

# RESISTANCE GUIDE

how to sustain the movement to win

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**Paul Engler &  
Sophie Lasoff**

In collaboration  
with Momentum



**Social movements of the past can teach us how to shape the future.**

**This guide will equip you with the essential strategies to shift public opinion, change laws and decisions, and elect new leaders.**

**A handbook for anyone who wants to understand what makes movements succeed, and how we can use this knowledge to fight for a better America.**

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**THEN THIS GUIDE IS FOR  
YOU. READ IT. USE IT.  
SHARE IT.**

**TOGETHER WE CAN WIN.**

# **Trump is the president. Republicans run our government. How do we fight back?**

As his time in office accumulates, the fact still stings:  
Donald Trump is the president of the United States.

Not only did he win an electoral victory many thought impossible,  
he benefits from a strong Republican (or GOP, for Grand Old Party)  
majority in Congress.

The GOP controls the House and the Senate. A conservative  
majority presides over the Supreme Court, the product of a  
successful power grab in which Republicans stonewalled President  
Obama's nominee in 2016. On the state level, Republicans hold 33  
out of 50 governorships and control 32 state legislatures.

Even as investigations are launched into the legitimacy of the  
election and misconduct by Trump and his administration,  
Congress and the White House remain united in their support for  
policies that fuel racism, criminalize protest, deport thousands,  
eliminate health benefits for millions, overturn environmental  
protections, and shred the social safety net, all while securing  
billions of dollars in tax breaks for the wealthiest.

## **What can we do?**

# This is a winnable fight

We believe that in working together and working strategically, we can build a resistance movement that will stop Trump and the GOP.

We believe the seeds of this movement have already started to germinate.

We speak as leaders of social movements that have won significant strides for social justice over the last two decades in the face of racism, xenophobia, dismissive media coverage, and hostile politicians.

We believe that social movements of the past show us a path to victory. We have studied resistance movements in the United States and abroad, and drawn lessons from the many instances in which—against even steeper odds than those we currently face—people took on the powerful and won.

We find grounds for hope in the sheer number of groups that have been formed since the election, and the huge numbers of people who have taken part in actions such as the Women’s March and the airport protests against the Muslim Ban. All this activity is strong evidence that we are living in a moment filled with potential.

The resistance is already working. As we’ll discuss in greater detail throughout this guide, creative mass protest has already derailed the agenda of Trump and the Republican Congress on multiple fronts. Trump failed to win the post-Inauguration approval ratings bump that every other modern president has enjoyed— thanks in large part to the millions who flooded the streets around the country the day after the Inauguration. After Trump attempted

to introduce a discriminatory travel ban, mass protests at more than a dozen international airports galvanized thousands against the policy, even though it had been framed in the traditionally unassailable language of national security.

Despite these early successes, many feel disoriented. Since the election, we’ve heard from countless people who have similar questions: *What is the best way to get involved? Is anything we are doing actually making a difference? Does protest really work?*

It does. It has. But if we’re going to carry the fight forward, it’s critical to understand how.



## Who we are

This guide was authored by leaders of [Momentum](#), a training institute and movement incubator. We study what makes or breaks social movements. And we teach people how to incorporate the best techniques and strategies of protest into their ongoing work for social justice.

We are organizers, researchers, and trainers who have decades of experience between us in many social movements. We've organized to defend the rights of immigrants, to leave the fossil fuel economy behind and stop climate change, to dismantle racist power structures, to fight for international peace and justice, and to bring an end to corporate money in politics. Our organizations, alongside others, are hard at work together to stop the Trump/GOP agenda. (We've included a list of these organizations at the end of this guide.)

Momentum has trained hundreds of grassroots leaders in dozens of organizations throughout the United States and internationally. We invite you to sign up for a training with the Momentum Institute to learn how to put the work of this guide into practice.

To explore the issues raised in this guide in greater depth, you may want to read *This Is an Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt Is Shaping the 21st Century*, by Mark Engler and Paul Engler. (Paul is a co-founder of Momentum.) Released in 2016, *This Is an Uprising* surveys the field of civil resistance and draws lessons from some of the great social movements of the past century.

These include the Civil Rights Movement, ACT UP, and Occupy in the United States; the movement for independence in India; and the resistance movement that brought down a dictator in Serbia. We've drawn on several of those accounts in the sidebars throughout this guide.

To learn more about the book and to find additional resources on civil resistance, visit the web site [ThisIsAnUprising.org](http://ThisIsAnUprising.org).



# The study of civil resistance gives us answers

We've developed this guide through our study of the field of civil resistance, which examines the means by which nonviolent movements combat injustice when their opponents seem to control all the levers of institutional power. For decades, scholars of civil resistance have analyzed data and poured over case studies to determine best practices for social movements.

The study of civil resistance has validated what we knew from our own work, and it validates what is working in the current Trump

resistance movement. It has given us a framework to understand social movements and to explain them to others. We have used this framework to train the leaders of dozens of community organizations, unions, and activist groups so they can build on lessons from the movements throughout history that have toppled dictators and won sweeping reforms.

We believe that this framework must be the cornerstone from which the resistance will grow and sustain itself against the Trump administration and the GOP.



# What you can expect from *Resistance Guide*

In this guide, we break down the basics of civil resistance in four sections that will help you work strategically and sustain the movement to win.

The Introduction is about theory, strategy, and vision. The resistance must say goodbye to the traditional politics of compromise in favor of a movement strategy that will change the political weather and apply pressure where it is most effective.

Chapter One explains the importance of social movements. Elected leaders are important—but people power is more important to achieve transformative change over time.

Chapter Two explores how protest movements work, especially how they turn popular support into the active participation needed to win.

Chapter Three digs deep into three different but complementary types of resistance. We call these the game change, the outside game, and the inside game.

Chapter Four gives you the tools you need to resist together, by finding a training and finding a group, or forming a group of your own. It also suggests a minimum individual commitment needed to sustain this movement.

We've included multiple sidebars illustrating the successes and challenges of social movements from history and recent events. And we've included links to additional resources—including information for many groups that have already begun organizing to resist the Trump administration and promote a broader vision of social justice.



# **INTRODUCTION:** **BEYOND THE STATUS QUO**

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**For too long, the leadership of the Democratic Party has sought empty compromise positions that claim the broadest possible appeal without upsetting big donors. The only way to defeat the Trump/GOP agenda is to employ a movement strategy that instead heightens the differences between the reactionary Republicans and we who resist them. The example of the Tea Party shows us what it will take to change the political weather and win. Are you ready?**

**“Every good movement passes through five stages: indifference, ridicule, abuse, repression, and respect.”**

*—Mohandas Gandhi, Young India,  
March 9, 1921*

**“The high hopes of instant victory in the movement take-off stage inevitably turn into despair as some activists begin to believe that their movement is failing. It has not achieved its goals and, in their eyes, it has not had any ‘real’ victories.”**

*—Bill Moyer, “Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements”*

# Hope versus despair, or the view from the crossroads

Historians may look at the year 2017 as the beginning one of the great social movements of American history.

Future generations may tell how, faced with an unfit President and a reactionary Congress, people flooded the streets, raised their voices, and sparked a push for social justice that halted conservative initiatives in their tracks, energized the Democratic Party with progressive values, and took back the Congress, the White House and the courts. And they may tell how this grassroots insurgency led to enduring advances toward racial justice, worker and immigrant rights, gender equality, and environmental sustainability.

Or they may look at the dawn of the Trump era as one of history's great missed opportunities, a time in which protesters started out strong but were ultimately unable to build on their great manifestation of hope and their hunger for change.

At this moment, we don't know which way it will go.

Millions upon millions of people have taken action to resist Trump: taking part in street protests; joining large organizations like MoveOn and the ACLU; forming Indivisible chapters and other local groups; flooding the phone lines and town hall meetings of their elected representatives. **This presents an enormous opportunity, if the new energy can be sustained and channeled effectively.** Bringing people into a movement. Sustaining their participation. Keeping them inspired. Directing them to effective action. These are critical challenges. If they are not met, millions of new activists will lose interest—or lose hope.

Observers of social movements describe a “movement cycle” (see Figure 1). After periods of exhilarating growth and promise, there will always be periods of disillusionment and contraction as opponents adapt, change slows, and hope dims.

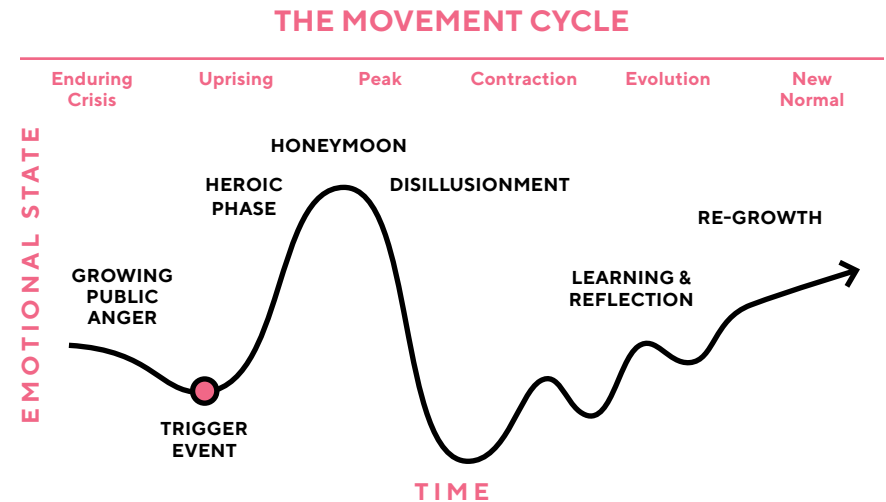


Figure 1. This chart by Movement NetLabs describes how social movements cycle through different phases depending on public sentiment.

But this lull should not be taken as defeat. Being aware of these patterns and how to adapt to them helps us ward off despair, even in our darkest hours. We can build on our strengths even when the media dismisses our efforts and victories seem beyond our reach. We can sustain one another until the light breaks through. And we can create both the actions that draw in new supporters and the structures that will help keep them participating.

Every social movement has struggled with the same challenges. What can we learn from them?

# Beyond compromise— movement

The crisis we are in today calls for a movement strategy rather than a compromise strategy. What does that look like?

First, it means **polarizing the issues**. Just as the function of a magnet or a battery depends on the opposition between its positive and negative poles, it is necessary to cast issues in terms of right and wrong. This forces people to pick a side. It's the opposite of searching for positions where there's broad agreement, as reassuring as it might be to emphasize common beliefs across the political spectrum.

Second, it means **focusing on the base**. For too long, the Democratic Party has demobilized its own base, only to activate it in brief moments before elections. The base consists of the core voters of the Democratic Party. By seeking positions that appeal to them, we can draw swing and crossover voters to us. If we face a choice between placating the Democratic Party's big-money donors or appealing to passionate grassroots supporters, we should choose the latter—the path of energy, activation, and hope.

Third, it means creating and sustaining **active popular support**. This refers to a base of supporters who are willing to take action to push the movement's vision. It is distinct from the kind of passive support that most public opinion polling reveals.

Mainstream Democratic politics and even many large liberal nonprofits have steered away from these three principles for more than a generation. Instead, they've pursued the path of compromise and "triangulation." Compromise is appealing as a civic virtue. Against an opponent who is using a movement approach, however, it is a recipe for loss after loss.

We see mainstream Democratic politicians and organizations seeking broad consensus and floating proposals that claim to reject the dug-in positions of left and right, triangulating a third position above either. They raise the prospect of

"grand bargains" but end up disappointing both sides in equal measure. There have been small victories along the way, but the overall trend has put us where we are now—out of power, with Republicans solidly in control at the federal level and in most of the states.

## Compromise Strategy

## Movement Strategy

Assumes static, zero-sum politics

Assumes politics is dynamic and can be changed by protest

Top-down, market-tested advertising that focuses on undecided voters

Messages that appeal to heartfelt values and energize supporters

Transactional leadership

Transformational leadership

Seeks consensus

Challenges status quo

Coalition maintenance

Realignment of coalition

Electoral politics casts protest as threatening to status quo

Electoral politics and protest complement one another to transform society

Depends on Wall Street and billionaire donors

Depends on massive numbers of small donors

Makes the deal

Changes the political weather

Symbolic resistance

Real resistance

Establishment politics

Populism

Prioritizes short-term legislation and political maneuvering

Prioritizes long-term social change

Follows elite opinions and courts big donors

Follows movements and cooperates with grassroots organizations

Speaks to the head

Speaks to the heart

Uses the rules and established methods of "legitimate" politics

Breaks the rules and rewrites them

If we want to see what a successful movement strategy might look like in mainstream politics, we need only consider at the recent history of the Republican party. Specifically, we must look at the rise—and startling success—of the Tea Party.

# Beyond town halls— the Tea Party's movement strategy

In 2009, Barack Obama was inaugurated as president of the United States. The Democrats seemed unstoppable. They controlled the Senate, the House, and legislative chambers all over the country. After eight years of George W. Bush, Republicans and their agenda were deeply unpopular.

Obama began his presidency with an approval rating 10 points higher than George W. Bush's was in January 2001 and nine points higher than Bill Clinton's was in January 1993. Republicans had serious incentives to cooperate with President Obama. Some at the top even advocated for a new type of conservatism that would be more inclusive and would reach out to minorities and Democrats who were alienated by Bush.

So how did the Republicans so quickly reach a hardline stance of opposition and obstructionism instead?

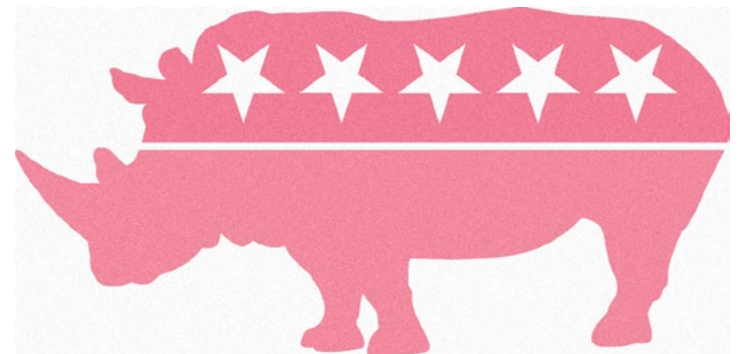
Starting that very year, in 2009, an energized and angry base of conservatives declared their resistance—not only to Obama and the Democratic Party, but to the moderate Republicans who had considered cooperation. They called themselves the Tea Party.

Today, we attribute the Tea Party's ascent to economic anger over the 2008 financial collapse and years of stagnant wages, accelerated by a racist backlash to the election of the first Black president. At the time, however, both Obama's handling of the financial crisis and his mantle of racial reconciliation bolstered his support.

Tea Party activists first made national headlines with a massive Tax Day protest on April 15, 2009. Fox News gave endless coverage to the protesters' call for more limited government.

This was a game-changing event. The protest was designed for public consumption. It captivated the media. The Tea Party soon became the wellspring of opposition to the proposed Affordable Care Act, aka Obamacare.

Following the rally, tens of thousands of people organized into autonomous small groups. The Tea Party quickly activated, recruited, and energized a massive base of supporters, all hoping to push elected Republicans (and the party's donor base) further to the right, preventing compromise with the Democrats in power.



Tea Party leaders quickly began to put strategic pressure on members of Congress using phone calls, letter writing campaigns, and impromptu, in-person delegations of constituents who would show up at lawmakers' district offices and demand meetings. These actions drew extensive news coverage, which in turn helped draw new recruits to the movement.

As a result, the health care reform that President Obama had campaigned on became heavily politicized. Democrats worried that constituents sympathetic to the Tea Party would revolt over too radical a shift in policy. Republicans began to fear that cooperating with any Democratic legislation would earn them primary challengers from the right.

Republicans were right to be afraid. In many areas, local Tea Party organizers shifted their focus from putting pressure on those in office to running candidates of their own. This came to be referred to as the "RINO hunting" strategy, because organizers claimed that moderate GOP members of Congress were "Republican in name only." Republicans deemed insufficiently conservative were "outed" as traitors to their party.

Many Tea Party challengers made it to Congress. In the 2010 midterm elections, 44 newly-elected Republicans were affiliated with the Tea Party movement. Others won primaries but lost general elections—recall Christine O'Donnell in Delaware, who had to address remarks that she had "dabbled in witchcraft," and Todd Akin in Missouri, who was ensnared in his references to "legitimate rape." Yet even while drawing mockery and scorn from mainstream political commentators in defeat, these candidates advanced their movement. As journalist Joan Shipps put it, they "lost their national-level races but won with Republican voters, thereby moving their party rightward."

# Beyond Indivisible— a comprehensive strategy

Shortly after Donald Trump’s election, a group of former Democratic congressional staffers released the [Indivisible Guide](#). They had personally witnessed the rise of the Tea Party. They had seen how it undermined the prospects for progressive change under President Obama. The *Indivisible Guide* examined the Tea Party’s tactics—specifically, the way its activists challenged Democratic members of Congress at town halls—and showed how the same methods could be used to thwart Trump.

The *Indivisible Guide* was an immediate viral hit and it spawned significant grassroots organizing. The document has been viewed or downloaded more than two million times. By mid-2017, nearly 6,000 Indivisible groups were active in the United States. Utilizing strategies presented in the guide, activists have flooded town hall meetings with angry constituents and bombarded members of Congress with phone calls from voters intent on expressing their disapproval of Trump administration policies. Indivisible has played an important role in slowing Republican efforts to overturn Obamacare.

The *Indivisible Guide* is an essential part of the movement to resist Trump. We applaud its authors and the activists who have put its lessons to great use. With the *Resistance Guide*, we wish to show how Indivisible fits into a broader social movement that, like the Tea Party, can change the political weather and regain power. We discuss how Indivisible-style pressure on decision-makers is a critical part of a social movement strategy for change in Chapter 3.

**But the Tea Party did more than block Obama’s agenda, and we can do more than block Trump’s proposals.** The Tea Party reshaped the GOP agenda on the local, state, and federal level. It did more than elect individual Republicans. It tightened the GOP’s hold on power by boldly rejecting compromise. As important



as it is to stop (or even oust) Trump, our resistance should keep in mind what happened during Obama’s eight years in office.

More than one thousand state or federal offices fell from Democratic to Republican hands. States like Wisconsin, North Carolina, Texas, Michigan and Ohio saw radical policy changes that curtailed the power of unions and other key members of the Democratic coalition. Republicans destroyed funding for public schools, universities, and children’s health services, among other public initiatives, with legislation that hurt the poor, women, marginalized citizens, and the public good. Much of this change was due to the broad and uncompromising vision of the Tea Party movement.

The notion of realigning the party around the most extreme elements of the base looked to many like a disaster waiting to happen. At some point, wouldn’t the extremists alienate the center? The opposite happened. **Because that base was organized and active, it continued to draw the center towards it.**

In the end, the Tea Party changed the political weather in the United States. Today, no Republican official could get away with the environmental protections that Richard Nixon enacted. The immigration law that Ronald Reagan signed would be seen as a leftist pipe dream.



# Beyond resistance— creating transformative change together

The Women’s March and the airport protests were joyous, hopeful events. They, and the surge of protest they accompanied, announced that millions of Americans believe in a country that welcomes the immigrant and the refugee, a country that refuses to confine or restrict people based on who they love or how they identify, a country that addresses racial injustice and acts to save the climate.

**There is a path from that first burst of hope to the realization of our dreams.**

And it’s not a path you can walk alone.

We wrote the *Resistance Guide* because the study of civil resistance helped us develop a powerful theory of change. It’s a theory that only works if tens of thousands of people—not only top leaders—learn it, understand it, and put it into practice.

***In its simplest form,  
the theory is this:  
Stopping the assault on  
our democracy, protecting  
social programs, and building  
progressive power will require  
steadily growing numbers of  
people to consistently support  
a social movement.***

***These people will need to  
engage in three different  
types of protest action:***

- 1. Public protests that bring in  
new supporters and change what’s  
considered politically possible***
- 2. Acts of resistance focused  
on people in power  
(chiefly elected officials)***
- 3. Electoral politics that oust  
Republicans and replace the  
Democratic establishment with  
movement-allied leaders.***

Right now, some progressive groups are leading street protests against the president's policies. Others are facing down members of Congress in town hall meetings. And still others are cultivating new, grassroots candidates to challenge incumbents in upcoming elections. A successful social movement will incorporate all three of these approaches.

Learning the fundamentals of each of these strategies will help you make your own best contribution to the resistance. The alternative is politics as usual, and that will take us nowhere. Following establishment politicians down a path of compromise and triangulation will drain our hope and leave us demobilized and despairing.

But if we follow the example of the Tea Party, and the examples of progressive movements that toppled dictators and secured rights,

we can build a movement capable of absorbing the millions of people who have already begun to resist. We can channel their anger and their hope into a sophisticated, decentralized movement that will grow in numbers and in power.

If we commit to participating in all three types of resistance outlined in this guide, we can sustain that movement through the threat of despair and the setbacks along the way.

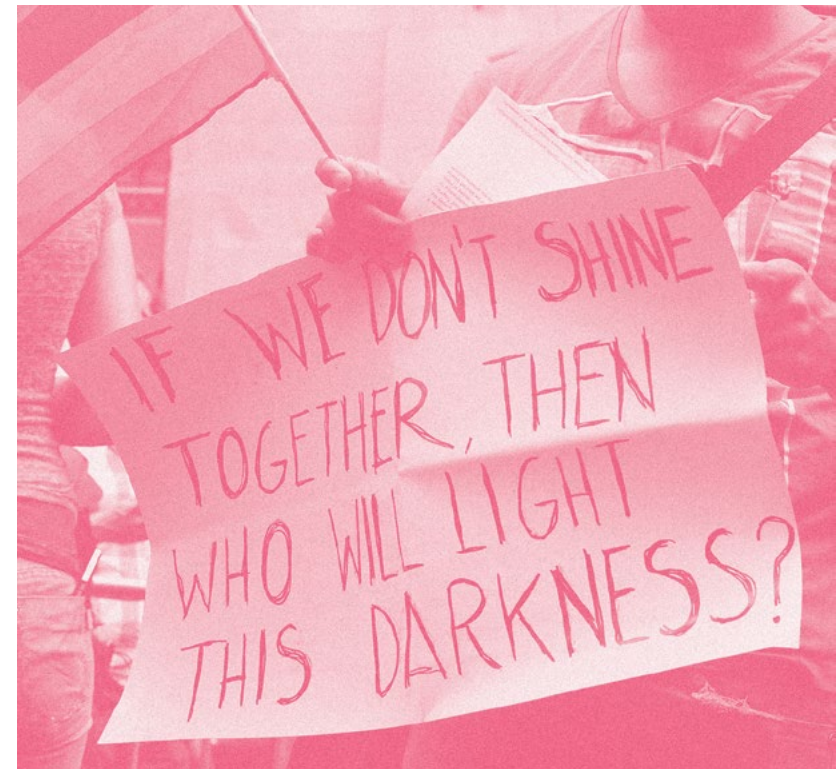
With growing numbers and faith in our own power, we can defend our movement from the inevitable attacks from the mainstream media, establishment Democrats and the Republicans in power.

When it comes to hope, we cannot just rely on professional organizers and leaders, we all have to carry it, and keep it alive.

And if we want to sustain it, to keep it growing, we have to do so together.

An old proverb states, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

***Let's go together.***



# CHAPTER ONE: THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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The change we need can only come from the power of social movements. In order to exercise that power, we first need to understand how to grow it and how to sustain it. Our culture places too much faith in the role of leaders. It's time to shine a light on the power of the people.

**"Ordinary people exercise power in American politics mainly at those extraordinary moments when they rise up in anger and hope, defy the rules that ordinarily govern their daily lives, and, by doing so, disrupt the workings of the institutions in which they are enmeshed."**

*—Francis Fox Piven, Challenging Authority:  
How Ordinary People Change America*

**"The good things that have been done, the reforms that have been made, the wars that have been stopped, the women's rights that have been won, the racism that has been partly extirpated in society, all of that was not done by government edict, was not done by the three branches of government. It was not done by that structure which we learn about in junior high school, which they say is democracy. It was all done by citizens' movements. And keep in mind that all great movements in the past have risen from small movements, from tiny clusters of people who came together here and there. When a movement is strong enough it doesn't matter who is in the White House; what really matters is what people do, and what people say, and what people \*demand\*."**

*—Howard Zinn, You Can't Be  
Neutral on a Moving Train*

# The history of social movements teaches us that Trump can be stopped

Throughout history, even in moments of total despair when repressive and racist forces have held the reins of power, popular resistance has broken through oppression and even made progressive gains. Social movements have overthrown dictators and military juntas. Across the globe, in hundreds of countries, they have fought back against corporate or theocratic power in the name of individual freedom and social justice. And they have won.

For example, take the surprising shift over the last two decades towards marriage equality. The 1990s saw both Democrats and Republicans pass the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which defined marriage as the union between a man and a woman and implicitly legitimized homophobia. As recently as eight years ago, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, Joe Biden and almost all other top Democratic leaders 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 didn't drive these changes—they raced to keep pace with them. LGBTQ activists led a movement that won the hearts and minds of millions, racking up local legislative victories, gaining acceptance for same-sex couples in religious congregations and corporate boardrooms, and shifting common sense attitudes within the legal community. Resistance 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.

This was not an aberration. It's how ordinary people have won rights and freedoms for ages.



## If the people lead, the leaders will follow

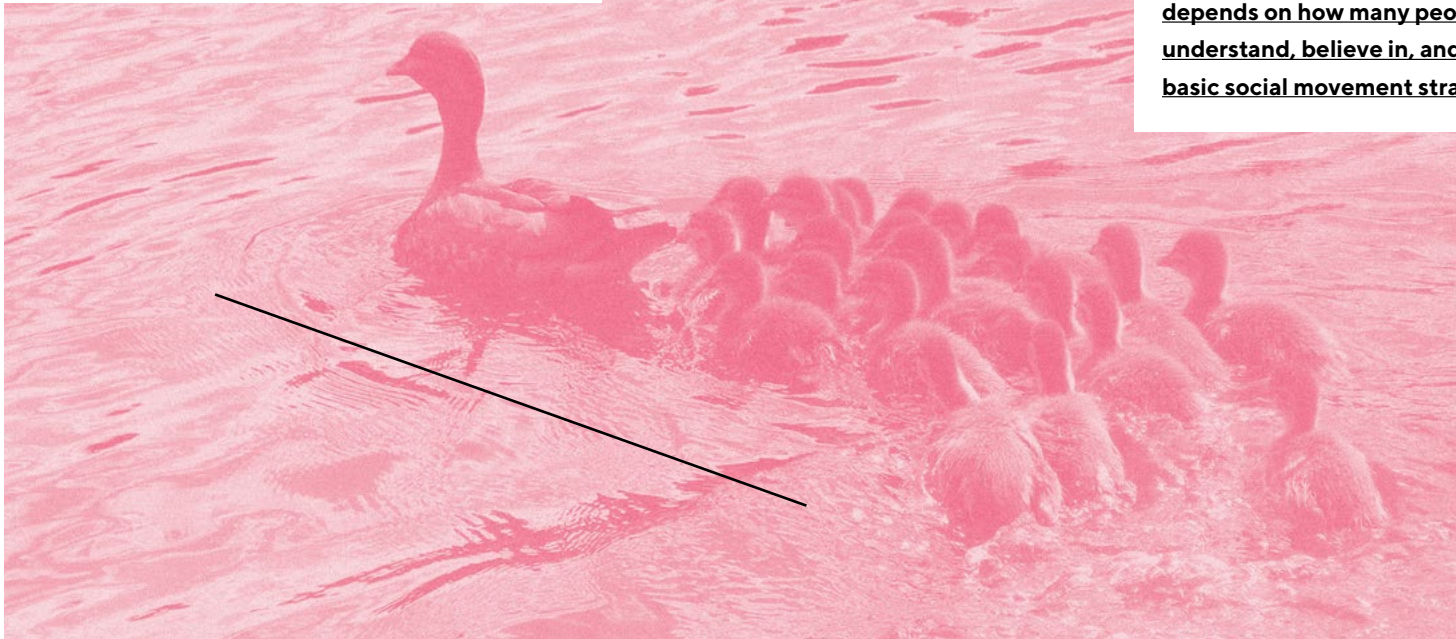
Too often, we think of the gradual expansion of rights in the United States as somehow baked into the DNA of American history, as if it was only a matter of time before the Declaration of Independence's claim that "all men are created equal" would apply to women and African-Americans. It's important to remember that all of the great egalitarian reforms in our country—the end of slavery, the end of child labor, the eight-hour work day, social security, women's right to vote, the end of Jim Crow segregation, and the securing of basic environmental protections—are owed to social movements that used **the same basic strategy.**

Time and again, this people-powered strategy has prevailed against staggering concentrations of power. The Environmental Protection Agency was established under Republican President Richard Nixon. AIDS activists achieved life-saving reforms during the hostile, homophobic administration of Ronald Reagan. Dictators such as Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic and Chile's Augusto Pinochet

were toppled by social movements that persisted in the face of extreme repression.

That same strategy can be used today in the fight against Trump and the Republican Party. At its simplest, it consists of building a social movement with active popular support that can pressure decision makers. For that to happen, it's important that we understand the nature of social movements. We have to explain our work as we recruit support. We have to give one another strength in the face of guaranteed hostility from those who get angry or scared when someone rocks the boat.

**The success of our movement today depends on how many people understand, believe in, and use this basic social movement strategy.**



## Putting our faith in politicians makes us forget the importance of our own power

Understanding the importance of social movements requires pushing back against a ubiquitous notion: that change comes from within the political system. We call this the **monolithic myth**. Popular in mainstream media accounts and history books, this myth gives the credit for social progress to elected officials, lawyers, lobbyists, and donors working behind the scenes.

The resistance movements we discuss in this guide were victorious because they were initiated by everyday people—by groups of engaged individuals—who changed the climate of political debate and forced politicians to take stands on issues they would have rather avoided.

Not only does the monolithic myth obscure the contributions that social 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.

Some of the greatest U.S. presidents knew this. Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson all collaborated with and responded to pressure from social movements. They recognized that without the work of those movements, they could not have accomplished what they did.

This history is too often left out of popular accounts and school books. Inspiring people to join a movement requires continually asserting that the movement can succeed, while the media and other authorities sow doubt that it ever has.

### U.S. Presidents and Social Movements

These presidents passed important legislation under pressure by social movements, often after initially opposing it:

- Labor union agitation was key to Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s passing the Wagner Act, which guaranteed collective bargaining rights for the first time.
- The civil rights movement of the 1960s pushed John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson to pass the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts (see sidebar, Chapter 2).
- The modern environmental movement won an early victory in the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency by Richard Nixon.
- Barack Obama stuck to the public position that marriage should be between a man and a woman, until the marriage equality movement reached a critical mass and he reversed his position.



# We must believe in the power of movements or we will continue to lose

The history of civil resistance shows us that the success of a movement depends on people first believing in its basic power—and then learning how to wield this power effectively.

Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign embraced the strategies of social movements, leading to the improbable victory of an African-American president in a country where racism remains a powerful force. Yet following that victory, the social movement that fueled the campaign yielded to the same old belief in the power of politicians. As commentator Van Jones put it, “We thought that by electing Obama, we could just sit back and watch. We went from having a movement to watching a movie.”

Meanwhile, an energized opposition rallied. The Tea Party movement grew as the Obama movement petered out, and—as we discussed in the Introduction—the Republican Party seized control of the House of Representatives in the 2010 midterm elections.

The Tea Party movement did not repeat the Obama campaign’s mistake. It sustained itself past its 2010 electoral victories, building the foundation for the Republican takeover of both houses of Congress and of the legislatures in 32 states—and laying the groundwork for the eventual election of Donald Trump.

**It’s tempting to believe that the simple act of electing politicians is enough to enable them to create change. Falling prey to this belief, we will tend to disengage after our side wins an election, and fail to sustain participation and growth.** If we continue paying attention to politics, it’s often in a passive way, as if we’re “watching a movie.” And that passivity can have disastrous consequences.

The good news is that Trump’s victory and his aggressive policies have inspired millions to take matters into their own hands, without relying on elected officials, political parties, or knowing insiders to make change.

So how do these millions form a movement—and how do we make that movement effective?

## The Marriage Equality Movement

As recently as 1990, three-quarters of Americans [viewed](#) homosexual sex as immoral. Less than a third of the country thought same-sex marriage should be legalized.

In 1996, the Defense of Marriage Act passed the Senate 85-14, to be signed by President Bill Clinton. By 2006, 26 states had passed amendments banning same-sex marriage.

But by June 2015, when the Supreme Court ruling in [Obergefell v. Hodges](#) allowed same-sex marriage nationwide, 37 states and the District of Columbia were already there, and public opinion polling showed a [majority](#) of Americans in favor of gay marriage.

How did marriage equality shift from a third-rail issue that politicians were afraid to touch to a political winner that everyone wanted to get behind?

The Supreme Court’s ruling in favor of same-sex marriage followed a long series of state and local fights. Not all were victorious. Early wins in courts and statehouses were reversed by legislatures and initiatives. San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom’s 2004 [decision](#) to marry same-sex couples in defiance of state law led to backlash and the 2008 passage of California’s Proposition 8, which enshrined heterosexual marriage in the state constitution. Yet even amid setbacks, there was progress towards acceptance of marriage equality.

The drive for marriage equality was grounded in a simple idea: If a social movement can win the battle of public opinion, the courts and legislatures will follow. By chipping away at hearts and minds across a broad range of constituencies and institutions, activists created a shift in public opinion so enormous that politicians had to reconsider which side of the argument was “safe” for them to support.

As hundreds of thousands of engaged citizens steadily pushed for acceptance of LGBTQ community members, television shows gave more—and more favorable—attention to queer life experiences. Celebrities came out with less hesitation. Religious congregations debated welcoming LGBTQ parishioners and clerical leaders, and some even began to consecrate same-sex unions. Fortune 500 companies offered health care benefits to same-sex partners. The number of LGBTQ student groups in high schools grew at a record pace. Experts on childhood development marshaled evidence in support of same-sex parents, making it increasingly difficult to produce credible testimony against gay marriage.

Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in the United States, said in 1977, shortly after his election to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, that the simple act of coming out “would do more to end prejudice overnight than anybody would imagine.” Though Milk was later assassinated, the rapid rise in

support for the LGBTQ community in the early 21st century proved his words to be prophetic. In a virtuous circle, as more Americans came out to their families, friends, and colleagues, institutions became more welcoming and support for marriage equality increased, making it easier for more Americans to come out.

By 2011, public support for same-sex marriage was nearing 50 percent for the first time. In May 2012, Vice President Joe Biden declared on Meet the Press that he had changed his position and now supported marriage equality. President Obama completed his “evolution” shortly thereafter. In just one week in April 2013, six senators made similar shifts and proclaimed their support for marriage equality. By the time the Supreme Court was debating the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act in 2013, the Obama administration had not only opted to stop defending the Act, it filed an amicus brief arguing that the law violated the equal protection clause.

One startling effect of the Supreme Court’s ruling was the reaction of Republican voters: same-sex marriage [moved](#) to the bottom of the list of their concerns. Today, even politicians who have not changed their position duck questions about their views on the subject. At nearly every point in the last three decades, legal and political positions on marriage equality have followed popular attitudes. As Evan Wolfson, founder of the organization Freedom to Marry, put it, “We had persuaded the country, and the courts followed.”





## CHAPTER TWO:

# HOW DO MOVEMENTS WORK?

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**Social movement victories require growing and sustaining active support—but great gains can be made with a relatively small, active group of supporters. Movements use protest to “polarize” issues, forcing spectators to choose a side. Though this can create discomfort, the result is often to strengthen movements—making it vital that supporters continue to show up for continued protest.**

**“Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed.”**

*—Abraham Lincoln, First Debate with Stephen Douglas, Ottawa, Illinois*

**“That age-old lesson – that everything we do matters – is the meaning of the people’s struggle here in the United States and everywhere. A poem can inspire a movement. A pamphlet can spark a revolution. Civil disobedience can arouse people and provoke us to think, when we organize with one another, when we get involved, when we stand up and speak out together, we can create a power no government can suppress. We live in a beautiful country. But people who have no respect for human life, freedom, or justice have taken it over. It is now up to all of us to take it back.”**

*—Howard Zinn, A Power Governments Cannot Suppress*

## When enough people join in, social movements become unstoppable

Social movements work by getting enough people engaged, involved, and activated.

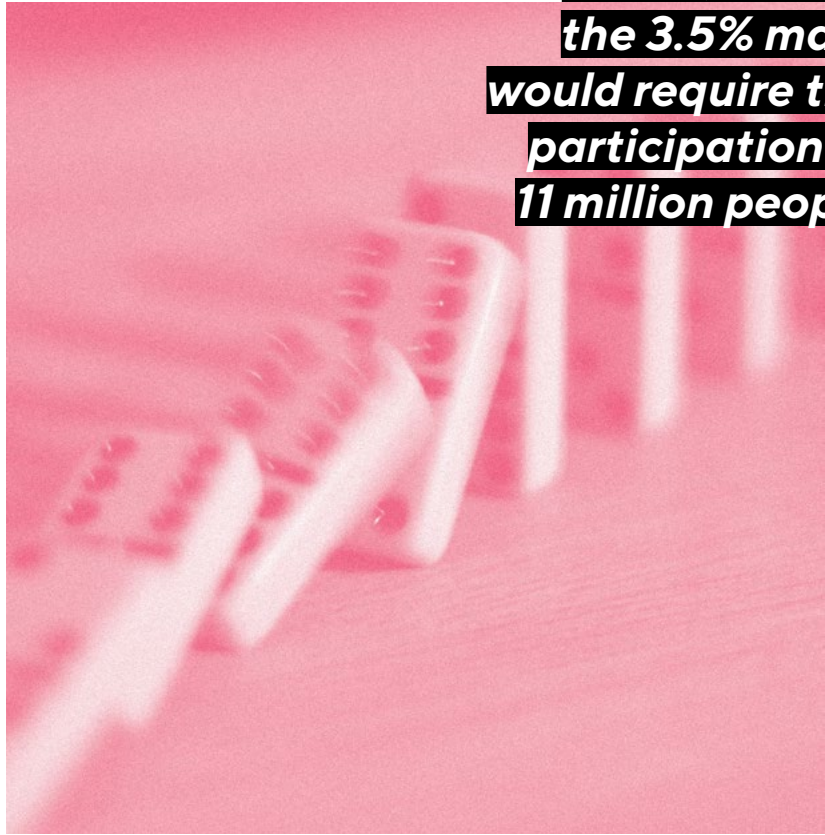
This raises an obvious question: How many is enough?

Surprisingly, the research suggests that this question can be answered. In *Why Civil Resistance Works*, Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan argue that no political revolution since 1900 has failed after gaining the active and sustained participation of 3.5% of the population. Some have won with lower participation—but beyond that threshold, not one has lost.

Whether or not there's a magic number for participation, once we understand just how much numbers matter in general, the most important questions about any action become clear: Is this action winning more people to our cause? Is it helping our movement grow in scale and over time? Are people more likely to sustain their participation in the resistance because of it?

In the United States, hitting the 3.5% mark would require the participation of 11 million people. That's a steep goal. But consider that as many as 4.6 million people showed up to the Women's Marches.

It isn't out of reach.



**... In the United States, hitting the 3.5% mark would require the participation of 11 million people**

# Winning support means reaching people—where they're at—and moving them

Public actions change minds. They dramatize unjust laws and decisions, make visible moral crises that have gone unseen.

They energize people who feel they haven't had a voice and demonstrate that they are not alone.

Actions don't move people all at once, however. We won't succeed because a clear message causes a lightbulb moment across the country, or because one great march inspires everyone to flood into the streets. People move across a **spectrum of support**.

Not everyone starts in the same place. Some are neutral. Some are passive supporters. Some are against us. As the *Spectrum of Support* shows, a good action will push people across this spectrum. Those who are neutral may be moved to educate themselves on the issues and ultimately become passively supportive. Passive supporters may be led to get involved. Active supporters might find themselves bringing others in and becoming more fully involved as strong advocates.

Movement across this spectrum isn't always the result of conscious decision making. **Often, people shift because an effective action reframes the basic moral questions behind an issue that is otherwise seen as too abstract or complex. It makes people emotionally connect to the issue and choose sides.** We call this process *polarization*.

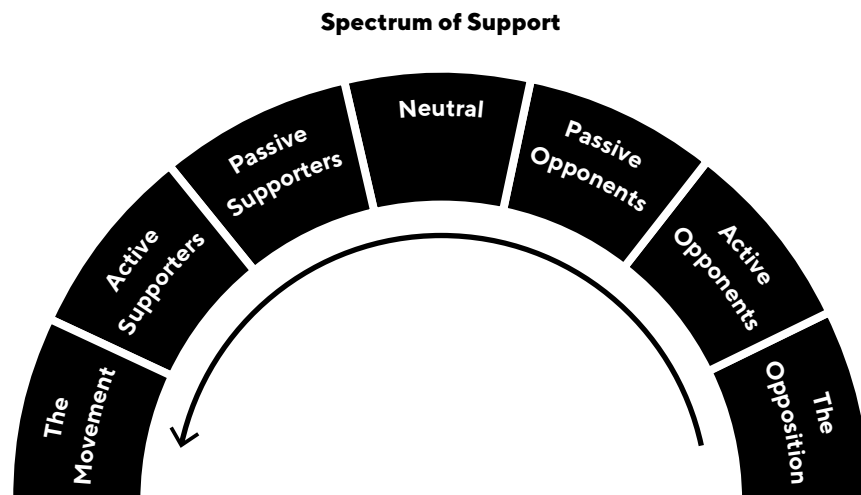


Figure 2: Protest can shift the spectrum of support

## Protest creates polarization

For social movements, protest is the most effective means of polarizing an issue. Research shows that perceptions of protest as violent or destructive of property tend to discourage participation and make a movement less effective. *Confrontation*, however, is not the same as violence. Confrontational tactics can draw people to a cause, even when the protesters are criticized as too abrasive.

You wouldn't always know it. The message that protest doesn't work is deeply ingrained in our political and popular culture. Anyone who tries to join a demonstration will hear the same refrain: *No one is listening to you. No one cares. You're just preaching to the choir. You're too disruptive. You're too angry. You're making a lot of noise and accomplishing nothing.*

**This message is wrong. Dangerously wrong.**

How do we know?

In recent decades, scholars have pushed back against the monolithic myth with numerous accounts of how protests changed public

opinion, shaped policy, and altered the course of history. There's even quantitative evidence: A study by Daniel Gillion at the University of Pennsylvania analyzed civil rights legislation from the 1960s through the 1990s and found that every 10 protests in a representative's district made that representative one percent more likely to vote in favor of civil rights issues—a minor but nonetheless demonstrable effect on legislative progress.

Our society is adept at shutting out the voices of ordinary people. Corporations spend millions on advertising. Celebrities dominate airtime. Wealthy constituents have the attention of elected officials.

**In a democracy, protest is the most effective way to seize the microphone in the absence of either money or fame.**

Protests capture the attention of the media and the broader public. They shine a spotlight on issues that those in power would otherwise ignore. And after heightening awareness, protests force people to take a position. Protest asks, "Which side are you on?"

**... Protest asks,  
"Which side  
are you on?"**



The message that protest doesn't work can be so easy to believe because we rarely see change from any one protest. To move issues on a national scale, protest requires participation from tens or even hundreds of thousands of people. It requires both big and small actions, from movements that persist and adapt over time.

Protest is a vital tool for social movements. It can shape public opinion, transform political discussion, and bring new people into a movement, resulting in important long-term developments even as short-term goals like specific legislative changes prove elusive. Occupy, Black Lives Matter, and the Keystone Pipeline protests are not considered to have racked up many concrete victories. But each brought thousands upon thousands of people into their respective movements, reshaping political discussion around economic inequality, racial injustice, and climate change.

### **Types of Protest**

There are more ways to protest than marching with a sign (though that one is important). In fact, civil disobedience allows for great variety and creativity. Theorist Gene Sharp once compiled a list of [198 methods of nonviolent action](#). Protest tactics include letter-writing, boycotts, guerrilla theater, strikes, occupations of public (or private) spaces, delegations to politicians' offices, dropping banners from office towers, sing-ins, sit-ins, call-ins, flash mobs, press conferences and bike rides, to name a few.

# How protest polarizes

Even though confrontational tactics may cause discomfort, they force people to make a choice, to view an issue in terms of right and wrong. The actions demand that onlookers take a side.

Think of your own experience. Have you found yourself thinking about an issue with newfound urgency because of the way you've seen it framed by such an action? Have you found yourself moving across this spectrum in your own activism?

Martin Luther King Jr. presented a powerful explanation of this process in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Responding to criticism of disruptive protests that had culminated in violence, King wrote, "We who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with."

King's analysis proved correct. In Birmingham, activists protested knowing they would likely be attacked by police—and knowing that images of the violence broadcast in Americans' living rooms would force the nation to confront the horrors of segregation. Those images galvanized support for civil rights protections, even though many Americans believed that the protesters' tactics went too far.

This is the response to offer those who say that protest is too disruptive. Protest polarizes, and successful polarization moves people from neutral to taking a stand. Even those who say they disapprove of the protesters can come around to supporting the cause.

It may take several protests to make someone aware of an issue. It may take several more to make them feel they must pick a side. It takes time. That's why sustained participation is so important.

**Successful vs. Unsuccessful Protest**

You'll have to go to the movies to see a march that ends in an unequivocal victory. In the real world, it can be difficult to tell whether a protest is successful or not. Here are a few tips for staging an effective protest:

- **Take media reports with a grain of salt.** Cameras love a well-designed protest, but commentators often disparage protesters as naïve, uninformed, alienating, or ineffective.
- **Declare victory and take credit.** Because so many authorities will downplay your effectiveness, a big part of an effective protest is explaining to the general public how it is that what you're doing is working.
- **Elevate sacrifice and disruption.** Sacrifice can be as simple as giving up valuable time to march, leaflet, or picket, or as dramatic as going on hunger strike. Sacrifice touches others by demonstrating seriousness of commitment. Disruption is similarly critical. Critics argue that traffic-blocking marches alienate potential supporters, but the power of disruption to capture public attention often outweighs its alienating effect. Disruption signals that business as usual will not be permitted to continue under the current state of affairs.
- **Discourage violence and property destruction.** Perceptions of protest as violent or destructive of property tend to discourage participation. The philosophical difference between violence and property destruction doesn't really matter for the practical purposes of effective protest. Chenoweth and other researchers have shown that public support drops off dramatically when either enters the picture.
- **Make your message clear.** Write signs with concise statements that are easily understood. Train spokespeople to speak in sound bites with a clear message that defines problems and solutions, identifies heroes and villains.
- **Build support, but don't worry about winning everyone over at once.** The media will always find at least one person to say that he finds you off-putting, but as long as your support is growing more than your opponent's support, you are on the right path.



## Not everyone has to like us

There's an enduring paradox of social movements: Many of their greatest achievements have come in the face of vocal majority opposition.

We don't need to change the minds of angry Trump supporters to win.

**We don't need everyone to like our movement or approve of our tactics.**

A large majority of the public opposed the Tea Party, yet they captured the agenda of the Republican Party. The Civil Rights Movement achieved huge legislative victories because the public came to support the need for concerted action on civil rights even as they disapproved of the movement's tactics.

Research shows that even tactics the public dislikes can increase support for an issue. Even a movement that is seen as unpopular can continue winning people to its cause. Public opinion never gave wide support to the Occupy movement—

approval of the Occupy encampments often polled lower than it did for the Tea Party. Yet through Occupy, public concern over inequality grew. Ultimately, the movement popularized the argument that the United States was ruled by an elite one percent whose interests were opposed to the remaining 99 percent, and a political debate previously centered on budget cuts and debt ceilings gave way to a debate about the unjust influence of the wealthiest few.

Of course, this does not mean that we should be purposefully alienating. There is a fine line between protesting to move people towards our side and alienating potential supporters. **Protests that are disruptive or dramatize an issue should still appeal to common sense values.** Academic jargon, incoherent messaging, or moral superiority can prevent potential supporters from feeling connected to the issue at hand.

At the same time, many issues claim majority support from the general public and yet seem permanently stalled. Take background checks for gun sales. According to polls, approximately 90 percent of Americans support background checks for private gun sales. Knowing that, you might assume that politicians would be racing to expand background check laws. Guess what? They're not. While support may be in the majority, opinion remains passive and thus fails to rouse political urgency and willpower.





## The importance of active popular support

The resistance to Trump is built on beliefs that have broad popular support. Immigrants' rights, free college education, the protection of voting and reproductive rights, a \$15 minimum wage, universal health care, and an end to the drug war are all fundamentally popular issues with bedrock support of 50 percent or more.

But on many of the issues—gun control is the starkest example—the minority opposition is more effective. Why is this?

The difference between an issue that doesn't move and one that does is **active popular support**. This refers to the base of people who not only approve, but are willing to take action on behalf of a social movement.

Active popular support makes a crucial difference. In its absence, elected officials can disregard even majority passive support. Even if politicians vote against positions held by the majority, they will pay little price so long as this majority is passive.

Active popular support can encompass a wide range of activities. Supporters might attend marches, call elected officials, host educational events, or donate money. The key is that they do more than merely agree with a movement: They back up their beliefs with action. When a movement has enough active popular support, it can compel politicians to change their positions—or replace those who will not.



The theory that participation by only 3.5 percent of the population can ensure the success of a revolution refers to active popular support. This support gives movements room to maneuver. If we can keep people joining us and taking action, we can make significant progress long before the majority comes to our side.

If there's enough active support, politicians become alert to growing popular resistance well before it reaches the level of majority support. It can limit their power, dry up their campaign contributions, damage their reputations, and ultimately end their careers. As active popular support grows, then, it can often influence the actions of elected officials.

## Keep showing up

One protest does not a social movement make—even if the protest is a big one. The Tea Party rocked the establishment when it burst onto the scene in 2009, but its real victories came when it swept the Democrats out of control of Congress, pushed the Republican Party to the right, and created the conditions for Donald Trump’s rise to power.

New activists can get discouraged when, after one or two protests, they don’t see immediate results. But winning depends on persistently expanding our active popular support, with the recognition that this is a long-term process. It means showing up, and showing up again. It means protesting hundreds of times in dozens of different ways. Often it means returning to the same place with the same message and the same people until more people join.

**We know that we are winning when more and more people are becoming engaged.** The one thing we can’t do is slack off, either because it feels like momentum is on our side, or because we are losing hope. Small victories become the foundation of our movement. By claiming these victories and continuing to show up, our active popular support will continue to grow.

# Change the political weather

The Women's March. The airport protests. Occupy. Black Lives Matter.

All of these did more than change public opinion. **They changed the political weather.**

What's the difference? Just as passive political support is not the same as active popular support, normal fluctuations in public opinion are not the same as significant shifts that signal the possibility for genuine political change. As social movements develop active popular support, their activities begins to have ripple effects. **Social movements can do more than shift opinion—they can make once-radical opinions into a new conventional wisdom.**

As the 2008 financial crisis set about ruining thousands of lives, national political opinion was obsessed with debt reduction. Occupy upended that discussion, re-centering it around inequality. Before Black Lives Matter, the criminal justice debate was focused on crime and punishment. Black Lives Matter expanded it to address police violence and racism. Both of these movements led to dozens of local, state, and even federal policy changes, such as millionaire taxes in the case of Occupy and body cameras for officers in the case of Black Lives Matter.

From the day after the 2016 presidential election through the inauguration, our actions have energized thousands of people to join our movements, to demand change, and to fight back.

By showing up, we have given the institutions that might otherwise have capitulated to Trump's agenda the backbone to stand up to him in the courts, in the legislatures, and in the streets.

We have laid the groundwork to resist Trump and the Republican Congress. Now we have to build on it. So how do we do that?

### **The Civil Rights Movement**

Only a few generations ago, if you were Black and lived in the South (or any number of other places in the U.S.), you would have been legally required to attend separate schools, drink at separate water fountains, use separate bathrooms, and swim in separate public pools from those of your White counterparts. Even the slightest violation of the racist social code known as Jim Crow could draw the anger of White mobs, who tortured and killed Black men and women while the law turned a blind eye.

Through the 1950s and 1960s, a series of political, legal, and legislative victories put an end to segregation and limited the scope of White supremacist terror. As

with the achievement of marriage equality in the 21st century, those victories happened because a social movement—the Civil Rights Movement—made them happen. The leaders and participants of the Civil Rights Movement steadily increased active popular support until the political weather changed.

For decades, it seemed like the Jim Crow system would never change. Democratic and Republican politicians alike ran for office promising to continue segregation, assuring their White constituents that they would continue to treat Black people as inferior.

The Supreme Court ruled in 1954's *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregation laws were unconstitutional. But that decision

didn't play out immediately in communities living under Jim Crow. If anything, the *Brown* decision engendered more racist backlash. Black people were legally allowed to vote, but often could not do so without being threatened or killed. If you were Black and chose to exercise your rights, the simple act of walking to the polls could cost you your life.

But starting with the Montgomery Bus Boycott, in which a mostly Black, female domestic workforce refused to ride the bus until it was desegregated, a new, defiant attitude began to take hold. With strong organizing work, a social movement sustained the boycott for all of 1956.

Over the next few years, against daunting odds, Black activists continued devising new tactics to put pressure on businesses. In February 1960, four Black college students sat down at segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, and tried to order. When they were denied service and asked to leave, the students

stayed in their seats. Soon, Black students across the country were demanding service at segregated lunch counters. By the end of April there were sit-ins in 78 cities. Active popular support grew and grew. About 70,000 Black college students participated in some kind of protest during 1960. More than 3,000 went to jail. The movement was on fire.

In 1961, an integrated group of 13 civil rights activists known as the Freedom Riders rode interstate buses throughout the South to protest segregation, which had by then been ruled unconstitutional. The group endured violent reprisals throughout their trip, facing physical assaults and even the firebombing of one of their buses.

However, the Freedom Rides drew national attention to the violence that had been endemic to the South for decades. Segregation went from a way of life to an emergency. Politicians, including the

president himself, could no longer remain silent; they were forced to pick a side. By polarizing the issue, Freedom Riders led the way to consensus about the urgency of ending Jim Crow.

Two years later, Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) brought similar attention to segregated Birmingham, Alabama. When national TV news crews witnessed local police violence at peaceful marches, images



**... The movement was on fire.**

of Black youth being attacked by police dogs and pummeled by water from hoses were burned into the public consciousness. Although King is widely celebrated today, he was a divisive figure at the time and his methods of nonviolent protest were frowned upon by the media, politicians, and the general public alike.

This excerpt from a letter King wrote in 1967 illuminates the far-reaching effects of seemingly local

protests: “Sound effort in a single city such as Birmingham or Selma produced situations that symbolized the evil everywhere and inflamed public opinion against it ... Where the spotlight illuminated the evil, a legislative remedy was soon obtained and applied everywhere.”

When King, along with other civil rights leaders, called for a march on Washington, more than 200,000 people showed up to voice their support of integration. The political

weather had changed. President Lyndon B. Johnson began to strongly advocate for civil rights legislation. He later admitted that without the movement, he wouldn’t have been able to sign the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

“Birmingham, and the protests that immediately followed it,” writes historian Adam Fairclough in his book *To Redeem the Soul of America*, “transformed the political climate so that civil rights legislation became feasible; before, it had been impossible.”

For deeper reading on active popular support, polarization, changing the political weather, and other strategies drawn from the American Civil Rights Movement, we recommend Taylor Branch’s *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954–1963*. (Similar issues are explored in relation to LGBTQ rights in *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk*, by Randy Shilts.) The Civil Rights Movement is also discussed at length in the Introduction and Chapter One of *This Is An Uprising*.



... the Freedom Rides drew national attention to the violence that had been endemic to the South for decades

## **CHAPTER THREE:**

# **MULTIPLE TYPES OF RESISTANCE: GAME CHANGE, OUTSIDE GAME, AND INSIDE GAME**

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Active popular support is the fuel for successful social movements. Turning active popular support into social change requires three different types of resistance: 1. game changing events that change public opinion and recruit new people; 2. outside game strategies that pressure decision makers; and 3. inside game strategies that put movement-identified leaders in positions within the system where they can effect change.

**Strategy asks the question:  
'What can we do today, so that  
tomorrow we can do what we are  
unable to do today?'"**

*– Paulo Freire*

**"Keep the pressure on with  
different tactics and actions, and  
utilize all events of the period  
for your purpose."**

*–Saul Alinsky, Thirteen Tactics for Realistic  
Radicals: from Rules for Radicals*

*Since the November 2016 election, new organizations have sprung up like wildflowers to absorb the revitalized energy of mass protest. Amid this whirlwind of activity, however, it can be difficult to know how or where plug in. Many people have asked us how they can get involved and how they can make the biggest difference.*

*The study of civil resistance points to some answers.*

*Almost every tactic used across the broad spectrum of civil resistance falls into one of three types, and most effective movements in democratic countries succeed by employing some form of all three. We call these three types of resistance: game change, outside game, and inside game.*

*This section will explain what makes each type of resistance effective, as well as how they complement one another. While it can be beneficial to center your efforts around one organization and focus primarily on the type of resistance that best suits your circumstances and passions, we recommend that everyone support all three types of resistance. The Tea Party showed us how much power can be leveraged when all three are used at once. If hundreds of thousands of people contribute in this way, Trump and the Republicans won't stand a chance.*

### **The Tea Party**

The Tea Party's rise to power is an example of how game change, outside game, and inside game can all work together to drive political transformation.

The massive Tax Day protest that established the Tea Party as a political force was a classic game change: It shifted the political debate, putting Obama and the Democrats in Congress on the defensive.

The Tea Party followed this with a blazingly effective outside game, flooding Congressional offices with phone calls, letters, and delegations.

Finally, as election after election saw vulnerable Democratic seats fall to Republicans and mainstream Republicans fall to Tea Party candidates, they demonstrated their mastery of the inside game. With such influence in Congress, they often left President Obama with no option but executive action, even preventing him from filling a Supreme Court vacancy.

We can build progressive power if we learn from—and improve upon—the strategies of their insurgency.



## **Type I: Game Change**

**Game change includes two different kinds of activity. The first is massive protests that shift public opinion enough, redefining what is and is not possible under the current circumstances, and fuels active popular support. Such protest can either be a response to external events or generated by the movement. We call these sorts of protests trigger events. The second kind of activity consists of small actions that may not have the same scope as trigger events but still communicate to the public and help change the political weather.**

From great mass protests, great social movements are born. Successful events use clear messaging, rich symbolism, and captivating imagery to inspire and motivate participants and to make observers want to join in. These actions are designed to speak to, agitate, move, and recruit the public. They do not include pressure on politicians or other decision-makers as a primary goal.

Large-scale game changing protests are known as **trigger events**. These are the engine for the resistance. They fill our ranks with people who want to help create change. They dramatize injustice and speak to core values. They give even those who keep to the sidelines a stronger connection to the message. **We call it game change because trigger events can cause such a dramatic culture shift that the entire political playing field is rearranged.**

Smaller acts of protest and noncooperation also fall under game change. In response to Trump's election, students walked out of

classes across the country to support sanctuary campuses. Yemeni bodega owners shut down their operations in New York City to oppose the travel ban. These actions demonstrate a refusal to allow abuses of power to be normalized. They target the public. When ordinary students or storekeepers disrupt business as usual in the face of injustice, anyone watching may be inspired to take a stand.

### ***The movement can create game change from outside events***

Watershed news events that occur outside the control of movements can result in game-changing movement responses.

In 2013, activists created #BlackLivesMatter in response to George Zimmerman's acquittal for the murder of Trayvon Martin. The following year, the #BlackLivesMatter movement organized mass protests in response to the police killings of Eric Garner and Michael Brown. Polarized by the protests, few could ignore the issue of racial justice in policing. In this case, the horrific killings prompted trigger events in the form of game-changing protest actions.

The moments of intense protest that follow calamitous events generate the images and create the awareness that changes people's hearts and minds. **But calamity alone does not lead to protest. It is the movement's ability to create trigger events in moments of crisis that will determine how effective and lasting those changes are.**

Considered this way, the movement built a trigger event out of Trump's victory. The day after the 2016 election, more than 350 protests broke out in cities large and small across the United States. Within five days, activists announced plans for a Women's March that would take place immediately after the inauguration. This march turned out to be the largest protest in U.S. history, with more than 4.2 million participants in more than 600 cities, and forced a brand new presidency into an unprecedented defensive crouch.

#### ***Small actions can build towards game change***

Game change can occur even in the absence of explosive or monumental trigger events. With small actions, protesters communicate the values and goals of the movement to targeted slices of the public. These actions don't necessarily grab the national media spotlight or pressure decision makers. By reframing an issue, however, they can force members of a community or a sector to take sides and thereby gradually change the game. Certain 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. Document them, share them on social media, and encourage your friends and followers to join you in them. They help to maintain a sense of urgency and keep the movement growing. In the dozens, hundreds or even thousands, these types of actions can move mountains.

***... It is the movement's ability to create trigger events in moments of crisis that will determine how effective and lasting those changes are***



**Small Action Ideas**

- Protesters showing up at Trump Tower.
- A guerrilla theater troupe interrupting a college dining hall with a song or a skit to dramatize a particular issue.
- College students turning their backs on a commencement speaker who represents the administration.
- Dropping a banner from an office tower or a freeway overpass.
- Holding a wheatpasting session in a business district.
- Changing one's Facebook profile picture in solidarity with a movement or event.

**Trigger Events**

Some game-changing protests that have shifted public discussion around an issue:

- The civil rights protests in Birmingham, Alabama, that broadcast to the world images of Bull Connor's use of dogs and firehoses on protesters, 1963
- The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, where Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech, 1963
- The coming out of Ellen DeGeneres on her television show, 1997
- The occupation of Zuccotti Park (Occupy Wall Street) and the propagation of Occupy camps worldwide, 2011
- The protests generated by the killings of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown and Eric Garner, 2012-14
- The Women's March that followed the inauguration of Trump, 2017
- The airport protests that followed the travel ban, 2017

**WHAT'S POSSIBLE**

Game change protest, if successful, would shift public opinion firmly to the side of the movement and against Trump and the Republicans.

**Imagine if tens of thousands of people flood the streets in response to every unjust law, every committee vote that goes against American values, every executive action that threatens our democracy. Imagine if from these trigger events, everyday people working in small groups spin off hundreds of small actions to drive the message home in their communities.**

Politicians who support the Trump/GOP agenda would see their approval numbers collapse and their legitimacy falter. As the political weather changed, the media would cover the resistance with admiration, not disdain. Trump's presidency would start to be perceived as a failed presidency and would pull the GOP down with it.

**HOW TO ACT**

Here's how you can make that vision real: You can show up every time. Show up to long-planned protests and show up to spur-of-the-moment protests that turn new headlines into trigger events.

Bring a sign that speaks to the media or the public, and stay on message. One unified message repeated over and over is stronger than many disconnected messages.

You can't count on the media to give protesters credit for change, so celebrate the impact of your protests and frame them as successful in light of subsequent events.

Follow up on large-scale protests with small actions in your community that elaborate on the messages of trigger events.

Consistent, rapid protest responses with strong messages have driven Trump’s approval rating down, inhibiting his ability to enact the GOP agenda. We should do everything we can to drive it down further. And the most important part of this is showing up.

You may not agree with every aspect of a particular protest. You may feel critical of certain messages and actions promoted by the groups that are organizing it. But that doesn’t mean you should disengage. The best way to contribute is to show up time and time again. Find the organizers and offer to help promote, organize or set up. The more protests you support by simply showing up, the better sense you’ll have of what works. (Existing resources can help you identify what works—for practical protest tips, check out BeautifulTrouble.org, which provides an online toolbox for grassroots action.)



Showing up is a muscle, and regular exercise of this muscle makes our movements stronger. **If we build a movement that mobilizes every time democracy is threatened, we’ll see a culture shift.** Politicians will run from Trump and the GOP agenda for fear of awakening a sleeping giant. That’s game change.

### **KEYS TO SUCCESS**

- **Does the protest generate passion, support, and attention?** Participants should feel energized after successful game change protest. Both passive and active support should grow, as observers move towards our side, and new participants join in.
- **Does the protest help reframe the issue for the public?** Game change protest should include a strong message that educates people about our issues and helps observers emotionally connect with our cause. It should highlight common values that Americans share and should delegitimize or undermine the stance of the opposition. This can help people in the middle of the spectrum of support move towards our side.
- **Does the protest attract attention?** Media coverage is the best vehicle for game change protest. Social media can heighten media impact and focus messaging. You’ll know game change protest is working when the media is spreading our frame and more and more people understand our issues.

### **The Women's March and the Airport Protests Were Game-Changing**

From the moment Donald Trump prevailed in the electoral college—and thus won the presidency—the resistance was visible. Unrest erupted all over the country. Protests filled the days and weeks following Election Day as people took to the streets to express their grief and anger. Some observers criticized the protests, but the feeling of widespread disapproval proved contagious: Trump took office with the lowest approval rating of any modern president.

The day after Trump's inauguration, four million people gathered together in 653 different cities to protest his presidency. The Women's March was the biggest single-day demonstration in U.S. history. For many protesters—up to a third, according to a survey conducted by University of Maryland professor Dana Fisher—it was their first participation in any kind of civil resistance. Many others hadn't protested for decades.

Public opinion surveys immediately after the march showed that the protesters had greater public support (50 percent) than Trump himself (44 percent). The pressure only increased during Trump's first week in office. A new movement was springing to life. Tens of thousands started meeting in Indivisible groups, showing up at town hall meetings, participating in subsequent protests big and small, and calling their representatives.

Then the administration issued a draconian executive order targeting Muslims and refugees, banning the entry into the country of even those who had been here for years, with legal papers. In response, [tens of thousands of people](#) flocked to airports nationwide to demand that detainees be released. Many were mobilized through networks born out of the previous protests.

Those massive protests kept the spotlight on those declaring their resistance. The visibility of protesters' anger helped keep support for the travel ban under 50 percent. Soon, a large base of corporate leaders, academics, and law experts stood up to oppose it. With the active popular support of a movement behind them, the courts soon followed. The law was [struck down by two federal judges](#).

In June 2017, the U.S. Supreme Court allowed the ban to proceed within certain limits while it considered its constitutionality. As writer [Rob Hunter](#) put it in a review, "It is more important than ever to form coalitions among organizations, to forge stronger bonds of solidarity, and to build the social movement power of Muslims, refugees and immigrants... Only a mass movement will successfully fight the ban."



## Type II: The Outside Game

**While game change protest is focused on building mass public support, outside game protest targets the powers that be. Some outside game protests have chiefly symbolic value. Others yield practical outcomes. Outside game protest can be effective in various spheres of influence, but targeting decision-makers is the most critical.**

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Outside game strategies allow individuals who are outside the channels of power to collectively raise their voices, issue demands, and achieve change by either halting bad policies or propelling good ones forward. Outside game tactics call out decision-makers who would often prefer not to hear from us.

Of course, none of us is truly an outsider. We all have connections to places where power is exercised and decisions are made. We live our lives in various **spheres of influence** where we can make our views known. Working together, we can use these spheres of influence to drive change.

With all the energy generated by game-changing protest, our movement is flush with new recruits who believe in the power of the resistance and are eager to stay involved. Creative thinking about our spheres of influence will help us turn this growing active popular support into tangible achievements.

### *You have more power than you know*

One of the reasons social movements can make such a big impact is that each of the millions of people who belong to a movement has influence and power in many different aspects of their life.

Perhaps the most important sphere of influence in which we can act is as constituents to elected officials. As community organizer and theorist Saul Alinsky put it in his book *Rules for Radicals*, “Action comes from keeping the heat on. No politician can sit on a hot issue if you make it hot enough.” Our influence with our representatives doesn’t begin and end on Election Day: We can call or write their offices and show up at their town halls. Tea Party activists confronted their representatives en masse to great effect, and the *Indivisible Guide* has shown the Trump/GOP resistance how to respond in similar fashion (see sidebar).

**When activists make it costlier for politicians to support the status quo than to oppose it, we see change.** Republicans ease off their attacks on environmental regulations or protections for the poor. Establishment Democrats tilt their efforts away from Wall Street backers and towards working people.

The most important arena for the outside game is electoral politics, but pressure need not only be applied to elected representatives. This is where other spheres of influence come into play: We can move corporations, for example, as employees, consumers, or shareholders.

Tech industry leaders felt pressure to resign from Trump’s advisory council when their employees organized against using their skills to support deportations or religious discrimination in the form of a Muslim registry. The #DeleteUBER hashtag went viral after the company attempted to profit from an anti-travel-ban taxi strike in New York City, showing the power of consumer pressure.

Independently of electoral politics, boycotts have used consumer power to win direct reform from corporations. Apple, Nike, and Target, for instance, have all responded to consumer-led action in recent memory, improving working conditions and addressing anti-LGBTQ bias. Boycotts often begin to alarm corporations simply by gaining traction on social media—even before broadcast and print media take notice, and long before they begin to noticeably slow earnings. Union fights, local development environmental battles, and campaigns to pressure religious organizations or professional societies on particular issues also count as outside game protest.



### Resistance Within Different Spheres of Influence

- **As workers:** Federal employees refused to implement parts of the travel ban.
- **As consumers:** Consumers launched the #DeleteUBER campaign when Uber tried to take advantage of the travel ban taxi strike by offering low prices, leading thousands to ditch the app and ultimately pressuring the CEO to step down from Trump’s tech advisory council.
- **As students:** Students on college campuses responded to enhanced immigration enforcement by demanding sanctuary campus policies, including non-cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).
- **As local constituents:** Similarly, residents demanded that their cities, towns, counties and states declare themselves sanctuary jurisdictions, and that local police stop enforcing immigration law—even as Trump threatened to withhold federal funds from sanctuary cities.
- **As federal constituents:** Constituents put the pressure on their members of Congress to oppose the travel ban.

Many outside game campaigns are designed by experienced strategic campaigners. If you start a small group, don’t feel that you need to design your own a campaign. You can link up with one that has already begun. One campaign that everyone can join is putting pressure on members of Congress.

**WHAT'S POSSIBLE**

Imagine that the thousands of people who participated in game change protest have been joined by thousands more who were moved to oppose the Trump/GOP agenda because of that protest and subsequent small actions. Now they form their own small groups and flood established organizations to join existing campaigns.

Every proposal that comes out of the Trump administration or the Republican Congress sets off a barrage of phone calls, town halls, and delegations, day after day. Democratic officials, their fighting spirit restored, work harder to resist Trump's every move. Republicans hesitate to endorse Trump's agenda for fear of losing constituents.

**HOW TO ACT**

You can make this happen. The *Indivisible Guide* has been incredibly effective at getting the ball rolling. Now we need to keep up the pressure! Use the four tactics described in the *Indivisible Guide*: Confront your member of Congress at town halls; participate in events in his or her home district; join in district sit-ins (or, if fighting for health care, "die-ins"); and barrage them by fax and phone.

Don't leave out your Democratic representatives either. Even the most progressive Democrats need to know there's pressure on them from the movement, and most Democrats will slide towards the middle (or keep their heads down) if they don't see that the movement is alive and kicking in their district. Positive feedback can be important too. It helps politicians stay strong when doing the right thing—and it lets them know that you're watching.

Even if it isn't your primary focus, participate in outside game resistance at least once a month. Make phone calls. Show up to town hall meetings. Or find other strategic campaigns that influence decision makers.

**KEYS TO SUCCESS**

- **Is this type of resistance using our sphere of influence to pressure a decision maker?** Unlike small actions, which focus on winning active popular support, outside game tactics focus on pressuring decision makers.
- **Pressuring decision makers who control laws, policies, or institutions.** A good outside game tactic will use the smallest amount of force necessary to make a decision-maker feel the greatest amount of pressure. Look for signs that the decision-maker is nervous about a damaged reputation or a loss in power.
- **Has the decision maker changed their stance, started to behave differently, or found themselves in a dilemma?** For example, an elected official might have to decide between showing up to face a jeering town hall crowd or appearing cowardly by canceling their appearance.





### **Indivisible and the Health Care Fight**

From the day that President Obama signed the Affordable Care Act, Republicans have vowed to repeal it. Throughout four congressional election cycles and two GOP presidential primaries, Republicans continuously promised to “repeal and replace” Obamacare.

Sure enough, Trump’s first major legislative push after his inauguration in January 2017 was a new bill called the American Health Care Act (AHCA), which aimed to strip Obamacare bare, effectively denying health coverage to tens of millions of Americans.

Obama’s health care plan had been widely unpopular with Republicans since its introduction in 2010. But when Trump’s AHCA was set to go to the House floor, constituents flooded their elected representatives on both sides of the aisle with phone calls, faxes, letters, and personal displays of protest.

Thanks to groups like the [Town Hall Project](#), typically mundane town hall meetings with members of Con-

gress grew contentious all over the country as citizens shouted at their representatives or told emotional stories about pre-existing conditions and life-saving access to affordable health care under Obamacare. When broadcast on social media, many town hall meetings went viral, particularly those featuring personal stories.

The *Indivisible Guide* strategy of pressuring members of Congress, both Republican and Democrat, spread like wildfire during the AHCA debate. Constituents made thousands of coordinated calls, flooding phone systems and shutting down switchboards. Republican representatives who planned to vote in favor of the bill canceled public events for fear of having to answer for their actions.

The first vote on Trump’s health care plan had to be canceled for lack of support. After a series of amendments were adopted, House Republicans—and only Republicans—voted to pass the AHCA.

As of July 2017, the AHCA is staggeringly unpopular, and the Senate has failed to pass multiple versions of their own repeal bill. Legislative leaders desperately seek strategies to navigate it through Congress with minimal public attention. Meanwhile, public approval of Obamacare has surged to its highest level yet.

Through coordinated outside game strategies, the resistance scored an incredible upset with the AHCA. Obamacare repeal and replace,

heralded for years, was to be the centerpiece accomplishment of Trump’s first 100 days. Now, though the battle is far from over, the 217 Republican representatives who voted in favor of the AHCA face significant pressure in their districts, where they will have to run for re-election in 2018. In congressional districts with vulnerable Republican office holders, Democrats are seeing an influx of volunteers and donations to help turn them blue.



## **Type III: The Inside Game**

**Inside game resistance requires using the established system of elections, the legal system, and the current bureaucracy. We can advance the inside game by ousting vulnerable Republicans and by running and supporting Democratic candidates who put pressure on the Democratic Party to represent the aims of the movement rather than those of the establishment.**

Game-changing protest can generate enough active popular support to change the political weather. Outside game resistance can stop seemingly unstoppable opponents in their tracks. But we have to do more.

We need to put new people in power, and we need to pressure purported allies to step up. Our current system has been corrupted by corporate lobbyists, Wall Street money, and a billionaire class that employs politicians to divide us through racial fear-mongering.

But we can change that by **running candidates who share social movement values**. Even winning a few races can put establishment politicians on notice and change the dynamics of current politics.

### ***What's so corrupt about the Democratic Party?***

The Democratic Party is flooded with Wall Street and billionaire money. Democratic candidates court wealthy donors in order to fund their campaigns, and those donors don't disappear after Election Day. They exert disproportionate influence on elected officials, making it harder for popular movements—movements made up of ordinary people—to have a voice.

Wall Street and the billionaire class dominate the Republican and Democratic parties alike. Often, the same wealthy donors contribute to both parties—even to opposing candidates in the same election. Once they are elected, politicians reward their donors with policies and regulations that favor their industries. This system often puts Democratic politicians at odds with their constituents. They try to gain support from the working and middle classes, immigrants, and people of color with promises to raise minimum wages and worker protections, dismantle institutional racism, pass immigration reform, improve health care, and protect the environment. But their debts to their financial backers often leave them following the path of least resistance. They might make symbolic progressive gestures to win votes, but they avoid significant action that could get in the way of collecting campaign funds.



### ***Racism has left Democrats off balance***

Since the late 1960s, the Republican Party has appealed to White voters' racial resentment in an effort to peel them away from the Democratic Party. This is often called the "Southern strategy."

The Democratic Party has never managed to unify around a powerful response. The Southern strategy was developed in response to the Civil Rights Movement. As the movement won concessions for people of color from federal government programs, Republicans developed coded racial messages—what has been called

dog-whistle politics—that played on fears of rising crime and resentment about welfare. When Southern politicians claimed to advocate for “states’ rights,” for example, they were really advocating against federal civil rights protections that overstepped a state’s right to enforce Jim Crow.

One of the worst ‘triangulations’ undertaken by the Democratic establishment in the 1990s was its attempt to neutralize the Southern strategy by adopting similar messages, leading to short-term gains but leaving the Democrats in a strategic quagmire. The Democratic-led, bipartisan welfare reform and crime laws of the 1990s accepted the racist framing that Republicans had developed over the previous decades. Ultimately, they offered no alternative to the strategy that continued encouraging working-class whites to align with conservative billionaires and blame people of color for their misfortunes. As President Harry S. Truman put it as far back as 1952, “If it’s a choice between a genuine Republican, and a Republican in Democratic clothing, the people will choose the genuine article, every time.”

After many decades of Republican exploitation of racial resentment, Donald Trump’s declarations concerning immigration, Islam, and inner-city “American carnage” transformed the dog-whistle into a full-on bullhorn. The reactionary agenda made possible by dog-whistle politics continues to impede multiracial solidarity and threaten communities of color.

### ***Corruption is at the heart of Democratic losses***

When both establishment Democrats and Republicans play this game, it’s no wonder that voters doubt the ability of government to take their side against economic elites. A crisis of legitimacy has ensued, as the vast majority of voters come to find that neither party truly represents their interests against the powerful. **Watching a Democratic establishment cater to the billionaire class, people become disillusioned and stop participating.**

The failure of the Democratic Party to push back against the billionaire class gave Trump a path to victory. Throughout the eight years of the Obama presidency, wealth continued to concentrate in the hands of the one percent. Obama’s accomplishments did not affect the balance of power in a society that had seen rising inequality for decades. Voters understood that the Democratic Party would not seriously challenge the status quo, and despite Obama’s personal popularity, Democrats lost more than 1,000 state and federal seats during the eight years he served as president.



By the time Hillary Clinton ran for president, she was seen as the representative of a failed establishment. This allowed Trump to run against that establishment. Polls show that many of his supporters felt they were casting their votes less *for* Trump than *against* the status quo.

Now, Trump has ditched the populist fig leaf he campaigned with. Working with the congressional GOP on dismantling health care protections to promote tax cuts and stacking his cabinet with representatives of the finance industry, he has promoted the interests of the billionaire class with naked determination.

Even as his administration is rocked by allegations of corruption and abuses of power, the Democratic Party has failed to make the case that, if it regains control of government, it won't once more sell out its base of voters, appease its donor class, and put us right back where we started.

### ***A fighting movement party will win elections***

A Democratic Party that either ignores the people or responds only to fierce protest is bad for social movements. Getting the brush-off from politicians is demobilizing. It can prevent passive support from turning into active support. Even passionate supporters feel that their time has been wasted when elected officials don't respond to them. Without evidence that elected officials will be responsive, even a movement with millions of participants will have a hard time translating its numbers into real power and change. Discouraged by lack of action from their own party, activists and voters will once again stay home.

**... our  
movements  
will win when  
we elect  
officials who will  
passionately  
advocate for  
our issues**



**But our movements will win when we elect officials who will passionately advocate for our issues.** At the federal level, it will be slow going so long as Democrats remain in the minority—not even the most progressive Democratic Party will secure many real victories under Trump and the GOP. But a reinvigorated party will slow down the worst abuses of conservatives. And there’s plenty of room for gains at the state and local level. Look at how Tea Party-affiliated movements transformed Wisconsin and North Carolina during the Obama years, gutting labor protections and stacking the deck for permanent Republican power. They did this by eschewing compromise in favor of inside game tactics as part of a movement strategy.

The only way back to power—the only way to defend the hard-earned protections we’ve gained for civil rights and the environment, and the only way to win new gains for working people—is to build a Democratic Party that is not held captive by billionaire donors and that stands strongly against racism. And the only way to build such a party is to pour the same energy we have for marches, rallies, and calling elected officials into holding house parties, knocking on doors, and getting out the vote on election day for **movement candidates**. That’s the way to build a party that legitimately represents the people and our social movements.

### ***What is a movement candidate?***

A **movement candidate** is more than a “liberal” or “progressive” Democrat. A movement candidate is a candidate at any level of government who is not beholden to Wall Street funders and who recognizes the critical role of social movements in pushing for solutions. These candidates can energize people and give them hope for change—not only by saying the right things, but by demonstrating that they are not compromised by debts to the billionaire class.

Establishment candidates, on the other hand, funded by many of the same Wall Street interests that control the Trump administration, might object to Trump’s policies here and there but cannot convincingly stand against the interests that back him.

The presidential campaign of Bernie Sanders (see sidebar) relied on small donations and engaged with social movements across the spectrum, from #BlackLivesMatter to the little-known Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida. Sanders emerged as a movement politician years ago as the mayor of Burlington, Vermont, and his track record echoes this commitment to supporting movement values.

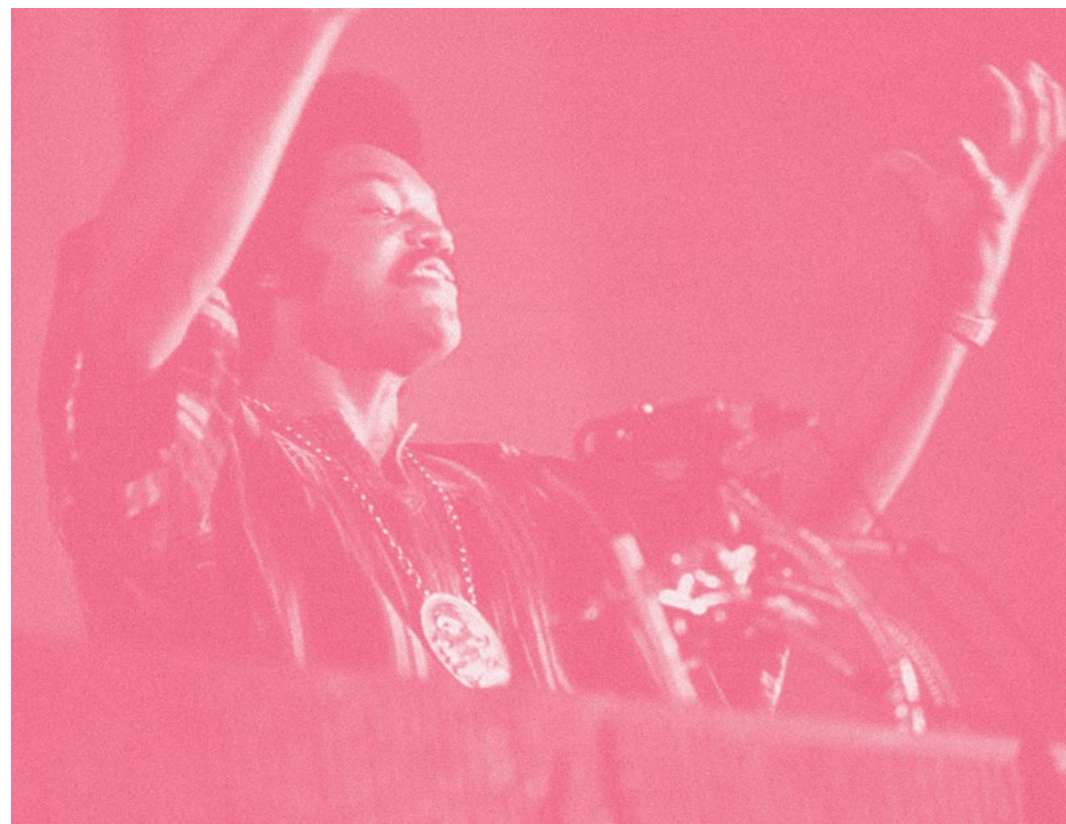
Movement candidates can make huge strides even at the local level, restoring faith in the ability of government to defend rights and improve lives. At the national level, movement candidates are essential in facing down the ruling GOP’s destructive agenda.

**Even when movement candidates lose, their campaigns can pull the party in a better direction.** Recall that many Tea Party candidates who attracted derision when they lost in general elections nonetheless succeeded, by winning the primary, in shifting the center of gravity in the GOP to the right.

Running movement candidates is vital to taking back power through the state. If establishment candidates are the only option, voters may still reject the more extreme manifestations of the GOP agenda. But that’s simply not enough. **We need to build a movement strong enough to change the Democratic Party while also returning it to power.** Once it is back in power, we need the movement to demand that government work as a force for good. For that to happen, we need the kind of active and sustained popular support that will both draw movement candidates to run for office and carry them to victory.

### Historical Examples of the Inside Game

- *Harold Washington's 1983 Chicago mayoral campaign* defeated the entrenched Democratic machine that the first Mayor Daley had built. Once in office, Washington installed a “rainbow cabinet” that represented movements led by women, Blacks, Latinos, the disabled, and others long excluded from Chicago politics.
- *Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition presidential runs of 1984 and 1988* bridged the false divisions between Democrats in the white working class and communities of color.
- The late 1990s and early 2000s saw the emergence of a *Latino-labor-left coalition in Southern California politics* that passed living wage and other pro-labor legislation while ousting conservative Republicans and corrupt Democrats alike.
- The *2008 Obama campaign* created a movement (see chapter 4), though President Obama's administration kept its distance from this movement.
- Over the last decade, movement-driven electoral coalitions, most notably *Podemos in Spain*, have risen to push back against austerity in Europe.
- In New York, the *Working Families Party* both cross-endorses progressive mainstream candidates and runs its own candidates in primaries against establishment Democrats, allowing it to build power while challenging the establishment.
- Public defender and longtime movement ally *Larry Krasner* was propelled to victory in *Philadelphia's 2017 district attorney race* by a coalition of progressive forces including racial and economic justice organizations and staff and volunteers from the Sanders campaign.
- *Jeremy Corbyn* led the British Labour Party to a *massive increase in Parliamentary seats* in June 2017—a stunning upset that the media and the political establishment (including many members of Corbyn's own party) thought impossible and worked against. Corbyn promoted an unapologetic movement agenda, rejecting decades of compromise and triangulation style politics from Labour. The victory was fueled by movement organizing that fought the establishment to restore faith in progressive politics.



**WHAT'S POSSIBLE**

Imagine if the energy, numbers, and uncompromising attitude that filled the streets and pressured our representatives was turned toward electoral politics? In the 2018 election cycle, it would bring the broad sense of urgency produced by Trump's presidential election to a traditionally low-turnout primary and midterm election. Up and down the ticket, corporate Democrats would face challenges from movement candidates, shifting the center of gravity in the Democratic Party. And those movement candidates would have the popular support they need when the establishment turns full force against them. The House of Representatives—historically known as “the people's house”—would be returned to the people.

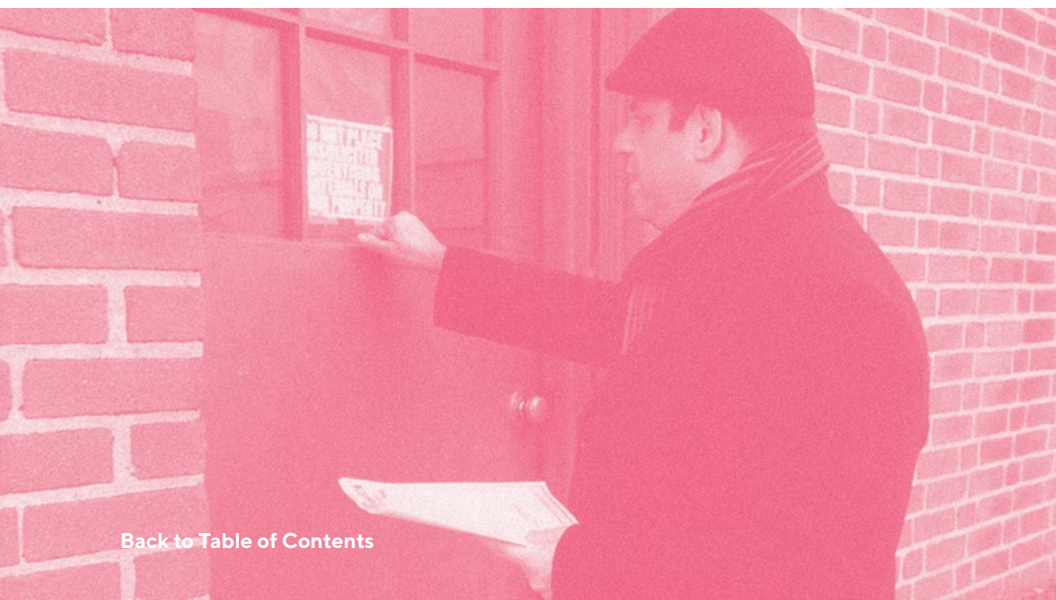
**HOW TO ACT**

To do this, we all need to get involved in electoral campaigns, and especially get out the vote operations. At minimum, show up to make phone calls or knock on doors the last week before election day. If inside game activity becomes your area of focus, you can join movement-focused candidate campaigns or electioneering organizations (see sidebar) more than a year in advance of the election. Throw a house party or a grassroots fundraiser. Become a block captain.

**KEYS TO SUCCESS**

- **How can we identify movement candidates?** Look for endorsements from social movement organizations that focus both on resisting Trump and transforming the Democratic Party at the same time. Locally, look for candidates who partner with the labor movement, housing rights champions, immigration advocates, racial justice organizations, and groups fighting for issues affecting your community. Back candidates who don't take corporate money and who ally themselves with other movement candidates, and recruit from your own organizations.
- **How can we have a chance at winning?** Get involved in elections early, in the primaries, when a small group of activists can shift the balance of power in the party. By the time the general election campaign begins, it's much harder to make a difference within the Democratic Party.
- **How will we know if we're winning?** A successful inside game strategy will allow politicians who work with social movements to advance our agenda. It will also pressure establishment Democrats to change their votes because they fear a challenge from a movement candidate. As this happens, we'll see the center of gravity shift in the party, as it did when Hillary Clinton moved towards progressive positions in the 2016 Democratic primary. We're already seeing this progress on minimum wages, single-payer health care, and tuition-free college. We may also see heightened tension as our progress loosens the political stranglehold of Wall Street and the billionaire class.

Remember that the media will downplay your importance and mock your efforts. Resist! Value your impact, claim victories, and educate others about your strategy.



### ***These Groups Are Hard at Work on the Inside Game***

- *Brand New Congress* and *Justice Democrats* are developing a campaign to run more than 400 new candidates in the 2018 election cycle on a platform to “rebuild the economy, repair our communities, and radically reform our institutions.”
- *Swing Left* is targeting swing districts to oust Republicans from Congress.
- *#AllofUs* and *#WeWillReplaceYou* are supporting primary challengers against Democrats who don’t stand up to Trump by providing an alternative vision grounded in an America that works for all of us.
- *Emerge America* and *Run for Something* are recruiting and supporting women and millennials to run for down-ballot offices.
- *#KnockEveryDoor* is building a mass canvassing organization to get out the vote for movement candidates.
- *Our Revolution* is continuing to build the Bernie Sanders coalition by supporting candidates across the country who will fight corporate power.

### ***The Bernie Sanders for President Campaign***

In the spring of 2015, when Vermont’s Senator Bernie Sanders threw his hat in the ring against Hillary Clinton in the Democratic presidential primary, he wasn’t even a registered Democrat. Sanders, a self-proclaimed democratic socialist, had served as an Independent for 16 years in the House and eight in the Senate. A longtime critic of centrist Democrats, Sanders centered his candidacy on economic inequality, the embattled middle class, and the shrinking social safety net, embracing the principles of movements like #FightFor15 and Occupy.

At first, observers thought Sanders had only entered the field to shift the debate, with little hope of winning. But his message captured the hearts of many Americans. He quickly became a serious challenger to the much-better-funded frontrunner.

In the years leading up to 2016, the stage had already been set for a movement campaign. Occupy Wall Street, which began in New York City in the fall of 2011 and spread to city centers and college campuses across North America, rallied many young people, including those who had yet to enter the workforce, behind the cause of economic inequality. States and cities around the U.S. saw concerted efforts to raise the minimum wage as high as \$15 per hour. Coalitions to stop the Keystone XL oil pipeline and the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement stimulated cross-pollination between multiple social movements.

Because of these and other grassroots movements, a large base of voters were ready to discuss these issues at a level that went well beyond the narrow, watered-down discourse acceptable to the establishment.



Sanders went to great lengths to synthesize a variety of progressive goals into a concise, cogent message. He was successful in large part because he believed in a movement strategy that activated tens of thousands of people around that message. Notably for a Democratic presidential candidate, his approach did not begin from an assumption that he needed to compromise his values in order to win. Sanders' leadership allowed his supporters to feel personally invested in the campaign. From the beginning, Sanders was clear that his election would be only one step, and that much-needed change could only be accomplished with sustained movement activity.

Sanders' popular message changed the national conversation, eventually moving Clinton's positions leftward. As social movements found more recognition in a reinvigorated primary



season, Clinton eventually adopted progressive stances on issues such as the \$15 minimum wage, police brutality, and mass incarceration. A [Saturday Night Live sketch](#) lampooning her attempts to capture the appeal of Sanders' candor inadvertently illuminates the differences between movement and compromise approaches.

The Sanders candidacy has created a 21st-century model for rejecting compromise politics and embracing movement strategy. Though Sanders did not win the nomination, he has continued to shape American politics, touring the country for key issues and supporting progressive candidates through the organization he helped start, Our Revolution. He has the highest approval rating of any active politician, and the positions he espoused on the campaign trail draw support today from establishment Democrats—witness New York governor Andrew Cuomo signing a bill for free college tuition with Senator Sanders by his side. Sanders has illuminated a path for social movements in the electoral arena that has not been seen for a generation.

## **Game change, inside game, and outside game: we need it all**

Working together, these three strategies create cascading virtuous circles, each making the next more powerful. Game changing actions can inspire hundreds of thousands of people to become active popular supporters of movements. Outside game tactics put those people in direct confrontation with the powers that be, polarizing issues and forcing cowardly elected officials to take stands. Matching that energy with a strong inside game will lead to wave elections and social movement politicians taking power.

**And—critically—if the movement can sustain active popular support once its candidates are elected, we can stand up to Wall Street and the billionaire class and create truly transformative change.**

Many organizations and activists find themselves drawn to one type of resistance more than another. Our movement is stronger when we work from complementary strengths. What weakens us is privileging one of these strategies over another. We all know people who believe that street protest is irrelevant compared to electoral politics, while others claim that electoral politics is a distraction from real issues or that there are no good politicians.

These are dead-end debates. Social movements need to master every one of these three strategies if they are to win power and create change.

As a minimum commitment, everyone should make some contribution to all three types of action, even those who are drawn primarily to one or the other. Our recommended minimum commitment looks like this:

- **Once a month, show up to either a trigger event protest with game change potential or a small, group-led action.**
- **Once a week, put pressure on decision makers with phone calls or at town halls.**
- **Vote for and do get out the vote work for movement candidates in local, state, and federal elections.**

**An energetic social movement based in any one of these three strategies can win individual victories. But a movement using all three together can be downright revolutionary.**



## CHAPTER FOUR:

# RESIST TOGETHER

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There's a reason they're called social movements. Working together, we can accomplish so much more than we can on our own. Resistance is a group sport.

Millions of people have taken the first step toward resisting Donald Trump. What will keep them fighting? What will sustain them along the way?

To help build the kind of active popular support that will stop the Trump/GOP agenda and replace it with a government of, for and by the people, you need two things. You need a way to resist together—preferably a small group or groups that meet frequently with consistency. And you need training in how to resist successfully.

**"As has often been noted, the Republican revolution that allowed them to take over so many state houses and take power far beyond their numbers came partly from corporate cash, but partly from the willingness to do the slow, plodding, patient work of building and maintaining power from the ground up and being in it for the long run. And partly from telling stories that, though often deeply distorting the facts and forces at play, were compelling. This work is always, first and last, storytelling work, or what some of my friends call "the battle of the story." Building, remembering, retelling, celebrating our own stories is part of our work."**

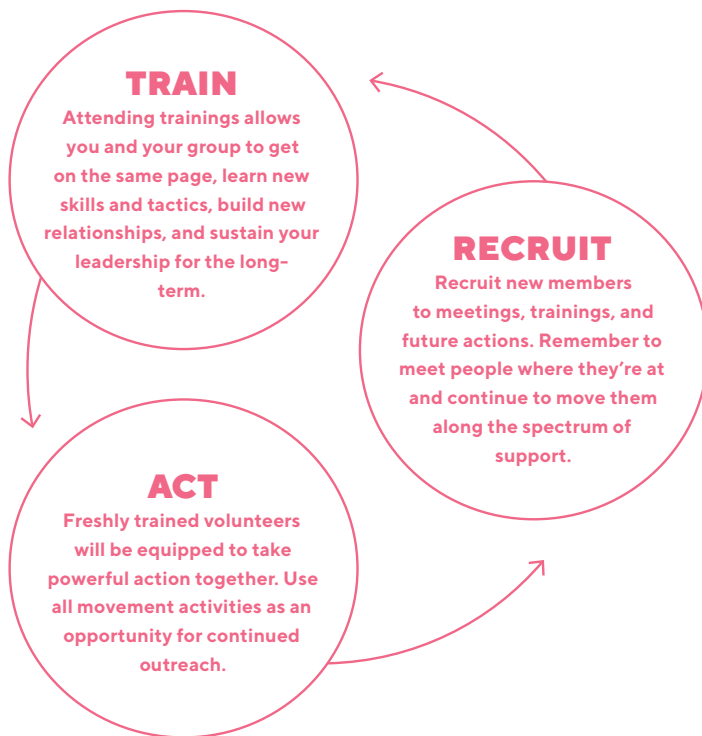
*—Rebecca Solnit*

**"When we tell our own story, we teach the values that our choices reveal, not as abstract principles, but as our lived experience. We reveal the kind of person we are to the extent that we let others identify with us."**

*—Marshall Ganz, "What Is Public Narrative?"*

## Key practices to sustain the movement

In thousands of small ways, joining together with others strengthens our resolve and brings joy to our experience. We become accountable to one another. We keep each other company. We learn each other's life stories and struggles and so come to feel that we aren't only fighting for ourselves but for each other. We help keep hope alive for one another.



Especially when the stakes are high—when we are fighting for our communities, our democracy, and the rights and freedoms of fellow human beings—we need other people to share the load, to bring an outside perspective, and occasionally to lighten the mood. We remind each other to celebrate our victories, great and small.

Participating as an individual can be helpful, but it's not enough. Connecting and participating online can support movement goals, but unless it also moves off-line, into the world, its effectiveness is limited.

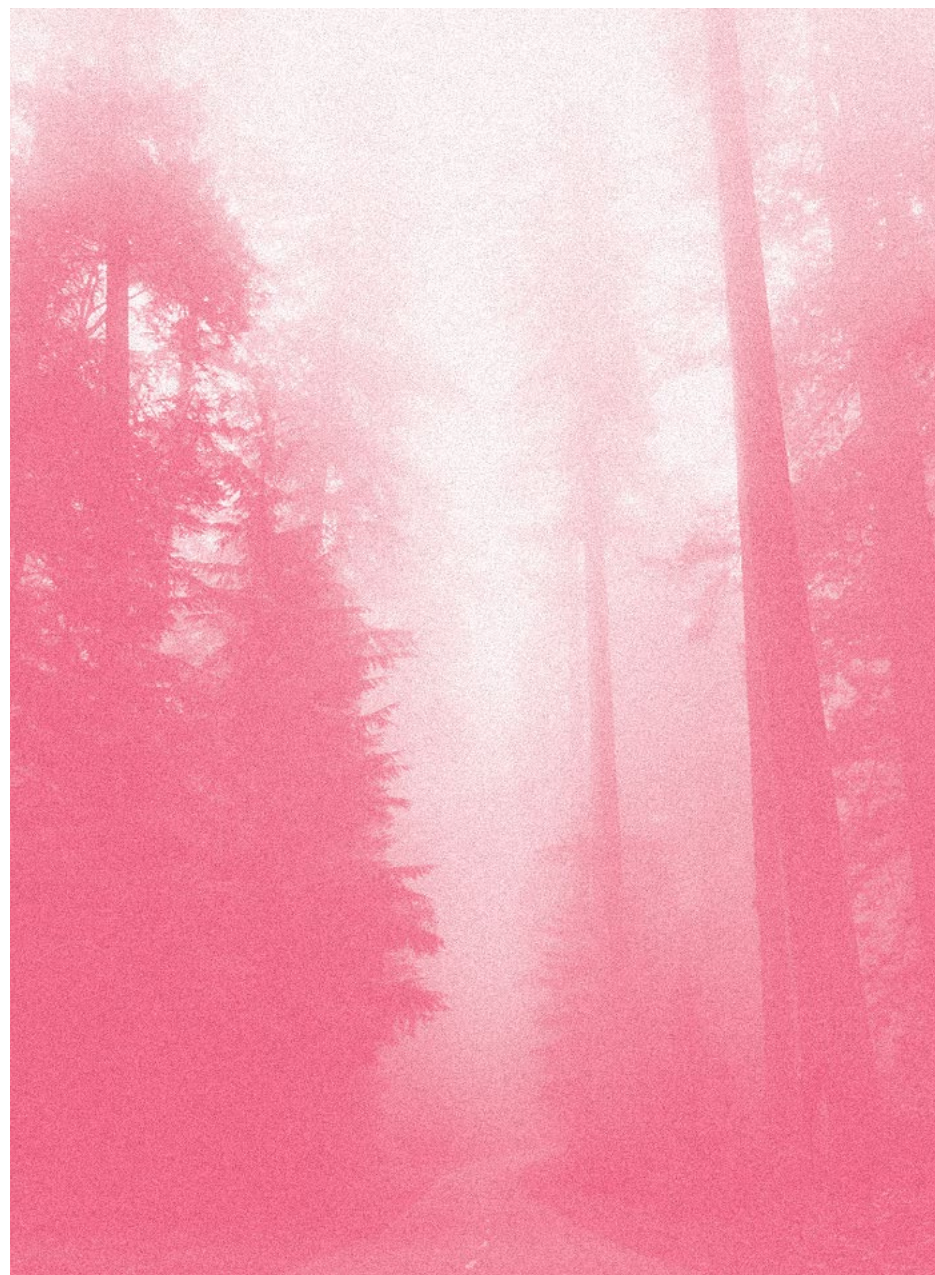
Research shows that social connection—being part of a group—is the key factor in sustaining active popular support for a resistance movement. In his book *Freedom Summer*, about the volunteers who traveled to the South in 1964 as part of the civil rights movement's Freedom Summer campaign, historian Doug McAdam found that having “strong ties” among the volunteers—that is, having close friends who also participated—was more predictive of continued involvement in the movement than any other factor, even commitment to its ideals.

Relationships sustain us. And small groups sustain us best.

## ***Small groups are better than big lists***

The strongest building blocks for our movement are small groups. Looking around at the state of the resistance today might give you a different idea, however. National nonprofits and political campaigns boast of email lists hundreds of thousands of names long. They mobilize individuals to sign petitions, make phone calls, and turn out to rallies, marches, and town hall meetings.

At specific times and for specific tasks, those lists are incredibly effective tools. But they won't help us create a resilient social movement that is built for steady, sustainable growth and that can mobilize beyond big actions. To do that, we must form small groups that can last and grow.



## ***Between mass marches and sustained participation: the missing link***

Barack Obama’s rise to the presidency was historic in many ways. One of the most significant was his campaign’s embrace of the principles of social movements. Obama outmaneuvered better-established, better-funded primary opponents by using critical insights that their campaigns didn’t understand nearly as well.

First, the Obama campaign conducted face-to-face mass trainings. Its staffers corralled enthusiastic crowds attracted by the candidate and got them on the same page, with a common message, a common means, and a common goal.

Second, the campaign encouraged people to take their participation into their own hands. Instead of waiting for further meetings to be announced by a central organization, they created small groups, supporting sustained participation in their common agenda.

By election time, the Obama campaign had created tens of thousands of trained community organizers, linked to one another in small groups that spanned the United States. (Sadly, this organization was largely demobilized after Obama took office.)

Of course, the Obama campaign didn’t invent these techniques. **Mass meetings and trainings often make the difference between a social movement that digs in for the long haul and one that is 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 drew protesters regularly to churches for sermons, freedom songs, tactical briefings, and trainings.

These 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 dictator Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia in the early 2000s, known as Otpor, which means “resistance,” developed a technique to rapidly train tens of thousands of activists in the principles and strategies of their movement. Otpor is one of the best-studied examples of a movement that, by sustaining participation over the long term—through the inevitable cycles of boom and bust, expansion and contraction—successfully passed the critical threshold of 3.5% of the population.

Otpor’s successful actions attracted new participants who would then be invited to a week’s worth of content-rich classes. Participants came to the classes with little experience, but left united around the movement’s goals, immersed in the tactics and principles of nonviolent protest, and prepared to form small groups and to lead protests of their own. They also left equipped with the inspiration they would need to keep moving forward in the face of an often-terrifying opposition.



## **Finding or forming your group**

What if tens of thousands of small groups all over the United States, their members trained in face-to-face mass trainings, met weekly to plan actions using all three types of protest?

What if you knew that millions of people like you had small groups they could count on to encourage and nurture their political activity, keeping them inspired and moving forward?

We could take back Congress and our state legislatures. We could block Trump's agenda, remove him from office, and ignite a progressive revolution.

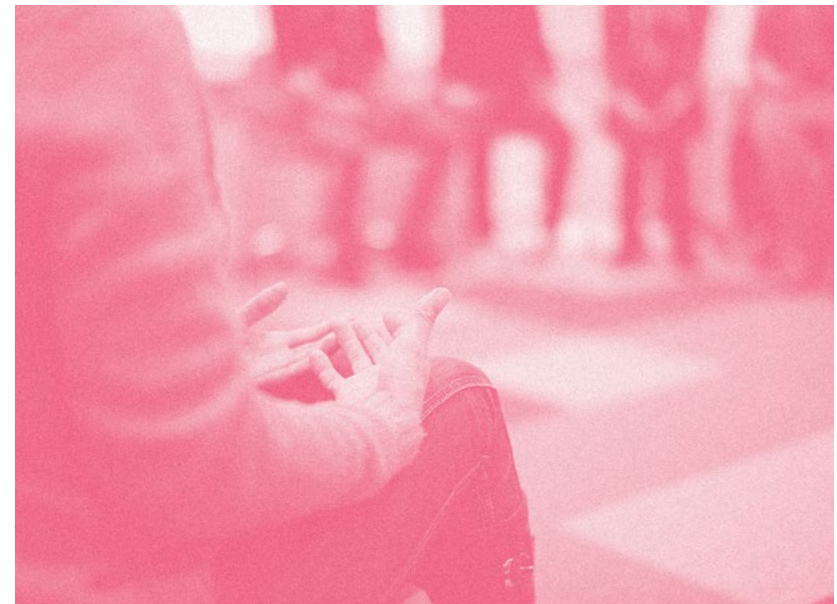
The first step is training. We are developing a Resistance Guide training program and would love for you to sign up for one today at [guidingtheresistance.org](http://guidingtheresistance.org). Many other groups offer mass trainings, some of which we helped develop. After one of these trainings, you'll be able to form your own group—just like those that advanced the Civil Rights Movement, or overthrew Milosevic in Serbia.

After training, the second step is [finding or forming a group](#). It's possible even without the benefit of an overarching organization. Your group could include your closest friends, your neighbors, someone you met at a protest, people from your religious community, or people you've interacted with online. We suggest that groups be no smaller than four people and no larger than 15. There's no hard and fast rule, but within that range you can be effective and flexible while helping one other to stay active.

The three key elements that your group should provide are: **relationships, training and action.**

**Build relationships** with one another through personal storytelling. This is a community organizing tactic that was used very well by the Obama campaign. This kind of storytelling—developed by theorist Marshall Ganz as [“public narrative”](#)—encourages activists to develop a “story of self,” a “story of us,” and a “story of now.” (First, we share the struggles we have undergone or witnessed as individuals. Then we connect those struggles to our vision and values as activists. Then we connect that vision to the crisis of the current moment.) Grounding our activism in these perspectives lends our words moral weight and surprising effectiveness as we reach out to others. In terms of building active popular support, it's enduring work.

**Train** one another about the issues at stake and about practices of resistance. Use materials provided by this guide and other groups to develop your understanding of your own tactics and those of your opponents.



**Take action.** This is the most important role of your group, though all action will be strengthened when ample time is given to relationships and training. The most important thing you can do is show up, and the most important way you can show up is as a group. Keep in mind our recommended minimum commitment:

- **Once a month, show up to either a trigger event protest with game change potential or a small, group-led action.**
- **Once a week, put pressure on decision makers with phone calls or at town halls.**
- **Vote for and do get out the vote work for movement candidates in local, state, and federal elections.**

This is where having a group pays off. By showing up together, you're accomplishing three critical things: You're sustaining the movement by maintaining active popular support. You're keeping one other in relationship, and probably—just as importantly—having more fun. And you're encouraging others to show up. These are simple things, but they make the difference between success and failure.

We're big fans of the *Indivisible Guide's* recommendations on starting your own group. Read it [at their website](#).



## ***Don't reinvent the wheel***

You may be already part of an organization that hosts trainings. Perhaps it's your church, your union, or another organization. If you have standing relationships within such an organization, and the organization is lending its participation to the resistance, please stick with it.

The best criteria to keep in mind when selecting a group is whether you like the people involved and are interested in building relationships with them. In some ways, this is even more important than a perfect match on the issues, as long as you share the broader goals. Relationships will sustain your participation, and help you build the emotional resources to take on the issues you care about.

You may find yourself initially out of sync with a group's agenda, but give it some time. Rather than raising objections or alternatives right off the bat, listen, ask questions, volunteer, and take on leadership as opportunities arise. Appreciate that the existing leadership may be making certain decisions for a reason, and try to learn about those reasons. And if it's not a great fit, try something else. Many roads lead to the resistance!

## Meeting formats

In nearly every city in the world, there's a group that meets every day, sometimes dozens of times in a day. It meets without the support of a central bureaucracy, a dues-paying membership, or even elected leaders, and it provides vital, life-saving services to millions of individuals. The name of this group? Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). AA and other 12-step movements have flourished in diverse environments for decades in part because every meeting follows the same, proven script.

Religious rituals have been practiced for millennia under the same principle. To observe the Passover holiday, Jews need only have a copy of the *Haggadah*, a book that lays out the story and the traditions of Passover, to be read at a family dinner.

The *Haggadah* is a meeting script that has been in use for more than a thousand years.

Meeting formats allow anyone to step up and lead, no matter the place or time. A volunteer leader can read a script that assigns different responsibilities to other leaders. These scripts can shape a one-time meeting or can provide a consistent structure for an ongoing group.

[At our website, you will find an example of a meeting script.](#)

Whether or not you affiliate with us, your group may find this script useful for organizing your energies and sustaining your participation in the resistance.

# EPILOGUE

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**“Hope is a belief that what we do might matter, an understanding that the future is not yet written. It’s informed, astute open-mindedness about what can happen and what role we may play in it. Hope looks forward, but it draws its energies from the past, from knowing histories, including our victories, and their complexities and imperfections.”**

*—Rebecca Solnit, Protest and persist: why giving up hope is not an option*”

The Tea Party Movement had real, hurtful effects on American politics. It pulled the Republican Party far to the right and the center of gravity of the American political system with it. It set the stage for the rise of Trump and the thrashing of Democrats at the state and local level.

It also set a powerful example for approaching politics from a social movement perspective, rather than using compromise as a strategy for change.

We believe that the current resistance can give rise to a social movement of far more lasting power than the Tea Party—and that this movement will shift our country in a direction away from the current administration’s cruel aims and towards justice for all.

By changing the political weather, we can turn demands that seem unrealistic today into the new common sense—and then we can win them.

Medicare for All. Free public college. Criminal justice reform. Strong, protections for reproductive rights. A \$15 minimum wage and a fair, progressive tax system in which the rich pay their fair share.

It will take hard work. But millions have already shown that they are willing to do it.

It will take a commitment to minimally participating in each of the three types of protest—changing the political weather and drawing new supporters into our movement through protest; resisting elected officials with the tools at our disposal; and winning elections against Republicans while pulling the Democratic Party towards our movement and away from establishment-centered, compromise-driven politics.

As the *Resistance Guide* goes to press in the summer of Trump’s first year in office, the future remains unwritten. The GOP has had trouble gaining traction on their agenda—yet they remain committed to undoing Obamacare, slashing taxes on the wealthy, and using executive power to impose reactionary environmental and criminal justice policies. Special elections suggest that the Republicans will be on the defensive in 2018—but no U.S. House seats have flipped, despite millions of dollars in campaign spending.

But that’s only the story that we hear on TV. The real story is happening elsewhere.

It’s happening in mass trainings across the country, as longtime activists and newly engaged protestors commit to common principles and action. It’s happening in small groups that are coming together and doing their part to resist the Trump agenda. It’s happening in sit-ins at elected officials’ offices, in local races across the country, in small actions on campuses and at City Halls.

Fueled by hope, a movement is growing.

***We hope you join us.***

## ***Affiliate with the Resistance Guide***

If you would like support from the *Resistance Guide* and our network, we would love for you to affiliate with us as a **Resistance Circle**. Affiliation is not exclusive—you're welcome join us and continue working with Indivisible or any other existing group.

To affiliate, we ask three things:

1. That you use the principles and brand that we provide through this guide, through our meeting scripts, and on our website.
2. That you sign up for a *Resistance Guide* training.
3. That you put your Circle's contact information on the map at our website, so others can see that the resistance is growing!

Find us at our website, [guidingtheresistance.org](https://guidingtheresistance.org)

# Resources

Find these at our website, [guidingtheresistance.org](https://guidingtheresistance.org)

- [Sign up for a training](#) with the Resistance Guide and learn everything you need to know to be a leader in the resistance.
- Download, share and give away this Resistance Guide.
- Use our [Resistance Circle Directory](#) to find a Circle near you, or start your own!
- Download the [Group Meeting Planning Guide](#) to use for small group meetings and presentations.
- Download the [Principles](#) for small groups (basic guidelines to follow when forming or joining a Resistance Circle).

## ***Further reading***

Mark and Paul Engler have a series of articles in Waging Nonviolence on topics covered in [their book](#):

- [Surviving the ups and downs of social movements](#)
- [What makes nonviolent movements explode?](#)
- [Gandhi's strategy for success – use more than one strategy](#)
- [From the Berlin Wall to today – Lessons for harnessing the moment of the whirlwind](#)
- [How did Gandhi win?](#)
- [When the pillars fall – How social movements can win more victories like same-sex marriage](#)
- [Should we fight the system or be the change?](#)
- [Can Frances Fox Piven's theory of disruptive power create the next Occupy?](#)
- [Would Saul Alinsky break his own rules?](#)

Other readings:

- ["This Is An Uprising": A Conversation with Mark Engler, by Michal Busch in Warscapes](#)
- [Why targeting corporate Democrats is part of the fight against Trump by Mark Engler in Waging Nonviolence](#)
- [How to win in populist times by Jonathan Matthew Smucker in Waging Nonviolence](#)
- [Participation is everything – a conversation with Erica Chenoweth by Eric Stoner in Waging Nonviolence](#)
- [How the Southern Strategy Made Donald Trump Possible by Jeet Heer in New Republic](#)

# Examples of Active Groups

The following list includes groups that are advancing the resistance. Focus and style varies from group to group, and some groups participate in more than one type of resistance. This is not a comprehensive list. There are many more groups participating in the resistance, and you can find an updated list at our website.

## Game Changing:

- [WomensMarch.com](https://www.womensmarch.com)
- [ColorofChange.org](https://colorofchange.org)
- [BlackLivesMatter.com](https://blacklivesmatter.com)
- [Movement for Black Lives](https://movementforblacklives.org)
- [350.org](https://350.org)
- [Cosecha](https://cosecha.org)
- [IfNotNow](https://ifnotnow.org)
- [Sunrise Movement](https://sunrisemovement.org)

## Outside Game:

- [IndivisibleGuide.com](https://indivisibleguide.com)
- [TownhallProject.com](https://townhallproject.com)
- [MoveOn.org](https://moveon.org)
- [OurRevolution.org](https://ourrevolution.org)
- [Working Families Party](https://workingfamiliesparty.org)
- [PeoplesAction.org](https://peoplesaction.org)
- [People Power, ACLU](https://peoplepower.org)
- [Center for Popular Democracy](https://centerforpopulardemocracy.org)

## Inside Game:

- [OurRevolution.org](https://ourrevolution.org)
- [RocktheVote.com](https://rockthevote.com)
- [Progressive Democrats of America](https://progressivedemocrats.org)
- [KnockEveryDoor.org](https://knockeverydoor.org)
- [Justice Democrats](https://justiceDemocrats.org)
- [Brand New Congress](https://brandnewcongress.org)
- [WeWillReplaceYou.org](https://wewillreplaceyou.org)
- [SwingLeft.org](https://swingleft.org)
- [Wellstone.org](https://wellstone.org)
- [Working Families Party](https://workingfamiliesparty.org)



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