's edges and others branching out in various directions, creating a web-like or architectural feel.

CONCLUSION

At its heart, movement building is a craft. It requires deep commitment and skill to tap into the moral conscience of society and alter the boundaries of what is considered politically possible. This craft draws upon a long lineage of practitioners, researchers, and writers who have identified the key challenges that movements face. And yet, the comprehensive study and practice of mass protest mobilization is still a young field in the United States. As the field develops, more people are more skillfully engaging with this powerful piece of the movement ecology. We believe in — and hope the evidence presented here shows — its potential to transform how we approach social change. Facilitating the field's continued growth will require significant investment and commitment on the part of the philanthropic community.

If even a small subset of the philanthropic world embraces mass protest strategies as a necessary part of a wider ecology of change, we predict that the impact of social justice grantmaking will be significantly magnified. Taking this on will require conviction in the power of this theory of change, against those who will dismiss these efforts as impractical or controversial. It will mean pushing back against the common notion that change only comes from within official political channels, and instead promoting the knowledge that, time and again, people-powered strategies have prevailed against staggering concentrations of power. Precisely because mass protest strategies are underappreciated, those who do champion this theory of change have the opportunity to make a disproportionate impact.

This guide is meant to give philanthropists the tools to challenge misunderstandings and to seize opportunities to harness the power of mass protest. By taking action, funders can cut through confusion, provide critical support to movements at key moments in their development, and help set them on a path of long-term sustainability.

If there is one thing that is clear, it is that the challenges our society faces are great and the injustices are many. But studying movements of the past sheds light on the kind of tremendous progress that can be won when the right forces are harnessed towards justice. That hope powers our commitment to channeling new vibrancy and resources towards the movements of today and the future.

Addendum #1: Limitations of Public Opinion Polling

As a means of measuring passive support, public opinion polling can be a valuable tool. But it has its limits, and it is important to keep them in mind. For one thing, gaining accurate information from surveys and interviews is notoriously difficult. Social scientists and pollsters always remember that a wide range of factors can influence respondents, from a question's wording to the perceived race of the person asking it. We must also be careful about what behavioral conclusions we draw from polls. After all, people may say one thing and do another, which is why measuring active support is just as important as measuring passive support.

For mass protest movements, attempts to measure impact with polls pose additional difficulties. Because movements rarely have the resources required to conduct extensive polling on their own, movement participants and observers are often limited to polls conducted by outside parties, assuming they are made available to the public. The interests of those outside parties, and how they query respondents, can influence the usefulness of a given poll. For instance, a great deal of political polling is designed to test public opinion of a specific candidate. Those polls focus in on specific messages and rarely detect shifts in broad public constituencies over time.

In contrast, polling that asks broad, values-based questions over sustained periods of time can be extremely useful to assessing movement impact. Since the 1990s, polling organizations like Pew and Gallup have done just that on a few select issues. Repeatedly, they have asked respondents to assess “the state of race relations today” and “whether we have made enough progress on racial equality.” Studying how responses to those questions trend over time, we can correlate fluctuations in public opinion to periods of anti-racist protest activity.

On the other hand, polling about undocumented immigrants tends to pose questions about specific policies. When respondents must indicate whether they favor granting work visas in one year, and whether they favor deportation in another, it is difficult to get a clear, overall sense of changes in pro- or anti-immigration sentiment.

Overall, non-experts should be circumspect about what they can glean from polling data. It is hard to interpret polling results without a sense of the larger context. Polling experts have developed complex methodologies to compare and aggregate polling information accurately. This comes into play regularly around elections, but we need more expertise on polls as they relate to social movements.

Despite those limitations, it is valuable for some movements to make use of polling in combination with other metrics to gauge passive support. To understand the public's stance on immigration in the early 2000s, for example, looking at voting patterns has shown how Latino constituencies aligned with the movement. For analyzing the effects of Occupy Wall Street, looking at shifts in the media's dominant narrative frames around income inequality has been similarly useful.

Given the expense of polling and practical barriers to investing in data analysis, movement organizations and funders can make use of what is publicly available from other sources, in combination with other passive support indicators, to assess a movement's influence on the public.

Addendum #2: Challenges of Studying News and Social Media Coverage

Studies of media and social media coverage are limited by access to data and the ability to code that data. That is, how to assemble a large database of articles on a given topic and develop a system to sort through that database for articles that specifically related to a query.

It is possible through institutional subscriptions to access sources that archive print media, such as LexisNexis Academic Universe. However, tracking social media data (for example, tweets with a certain hashtag) can be extremely expensive because the data must be purchased from the social media platforms themselves. A social media analysis provider told us that the base price to acquire data from Twitter spanning the past five years would exceed \$15,000. Most movement organizations cannot afford to pay those kinds of fees, given other urgent priorities.

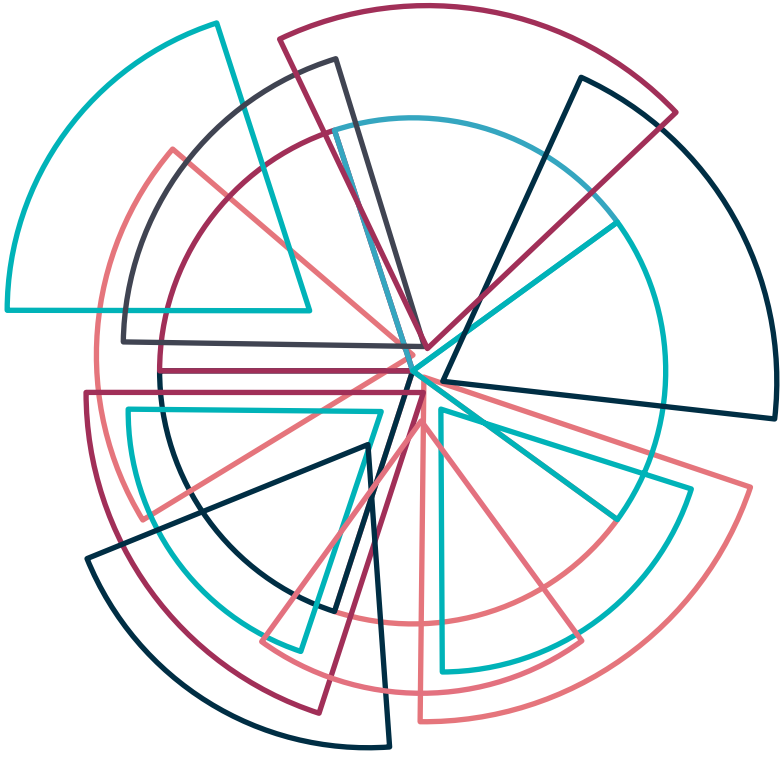
One media assessment tool we used for our research was GDELT's Television Explorer, which tracks mentions of topics on request across major television networks.^[106] While useful, it is somewhat limited by the fact that most outlets have only been tracked since 2009, with some added since 2013. Another source of data, MIT Media Cloud's tool to track online news, seems promising for the future, but it is still in development and currently presents some challenges related to tagging outlets as digital-only versus print. We predict that new open-source media tracking resources will become more useful as time goes on.

Given these limitations, we drew whenever possible on reports commissioned by institutions or peer-reviewed academic research for conclusions about media and social media. For example, we relied on the Center for Media and Social Impact's "Beyond the Hashtags" report for analysis of Twitter data during the #BlackLivesMatter movement.^[107]

[106] "Television Explorer," *GDELT Project*, 2018.

<https://api.gdeltproject.org/api/v2/summary/summary?DATASET=IATV>

[107] Deen Freelon, Charlton D. McIlwain, and Meredith D. Clark, "Beyond the Hashtags: #Ferguson, #Blacklivesmatter, and the Online Struggle for Offline Justice," *Center for Media and Social Impact*, February 29, 2016. <http://cmsimpact.org/resource/beyond-hashtags-ferguson-blacklivesmatter-online-struggle-offline-justice/>



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