

VOLUME 4

**D-HUB**

# NARRATIVE



**ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN**

**TOOLKIT**

Greatest hits to defend  
and renew democracies

**D-HUB**

**VOLUME 4**

**NARRATIVE**

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**D-HUB THANKS THE MEMBERS OF ITS COMMUNITY FOR THEIR FEEDBACK AND COMMENTS, WHICH HELPED IMPROVE THIS VOLUME.**

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Twenty-first-century authoritarian leaders follow a clear playbook. It's not a formula or a recipe but a dynamic set of strategies and tactics deployed across different contexts.

In response, we've started to crack open their playbook and crafted something of our own: an ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN TOOLKIT. Developed with insight from hundreds of frontline democracy defenders, scholars, and strategists, this 10-volume series is packed with the most effective plays to counter elected authoritarianism and safeguard our democracies.

This Toolkit is not a silver bullet. It's a catalyst designed to ignite your vision and creativity as you confront the challenges ahead. Its plays are archetypal but open to innovation and adaptation to the local context of those who use them.

We hope you use it and share it. Maybe the next big play, we'll learn from you.

**Ricken Patel**

**CO-CHAIR, D-HUB**

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Future Forward Party (Thailand) - Broad Front (Chile) - Indigenous Peoples (Guatemala) - People's Protest Assembly (Slovenia) - The Jasmine Revolution (Tunisia) - 8th of March Institute (Slovenia) - Alexei Navalny (Russia) - Leni Robredo (Philippines) - Hong Kong Pro-Democracy Movement (China)

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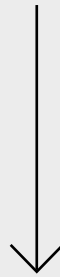
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# INTRODUCTION



**WHAT STORIES  
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**by Nika Kovač**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, D-HUB**

Elected authoritarian leaders understand the power of stories. They use narratives to dominate public conversation and consolidate power through lies, distortion, fear, and division. Yet they also speak in simple, accessible language, creating a sense of belonging to engage overlooked communities. Identifying this helps us understand their appeal and how to counter it.

That's where this volume of the Anti-Authoritarian Toolkit comes in. It focuses on narrative strategies: six plays designed to help you present your messages, connect emotionally with voters, and build resilient political movements. Each play offers tested approaches to capture attention, inspire action, and foster long-term engagement—not just moments of mobilization, but lasting communities of trust and participation.

We show how to ground messaging in real concerns, craft universal themes that unite diverse groups, and use humor and symbols to engage people. We also explore how to break through authoritarian shields—exposing

corruption, betrayal, and the harm hidden behind false promises. These plays have been put into practice in diverse environments where narrative control was key to resisting authoritarianism.

Throughout, we emphasize narratives that reflect people's lived experiences—showing how political change can improve the daily life of citizens. When messages mirror familiar and prevailing struggles and hopes, they become more authentic, mobilizing, and credible.

But narrative is only one dimension of political action. We are not an empty marketing company. Real change comes through organizing, delivering, and governing. The strongest and most lasting narrative is built through action—through tangible delivery and earned trust, not just words.

Our goal is to equip you with the tools to take control of public discourse and reshape our communities around values of unity, hope, and shared humanity. Because the stories we tell can turn the tide.

With love,  
Nika.

# HOW THIS PUBLICATION WORKS

Democracy defenders are busy and practical people. That is why we designed this publication to be concise and engaging.

This volume includes **ONE GRAND STRATEGY** and **SIX PLAYS**.

## GRAND STRATEGY

A guiding framework that aligns all actions and tactics with the long-term goal of safeguarding democracy. The foundation of the grand strategy provides coherence and effectiveness to individual plays.

## PLAY

An action that can be adapted to different moments and contexts. It may be a strategy, tactic, or tool. The key criteria for its inclusion are its deployment, effectiveness, and relevance in the fight for democracy.

FOR EACH, YOU WILL FIND THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION



# THE PLAY

Describes the strategy, tactic or move



## WHY IT WORKS

Explains the core reasons the tactic is effective and impactful



## HOW IT WORKS

A more detailed depiction of the play, with the basic steps of implementation



## TIPS

Recommendations and aspects to avoid



## WHO'S DONE IT WELL

Examples of how the play has been deployed in real life



## LEARN MORE

Curated resources to deepen understanding or support implementation

The concluding section, **"WE CAN HELP YOU,"** provides contact details for those needing help confronting elected authoritarian politics.

**FEATURED GRAND STRATEGY**

# **HARNESSING EMOTIONS TO SPARK CONVICTION**

**LEADING WITH PASSION,  
MOBILIZING WITH PURPOSE**

**For most people, the impulse to engage with politics is fundamentally emotional.**

**This doesn't mean it's irrational or superficial. People always seek certainty, dignity, and a better future. Facts and rational arguments alone rarely ignite commitment; messages resonate when they speak to real emotions of everyday experiences.**

**Even when a political message is grounded in real issues and demonstrates technical competence, a purely intellectual or pragmatic approach will fail to spark interest. Emotions give political content its resonance, and without them, even the best ideas are usually ignored.**

**To counter authoritarian movements, we must master emotional language—not to manipulate reality, but to offer a credible vision that stands strong against them. Authoritarians have mastered the psychology of emotions and excel at triggering them to shape perception and drive action.**

Democratic movements must learn to connect rational persuasion with emotions in ways that elevate, unify, and mobilize people around a shared purpose. Effective messaging doesn't rely on just one emotion. It creates and uses the right emotion at the right time:

- Grab attention with *fear*, *anger*, or *loss aversion*: "Will I lose what I have today?" Outrage over injustice fuels action.
- Invite possibility with *empathy* or *curiosity*: create space for people to explore, ask, and imagine.
- Inspire action with *hope*: give people a future worth walking towards.

This sequence turns emotion into structure, not merely decoration. As a progression, it mirrors the arc of great storytelling: stakes, struggle, resolution. It allows us to explain concepts and major situations in ways that awaken emotion, so people not only understand but feel why democracy matters.

**Above all, we must anchor this strategy in universal values: love, family, justice, freedom, patriotism, dignity, renewal. These values don't belong solely to one side. The goal isn't to defeat "the other half," but to build a future broad enough for everyone to take part in.**

**By reclaiming the values that authoritarians have hijacked while mobilizing emotions, we don't trick or deceive—we show that democracy is the strongest way to protect what people already love and stand for.**

**When we connect emotions, values, and vision, we move beyond campaigns and enter the realm of conviction—the place where true, lasting mobilization begins.**

**Emotion opens the door. Facts let people walk through it with confidence. But it's agency—feeling that their actions matter—that keeps them walking.**

**1**

# **BUILD A UNIVERSAL MESSAGE**

Crafting a message  
of shared purpose

# THE PLAY

Elected authoritarian leaders thrive on fragmentation—cultural, geographic, and generational. They live by the motto *divide and conquer*. Democratic movements often respond in fragments: a message for youth here, a policy for workers there, a slogan for elites elsewhere.

Worse still, we draw lines between democratic actors themselves—based on conflict, competition, or mistrust—instead of rallying around shared values and a common vision. This drains energy, exhausts supporters, alienates broader audiences, and weakens our ability to offer a compelling alternative.

This play flips the script. It's about identifying the values that unify and turning them into a message that speaks to everyone. Rather than fragmenting communications, find common denominators to create a drumbeat—a steady rhythm of messages that adapt to different groups while pointing in the same direction.

It's not about watering things down. It's about lifting them up—crafting a shared moral core that resonates across identity lines. A universal, positive message keeps core supporters energized and opens doors for new audiences to join in, making it a powerful tool for lasting impact.



# WHY IT WORKS

- **SHARED VALUES CUT THROUGH DIVIDES.** Universal values resonate across demographics, creating a common emotional foundation.
- **POSITIVE VISIONS DON'T JUST HELP US RESIST—THEY INSPIRE.** People are drawn to hopeful futures, not just to battles against shared enemies.
- **CONSISTENCY ON VALUES STRENGTHENS IDENTITY.** A repeated, coherent message shapes collective identity and reinforces belonging over time.



# HOW IT WORKS

## 1 START WITH WHAT UNITES, NOT WHAT DIVIDES

Begin not with segmentation, but with core values. Before you dive into research or audience mapping, clarify the universal principles that define your movement: dignity, freedom, fairness, and safety, for example. These aren't just abstract ideals—they're emotional anchors that resonate across identities. Once you ground yourself in these values, they will become your drumbeat, the steady, unifying rhythm that shapes all your messaging.

## 2 FRAME A POSITIVE VISION

Once you've defined your universal values, use research to connect them to people's everyday concerns and daily struggles. Show how these values address real fears, needs, and hopes. Craft a hopeful vision rooted in tangible symbols and relatable stories—making your message not just inspiring, but also believable and close to home.

## 3 SEQUENCE THE DRUMBEAT: LET ONE WORD MEAN MANY THINGS

Your universal values set the drumbeat—a steady rhythm through all messaging. Don't just present abstract policies; show how they reflect a shared aspiration for a better future.

For example, take *dignity*:

- For workers, it's fair pay.
- For youth, it's agency over their future.
- For startups, it's the freedom to innovate.
- For marginalized groups, it's equal protection.

One same value, many faces—one regular pulse, one unified, powerful message.

## 4 DELIVER THROUGH TRUSTED MESSENGERS

A message is only as strong as its messenger. Work with respected voices across society—community leaders, workers, startups, businesses, journalists, teachers—people directly affected by the issues. Let them speak in their own words, all reinforcing the same shared values.

## 5 ALIGN MESSENGERS TO AUDIENCES

Who delivers your message is as important as the message itself. Mirror speakers—trusted, relatable voices—help audiences connect. Combine digital reach with grassroots presence: while social media amplifies fast, personal connections on the ground build real trust and long-term engagement. One-size-fits-all won't work here; the message should always be adapted to each audience.

## 6 MAINTAIN THE DRUMBEAT

Keep the message alive across all spaces—online, offline, formal, informal. Reach beyond core activists: engage artists, businesses, families, everyday citizens. Repetition builds memory; consistency builds trust. Make your message part of daily life so that it feels universal and unstoppable. Your message should become *cultural background music*—something people can't unhear because it sounds like home.



# TIPS

## **A** BUILD LONG-TERM COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Don't think it's only about winning elections or campaigns. Offer people meaningful takeaways that help them navigate reality, counter misinformation, and feel empowered. Authoritarians shape public perception 24/7; in response, embed your message into broader social conversations for lasting impact. Build communities of engagement, not just moments of mobilization.

## **B** WALK THE TALK AND SHOW YOU CAN DELIVER

Authenticity matters. Show you can deliver by working alongside affected communities, local leaders, academics, and diverse voices. Pilot solutions, acknowledge struggles, and offer real, practical actions. People trust movements that prove they can turn shared values into meaningful and visible change.

## C AVOID THE TRAP OF TALKING TO THE ROOM

If your message only makes sense to the already-convinced, it's not universal. Pressure-test it with people outside your bubble—affected communities, academia, skeptics, everyday citizens. Even without big research budgets, you can take in evidence-based inputs. Use public data, social listening, or informal feedback to refine the message until it resonates meaningfully across divides. Also, as a quick kitchen-table test, try your message with someone in your life who usually votes differently—it's a simple yet powerful way to check for resonance and clarity.



# WHO'S DONE IT WELL



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**FUTURE FORWARD PARTY**

**Universal Values to Build Resilience Against Repression**

THAILAND

Despite Thailand's multi-party electoral system and regular elections, the military junta has consistently undermined its democratic progress. It interrupted the democratic process through coups in 2006 and 2014. Additionally, institutions like the courts have been used to dissolve political parties, exacerbating the ongoing power struggle between royalist, military-backed establishment parties and political forces aligned with former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

However, reformist movements have emerged, beginning with the Future Forward Party (2018-2020) and later the Move Forward Party (MFP, 2020-2024). In the 2023 national elections, the MFP ran on a positive reform agenda aimed at democratizing Thai society through the "3Ds": Demilitarize, Demonopolize, Decentralize. Their commitment to amending Thailand's strict lese-majeste laws and reducing military influence resonated strongly with both younger and older generations.

The MFP's campaign emphasized the creation of a "full democracy" with a people-driven Constitution and transparent governance, broadening its appeal across various demographics. Their hopeful message, which prioritized social welfare, economic equality, and inclusive growth, particularly resonated with younger voters, who saw the MFP as a vehicle for meaningful reform.

This comprehensive reform agenda, combined with their narrative and public communication, fostered a sense of collective hope, portraying a vision of Thai society that centered on fairness, social welfare, and inclusion. The MFP's success lay in its ability to transform widespread frustration into positive action. By emphasizing hope over division, the party tapped into a growing desire among the Thai population for progressive leadership that promised a more prosperous and equitable future for all.

Despite the MFP winning the most seats in the 2023 elections, the royalist-military establishment blocked the MFP's bid for the prime ministership and later dissolved the party, banning many of its leaders from participating in future elections. For the third time, the movement was forced to re-group and rebuild. The progressive momentum has now been

channeled into a new party, the People's Party, which continues the fight for a people-centered Constitution and participatory democracy in Thailand.

With a new name and legal structure, the anti-authoritarian political movement remains undeterred, pursuing the same mission: enacting a people-centric Constitution and advancing participatory democracy in Thailand.

**"The MFP's campaign broke away from the fear-based narratives traditionally used by other political parties. Rather than focusing on threats posed by opposition forces, the MFP emphasized the potential for positive change. Empowering local communities, promoting social equality, and transforming Thailand's energy and education sectors."**



## BROAD FRONT

### Uniting a Nation Around Dignity

#### CHILE

In the wake of Chile's 2019 social uprising, demands for systemic change exploded across the country. Amid authoritarian nostalgia and deep polarization, the progressive coalition led by *Frente Amplio* ("Broad Front") entered the 2021 election with a challenge: could they transform social protest into a national majority?

Their candidate, Gabriel Boric—a young former student leader—faced off against far-right hardliner José Antonio Kast, who invoked Pinochet's legacy and campaigned on fear, order, and tradition. Rather than engaging on Kast's terms, Boric's team stayed disciplined around a universal values-driven message: "*la dignidad del pueblo*" ("the dignity of the people").

This wasn't an abstract idea; it was a unifying moral vision that linked the demands from the streets to everyday struggles—fair wages, access to healthcare, LGBTQ+ rights, environmental protection, and democratic renewal. In the second round, the campaign reinforced this universal message with the slogan "*Para vivir mejor*" ("To live better")—offering dignity, hope, and clarity in place of fear and polarization.

The message was carried by thousands, not just the candidate. Youth activists created viral content on TikTok and Instagram. Feminist networks mobilized door-to-door, reclaiming care work as something political. Musicians,

muralists, and meme-makers wove the message into Chile's cultural life. Furthermore, the campaign did not take the bait of Kast's reactionary politics—it instead re-centered the conversation on people's hopes and needs.

Without abandoning values, Boric built a broad coalition across the left and center. His message remained consistent, and his posture signaled universality, unity, and stability. This balancing act turned a protest movement into a political majority.

The result was historic. Voter turnout was record high, with youth participation playing a decisive role. Boric won with 55.8% of the vote—the highest total in Chilean democratic history—and became the country's youngest president.

**"Only in the collective construction of a more dignified society can we build a better life for all."**



# LEARN MORE

## D-HUB RESOURCES



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## OTHER RESOURCES



Harvard International Review. 2024. "A New Vision for Thailand: Interview with Pita Limjaroenrat."



Laohabut, Thareerat & Duncan McCargo. 2024. "Thailand's Movement Party: The Evolution of the Move Forward Party."



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The Nation. 2023. "Pita promises a 'better future' for Thailand with Move Forward."

**2**

# **TELL THE STORY OF THE PEOPLE**

**Building connection  
through authentic narratives**

# THE PLAY

To win the narrative battle, center your message on emotions, not policies or programs. Emotional connection is more powerful than any polished argument. But emotional appeal is not enough: real connection happens when emotion is paired with substance.

Instead of focusing on politicians or abstract ideas, emphasize real people facing actual visible problems. Telling the story of ordinary people and offering solutions to their struggles becomes a powerful resource.

How stories are told matters. The steps of classical storytelling are key. A compelling story first presents a relatable challenge, then politicizes the solution by illustrating how it can be addressed, and finally connects to action by positioning the movement or a specific leader as the vehicle for change.

Genuine stories foster empathy and trust. This approach requires honesty, steering clear of overly scripted messages. When voters see themselves reflected in a narrative, they become more engaged and invested.



# WHY IT WORKS

- **REAL VOICES MAKE POLITICS MORE TANGIBLE.** They turn abstract issues into real, lived experiences that are easier to understand and remember.
- **PERSONAL STORIES BUILD EMOTIONAL BONDS.** They build empathy and trust, making political messages feel closer, more human, and relatable.
- **TESTIMONIES INSPIRE MORAL CLARITY.** They draw a sharper line between what's fair and what's unjust, fueling righteous outrage and renewed hope.
- **PEOPLE SEE THEIR OWN STRUGGLES REFLECTED.** It feels like looking in a mirror—favoring engagement and belonging.
- **RECOGNITION SPARKS AGENCY.** Seeing that their story matters—and that solutions exist—is a key mobilizer for many people.



# HOW IT WORKS

## 1 IDENTIFY KEY STORIES

Identify individuals whose lives have been directly shaped by political decisions, good or bad. Reach into target communities and gather personal stories of either struggle, hope, resilience, or even success. These authentic voices, aligned with your broader message, will bring your campaign to life and show the real-world stakes.

## 2 CREATE A STORY COLLECTION PROCESS

Set up a system—interviews, focus groups, or one-on-ones—to gather authentic stories in people’s own words. Prioritize sincerity and openness over polish and correctness to keep the narratives real. In sensitive contexts, those sharing their stories might face risks when speaking out. Protect individuals by using actors to portray experiences, and always include a disclaimer to ensure transparency to maintain trust.

## 3 INTEGRATE STORIES INTO CAMPAIGN MESSAGING

Once you’ve collected the stories, weave them into your campaign to humanize it and create an emotional connection with voters. Use these personal narratives across multiple platforms—through video testimonials, written stories, and social media posts. At rallies and community events, feature these stories to show voters how political decisions have directly impacted people’s lives.

## 4

### ENGAGE IN TWO-WAY DIALOGUE

Make storytelling interactive by encouraging voters to share their own stories and perspectives. Use social media, community forums, and in-person events to create spaces where voters can engage directly with your campaign and feel heard. This two-way dialogue fosters not just engagement, but a sense of ownership and lasting connection.

## 5

### CONNECT STORIES TO SOLUTIONS

A powerful story doesn't just expose a problem—it points to a path forward. After highlighting personal challenges, show how your movement or campaign offers real solutions. Link each story to actual and realistic actions, policies, or future change, so people see not just hardship, but hope—and know where and how to exactly channel their support.

## 6

### MONITOR AND ADJUST

Track how supporters respond to different stories and testimonies. Use feedback and engagement data to refine your storytelling approach, ensuring it continues to resonate with your audiences. Also, keep adapting new stories or emerging concerns with your values and with the vision of the world that you are promoting and striving for. This ongoing process will make your efforts dynamic and responsive.



# TIPS

## **A** PRIORITIZE HONESTY AND SIMPLICITY

Present stories as they are—honest, raw, and reflective of real life. Avoid overpolishing or scripting, as sincerity and authenticity build trust. Transparency means showing both challenges and successes, using clear, simple, and accessible language that resonates across groups. When people feel their experiences matter, they're more likely to see your campaign's vision as their own and engage deeply with your cause.

## **B** TURN STORIES INTO CALLS FOR ACTION

Every story should spark more than emotion—it should invite action. Show people how they can be part of the solution, whether by voting, volunteering, organizing, or amplifying the message. When stories end with clear calls to action, these next steps transform engagement into real-world commitment and build a movement that goes beyond words.



# WHO'S DONE IT WELL



## INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

### Reclaiming the Narrative of Democracy

#### GUATEMALA

In the wake of Guatemala's 2023 general elections, Indigenous communities became the moral voice of the nation. After Bernardo Arévalo's unexpected victory, the entrenched political elite—long referred to as “the pact of the corrupt”—tried to block the transition of power through legal manipulation and institutional sabotage. But it wasn't Arévalo or any political party who mobilized the people to defend democracy. It was the Indigenous communities who led, on their own terms, by telling their own story.

For 106 days, they blocked highways, held assemblies, and staged peaceful demonstrations. These weren't just protests—they were a powerful act of narrative reclamation.

For decades, Indigenous people of Guatemala had been treated as marginal to the political story: overlooked, stereotyped, or silenced. In 2023, they flipped the script. They weren't protesting for a specific party—they were defending democracy itself, and they were the main leads.

Their message wasn't broadcast through TV ads or social media influencers. It traveled by word of mouth, in K'iche', Xinka, and other Indigenous languages. Local leaders shared stories in squares and communal spaces. Testimonies were passed from one household to the next. The story was simple and clear: this protest wasn't just about the elites trying to steal an election—it was about long-stolen dignity, stolen futures, and a stolen voice.

**“We told our people why we had to act: to end corruption, get proper healthcare, and ensure women’s safety in our communities. Our fight wasn’t for a party—it was for our homes, our water, our way of life, and traditions.”**

When Arévalo was finally sworn in as president, the first thing he did was thank the organizations of Indigenous peoples. Through their actions, Indigenous communities didn't just protect the democratic process—they rewrote the national story, with themselves, the people, as the main protagonists.



# LEARN MORE



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– “#StandwithBelarus:  
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Rayner Cynthia and John Kania. 2022. "Storytelling as Meaning-Making."



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**3**

# **FIGHT BACK USING HUMOR**

Challenge apathy and overcome fear  
through laughter

# THE PLAY

During periods of repression, misinformation, censorship, or peak tensions, humor can be a powerful form of resistance. It challenges the regime's narratives and helps people cope emotionally.

Laughing at abusive authority unmasks its weakness. Through memes, irony, and jokes, almost anything can be addressed. Humor can also shape demonstrations and performances, turning protests into memorable, attention-grabbing events.

Blending online humor with offline action amplifies impact, creating a narrative that resonates both on the streets and across digital platforms. This engages wider audiences, making complex issues more accessible. Comedy reaches where reason cannot—and sticks because people are always ready to decompress and have a laugh.

Just keep in mind one rule: *ridicule them, but always show they're dangerous*. And remember: be sharp, not cruel. Aggressive attacks can backfire. Make it playful, never insulting :)



# WHY IT WORKS

- **HUMOR DISARMS FEAR.** Laughter makes repression less intimidating, making hard or frightening situations easier to face.
- **MOCKERY WEAKENS AUTHORITY.** Ridiculing authoritarian figures chips away at their aura of power and invincibility.
- **SATIRE SPREADS FAST.** Jokes and memes travel quickly across platforms, boosting reach and engagement.
- **JOY BUILDS RESILIENCE.** Humor sustains morale and lowers the emotional barrier to action, helping people stay committed in long struggles.



# HOW IT WORKS

## 1 LEVERAGE WEAKNESSES OF AUTHORITARIAN FIGURES

Conduct (or solicit) an analysis of public opinion studies to identify authoritarian weaknesses. These weaknesses are usually related to hypocrisy, incompetence, corruption, or specific actions carried out by the regime that have translated into controversy or criticism in public opinion.

## 2 STRIKE WHILE THE IRONY IS HOT

Humor is most powerful when it's timely and relevant. While adaptability matters in all communication strategies, it's especially crucial for satire and political jokes. Keep your anti-authoritarian humor agile and responsive, aligning it with current events to maximize impact. Leverage breaking news, controversies, or trending topics to expose the authoritarian weaknesses you've already identified. Well-timed humor not only boosts the chances of virality but also reinforces your connection and relevance to the public pulse.

## 3 CURATE AND AMPLIFY EXISTING HUMOROUS CONTENT

You don't always need to create content from scratch. Online communities often produce sharp, humorous takes on authoritarian leaders that naturally go viral. Curate the best content that aligns with your strategy and editorial line, remixing or adapting it to fit your campaign's tone and platforms. Memes,

parodies, and cartoons already available can be used to support your cause, reinforcing your message while keeping it fresh and engaging.

## 4 ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION AND INTERACTION

To expand your reach, build rapport with influencers or trusted voices who can amplify your content among their followers. Involve them in both the creation and dissemination of humorous content. Organize meme contests, creative challenges, or hashtag campaigns to encourage participation and boost your message's virality.

To keep efforts focused and effective, provide clear guidance and background information about the authoritarian weaknesses you want to highlight, ensuring that humor remains relevant and on point.

## 5 INCLUDE HUMOR IN STREET DEMONSTRATIONS

Funny banners, posters, performances, and artistic interventions that laugh at authoritarians during protests often make for great visuals, attracting media attention and going viral online.

Also, consider organizing humorous events, street comedy shows, or flash mobs to amplify your message. These creative actions not only energize participants and the general public but also turn demonstrations into powerful storytelling moments that resonate both on the ground and across digital platforms.

## 6 EVALUATE AND ADJUST CONTINUOUSLY

Monitor the reception and impact of your humorous content online and offline. Observe audience reactions, analyze participation metrics, and assess the reach and effectiveness of your message.



# TIPS

## **A** BE CAREFUL WITH THE “CLEVER BUT UNEFFECTIVE” SYNDROME

Using humor requires agility and the ability to stay on top of the current agenda. However, this comes with an additional challenge: you don't just want people to laugh, you want the kind of laughter that sparks awareness and prompts critical reflection. So, a joke that doesn't directly target the regime's weaknesses may be clever, but it won't reduce the authoritarian's power. Effective humor should make authoritarian figures feel exposed or embarrassed, creating doubts among their moderate supporters and reinvigorating their detractors. That's when laughter becomes a true act of resistance.

## **B** MAKE THE JOKE THE MESSAGE

Effective political humor works when the joke itself delivers the message, not when it resorts to shallow ridicule. Jokes about an opponent's appearance or quirks might get a laugh, but they fail to expose deeper truths or undermine authoritarian power. The most powerful humor taps into unconscious wishes and perceptions—what people truly feel but might not openly express. Only then does a well-crafted joke become an emotional shortcut to common sense, making complex issues instantly relatable. If the punchline reflects how people already perceive the situation, the message lands without further explanation. So focus your humor on authentic frustrations and desires, not personal attacks.

## C USE THE SEINFELD STRUCTURE

Use comedy to unmask manipulation and falsehood, allowing truth to shine more brightly. While using humor, employ the Seinfeld Structure: find absurdity in situations that are considered normal. This mechanism aims to dismantle and question behaviors that are so commonplace that we often overlook them. This structure, used by the renowned comedian, typically begins with a question like, *“Isn’t it weird when...?”* Labeling authoritarian attitudes as “weird” and contrary to what is “normal” can have a significant impact, even in the most repressive regimes.



# WHO'S DONE IT WELL



## PEOPLE'S PROTEST ASSEMBLY

### Defiance through Humor and Perseverance

SLOVENIA

From 2020 to 2022, a monumental challenge arose in Slovenia as citizens faced a government that sought to undermine democracy and human rights. Over the course of 105 consecutive weeks, a series of protests took place every Friday, emerging as a powerful movement of resistance. Born out of spontaneity, creativity, and determination, the protests became a symbol of defiance against the government's measures.

The movement began modestly, with banners hung from balconies during the pandemic lockdowns. As restrictions allowed outdoor exercise, protesters took to the streets, using bicycles as a symbol of their cause. Humorous signs and playful chants quickly became part of the demonstrations, making the protests not only politically charged but also vibrant and approachable. By the third cycling protest, 10,000 people—

on bicycles, scooters, and on foot—were parading through the streets in peaceful, colorful, and often humorous defiance.

Humor was not just an accessory but a central component of the strategy, making these protests more attractive to both the press and social media while keeping morale high among participants. Protesters often carried witty banners and signs mocking government hypocrisy, which helped the movement gain traction across digital platforms. Satirical slogans and ironic chants turned otherwise tense moments into expressions of collective empowerment. Whether tens of thousands strong or just a small group, the protests continued undeterred by sanctions and threats.

Protesters used satire and symbolism to powerful effect: they chained statues and handed them the Constitution, floated a boat on Lake Bled with representations of Janša, Orbán, and Vučić as anti-democratic puppets, staged a mock award at a gas station, built snow-penis sculptures, and climbed Mount Triglav to confront a fake Janša and demand the return of the national symbols he had tried to claim.

Consistency was vital to the movement's success. For 105 weeks, the voices of resistance echoed across the country, sparking conversations everywhere, in homes, offices, and schools. But it was the combination of persistence and humor that prevented apathy from taking root, proving that even a small group of dedicated citizens could make a significant impact. The protests constantly evolved, adapting to changing circumstances while maintaining their energy, creativity, and playfulness. Additionally, the movement developed an affirmative agenda, offering political and social alternatives to the government's actions.

The experience of the 105 Fridays showed that humor, creativity, and persistence can overcome great challenges. Each police intervention only strengthened the resolve of the protesters. The demonstrations became a celebration of courage and dignity, as humor was the tool used by thousands of individuals who refused to be intimidated.

These 105 protests were not just acts of resistance; they were a celebration of the collective ability to create, adapt, and endure. Through consistency and creativity, the movement demonstrated how even the greatest obstacles can be overcome in the fight for democracy.

**“As the movement gained strength, creativity flourished. Humor and art were essential to maintain attention and relevance. Giant puppets representing government figures, protests on water with canoes and kayaks, giant banners unfurled over rivers or monuments highlighting governmental incompetence. Each Friday came with a new surprise to showcase the movement’s innovative spirit and determination.”**



# LEARN MORE

## D-HUB RESOURCES



D-Hub. 2025. "A Surprise Comeback!"  
*The Fight for Democracy Chronicles*,  
Volume 4.

## OTHER RESOURCES



Jassa Jenull. 2020. "Recreation in the time of Janša and Coronavirus." *YouTube*



– "Allowed recreation." *YouTube*



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"Bicycle Mobilization." *YouTube*



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**4**

# **SHOW, DON'T TELL**

Let symbols speak louder  
than words

# THE PLAY

As the saying goes, “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Similarly, symbols are powerful visual tools for advocacy, capable of simplifying complex ideas into recognizable forms that resonate with broad audiences.

Effective symbols are simple, replicable, and participatory, allowing ordinary people to adopt and reproduce them. The most impactful ones can be drawn, worn, or displayed anywhere—on walls, banners, clothes, or social media—ensuring visibility across both digital and physical spaces.

To be truly effective, symbols should be easy for grassroots supporters to replicate, blending professionally produced materials with homemade creations. This mix ensures both clarity and authenticity, making participation feel accessible and inclusive.

Powerful symbols also bridge the gap between online activism and everyday life. They should be easy to reproduce, not just digitally but also through stencils, graffiti, or gestures. When people can engage with symbols in their daily routines, they become more than visuals—they transform into acts of solidarity.



# WHY IT WORKS

- **SYMBOLS CUT THROUGH COMPLEXITY.** A single image can evoke emotions, trigger memories, and convey values far more efficiently than a dense paragraph of text.
- **BRIDGE ONLINE AND OFFLINE.** From memes to graffiti, symbols travel across platforms and streets, linking digital and physical action.
- **TURN IDEAS INTO IDENTITY.** A shared image becomes a badge of belonging, building community around a cause.
- **SYMBOLS MAKE PARTICIPATION VISIBLE.** When people wear or display a symbol, they feel part of something—and others can see that sense of belonging.



# HOW IT WORKS

## 1 KEEP IT SIMPLE

In choosing a symbol it's important to find a clear visual representation that captures the essence of your idea and core values in an accessible manner, for the context in which it operates. Overcomplicating the kind of symbol you use can open the door for misunderstanding or, worse, misrepresentation.

## 2 STAY INNOVATIVE

Think out of the box when you are choosing a symbol. Focus on your more appealing and distinguishable proposals and think of an object that can represent them. The symbol is meant to transmit the core message and values to a larger (and not necessarily aligned) set of individuals. The chosen symbol must therefore have an unmistakable connection with the movement and the message you are hoping to transmit.

## 3 GO LOCAL

When choosing and leveraging a symbol, it may be tempting to adopt existing and recognisable symbols that have been used in similar contexts or for similar causes. This can work, yet it is key to check whether it can really capture the imagination of the constituency the movement is looking to harness. If so, locally recognised and context-specific symbols may allow you to harness and mobilize your core demographic.

## 4 USE SYMBOLS TO GROW YOUR BRAND

Symbols are a key part of a movement's larger brand, and the greater visibility it gets, the more likely it is to grow. A symbol will add to brand recognition, making it easier for the movement to establish its identity and maintain a cohesive visual presence.

## 5 ICONIC PRESENCE

Use the symbol as the visually appealing centerpiece (it is the cherry on the top) on all your material (placards and signs, stickers, t-shirts, you name it). Use it to develop alliances and solidarity with other constituencies, including non-local groups. Convert the symbol from just a visual into an icon, a powerful emblem, one that cannot be ignored or forgotten.

## 6 EMBODY THE SYMBOLISM YOU PROMOTE

Symbols are more than visuals—they represent your core values. To reinforce their meaning, you and your key representatives must embody what the symbol stands for. If you advocate for austerity, for example, avoid luxury and use public transport. If sustainability is key, bike and avoid plastic. This “show, not tell” approach ensures consistency and alignment, making your message much more credible.



# TIPS

## **A** CONSISTENCY AND REPETITION BUILDS RECOGNITION

Consistency in symbol presentation is pivotal for recognition. But it is repetition that embeds it in the audience's consciousness. When it is coherently aligned with a cause, the symbol fosters unity and credibility, and holds particular significance during pivotal events, protests, or demonstrations, aiding bystander comprehension of the cause. Make sure to include the symbol in every situation possible.

## **B** A PROPER SYMBOL CAN MAKE THE REGIME LOOK SILLY

A contemporary symbol often utilizes laughter, humor, and irony to compel the regime to confront a "dilemma action" with two choices: to either respond, thereby risking appearing silly or heavy-handed, or to refrain from responding, which only serves to bolster the movement's momentum further. By employing ridicule as a tactic, your movement can undermine the regime's authority in favor of your objectives.



# WHO'S DONE IT WELL



## THE JASMINE REVOLUTION

### The Baguette

TUNISIA

In 2010, a street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi self-immolated in the town of Sidi Bouzid after the police confiscated his cart and humiliated him. His act of desperation sparked widespread outrage and protests that led to the fall of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, an autocrat who had been in power for 23 years, in what became known as the Jasmine Revolution.

In those days of unrest, the baguette became a powerful symbol of the revolution. In a context of decades of marginalization, unemployment, and lack of political freedom, bread stood for the revolution's demand to live and eat, to provide for one's family.

Bread holds enormous significance in Tunisia, and baguettes, in particular, are present in every meal. Furthermore, colloquially, the word 'bread' equals 'work'. So, when protests against Ben Ali escalated, it was common to see protestors carrying and raising their baguettes as a symbol of the change that would bring work and dignity to the population.

During one demonstration, a camera captured a lone skinny man with a cigarette in his mouth on a main avenue, bravely pointing a baguette at the anti-riot police as if holding a machine gun. In the early days of globalized social networks, the photo became iconic and went viral. Soon, the man inspired a social media hero: Captain Khobza.

Captain Khobza wore a red Superman cape, a mask, and the traditional chechia hat. He had a cigarette dangling from his lips and carried a baguette everywhere he went. The animated cartoon's videos depicted a nonviolence promoter who used humor and satire. Soon, it became a sensation with more than 200,000 followers, and it was key in amplifying the revolutionary narrative both inside and outside of Tunisia.

**“Bread, as a universal symbol of sustenance and survival, made the political message easily understandable and relatable. The simplicity of the baguette symbol helped convey and legitimize the fundamental nature of their demands for dignity, economic opportunity, and justice.”**



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## 8TH OF MARCH INSTITUTE

### Flowers to mobilize voters

SLOVENIA

In the lead-up to Slovenia's 2022 parliamentary elections, the 8th of March Institute (8MI) launched an ambitious Get Out the Vote (GOTV) campaign aimed at sparking democratic change by boosting voter turnout.

Wary of the Institute's growing influence, and reflecting its increasingly authoritarian tendencies, the government of Janez Janša attempted to silence the effort. Authorities opened an investigation, accused the campaign of violating election laws, and tried to shut it down through legal intimidation.

In response, the 8MI turned to quiet, symbolic action. To mobilize early voters without explicitly invoking politics, they used a simple yet powerful tool: flowers. Volunteers distributed thousands of them across Slovenia, representing spring, renewal, and hope. It was a visual metaphor for change and a silent invitation to vote.

The flowers were more than symbols—they were a strategy. The 8MI tracked outreach by counting the number of flowers handed out, showing that even low-cost, non-verbal tools can be effective for both persuasion and assessment.

**"When someone accepted the flower we offered, we didn't need to talk to them about democratic values, human rights, institutional independence, or social rights—the flowers spoke for themselves, reminding people of those shared ideals without a word."**

This gentle but determined tone helped reshape the mood of the final days before the election. Calm, value-driven, and grounded in shared purpose, the campaign inspired action at a critical moment. Turnout soared to 71%—Slovenia's highest since 1996 and an 18-point jump from 2018. The legal investigation was quietly dropped after the vote.



# LEARN MORE

## D-HUB RESOURCES



D-Hub. 2024. "The Triumph of the Outsider."  
*The Fight for Democracy Chronicles, Volume 2.*

## OTHER RESOURCES



France 24. 2011. "Baguette-wielding superhero  
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Popovic, Srja. 2015. "Blueprint for Revolution."



Whetstone Magazine.  
"The Tunisian Baguette Revolt"

**5**

# **EXPOSE THE BETRAYAL**

Reveal authoritarian corruption  
and break the spell

# THE PLAY

Elected authoritarians often rise by promising to clean up institutions captured by corrupt elites. They claim to “eliminate the political caste” or “drain the swamp.” But once in office, these moral crusaders often become secretive, self-serving, and corrupt.

The gap between their declared and practiced morality is one of their greatest vulnerability. When their corruption is exposed credibly and clearly, the story shifts from “they’re fighting for us” to “they’re stealing from us.” It’s the betrayal—not just failure—that breaks the spell, even for loyal supporters.

It’s not strictly about money. It’s about values. It’s about how they become what they swore to fight: breaking promises, abusing trust, and showing contempt for those who once believed in them.

For this play to work, exposure must go beyond press releases. It must tell a sticky, emotional story—one that makes the betrayal feel personal. Done right, it flips the script: the authoritarian is framed as the elite, while ordinary people are left behind.



# WHY IT WORKS

- **CORRUPTION IS THE UNIVERSAL DEAL-BREAKER.** Across cultures, demographics, and ideologies, it's one of the few things that angers everyone.
- **ELECTED AUTHORITARIANS CAMPAIGN ON MORAL SUPERIORITY.** When you show they've betrayed that image, you cut at the heart of their appeal.
- **IT BREAKS THROUGH DISINFORMATION.** While voters might shrug at policy failure or controversy, corruption hits differently. It signals selfishness and abuse of power, not strength.
- **IT REFRAMES WHO THE "REAL ELITE" IS.** Instead of letting them define themselves as anti-elite outsiders, you show how they've become the corrupt elite they claim to fight against.



# HOW IT WORKS

## 1

### DROP THE BOMB, NOT THE HINTS

Avoid general statements like *“this regime is corrupt”*—they only trigger resistance among the general public and make the regime put up its defenses. Hold back that card until you find a clear emblem of betrayal—something concrete, visual, and memorable. One extravagant mansion, luxury perks, shady contracts, diverted aid. Build your narrative around that symbol, and escalate from there.

## 2

### MAKE IT UNDENIABLE: SHOW, DON'T TELL

Authoritarians survive by denying, distracting, and distorting. That's why your evidence must be rock solid: simple and irrefutable. Leaked documents, recorded audios, insider chats. And wherever possible, make it visual and emotional: luxury watches, private jets, drone footage of secret mansions, photos of cash-stuffed safes. A single image can do more than a thousand-page report. So think like a documentary filmmaker—to state it is not enough, you must show it.

## 3

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

Corruption as a technical crime doesn't move people, but corruption as a story of betrayal does. Use emotional framing: *"They looked us in the eye and lied."* *"They said they were one of us—but then they robbed us."* Tap into shared values and the feeling of personal violation. Betrayal hits harder than wrongdoing. It isn't just about broken laws—it's about broken trust.

## 4

## ELEVATE RELATABLE MESSENGERS

The messenger matters as much as the message. Journalists and opposition leaders have their role—but the most powerful voices are former believers. Disillusioned insiders, betrayed supporters, everyday people who once trusted and now feel let down. Use their stories. Their disappointment feels authentic and resonates widely. When they speak out, you can frame their shift to signal something bigger: *"It's okay to walk away too."*

## 5

## CONNECT TO REAL-LIFE HARM

Make the consequences of their corruption tangible. *"They stole public funds"* feels abstract. Instead, state: *"They stole your local hospital."* *"Your neighborhood school was never built."* Show that corruption creates a huge cost in lives, dignity, and lost futures. This makes the scandal hit close to home, not just feel like another political issue.

# 6

## RECLAIM THE MORAL HIGH GROUND

Don't just tear them down—lift up your own example. Model integrity, transparency, and humility. If you've made mistakes, acknowledge them first. If your team has a clean record or principled candidates, put them front and center. That re-frames the conversation: it is not just about corruption, but about who truly deserves the public's trust.

# 7

## ANCHOR THE PLAY IN A VALUE-BASED NARRATIVE

Make this bigger than a scandal and tie the corruption to the erosion of democracy itself. Connect the dots between corruption and the broader authoritarian project: weakening checks and balances, silencing oversight, stealing from the future. The betrayal isn't just personal—it's systemic, and it goes beyond party lines. It's about what's right and what's rotten.



# TIPS

## A BE SURGICAL, NOT SCREECHY

Outrage is valid—but too much noise can sound partisan or theatrical. Let the evidence, the betrayal, and the consequences speak for themselves. Stay focused: authoritarians lied, they abused power, they stole from citizenship. Aim for clarity, not volume. You're exposing systemic rot, not resenting personal wealth.

## B CORRUPTION IS (ONLY) ONE ENTRY POINT

This play is powerful, but not self-sufficient. It works best when paired with a broader pro-democracy message: inclusion, fairness, and a positive vision of tomorrow. Corruption grabs attention—but values win hearts. Use the scandal to open a deeper conversation. Show not just what's broken, but what's worth building instead.



# WHO'S DONE IT WELL



## ALEXEI NAVALNY

### The Palace that broke the spell

RUSSIA

In 2021, Alexei Navalny and his Anti-Corruption Foundation released a bombshell investigation: Putin's Palace, a nearly two-hour documentary that exposed a \$1.3 billion secret residence on the Black Sea.

The residence was allegedly built for Vladimir Putin through a network of corrupt deals, front men, and shell companies. The film exploded online, garnering over 100 million views on YouTube within its first week, and became one of the most-watched Russian-language political videos in history.

Moreover, its impact went far beyond views. Navalny shattered Putin's carefully curated image as a modest nationalist, revealing instead a self-serving autocrat living in secretive extravagance. Gold-trimmed furniture, a pole-dancing room,

an underground ice rink, vineyards, and private security—all while ordinary Russians faced poverty and pandemic pressures—laid bare the betrayal at the heart of the regime.

Navalny's team anchored their story in visual and emotional storytelling, combining drone footage, architectural diagrams, bank records, and insider testimony. Navalny narrated the film with a populist and personal tone, mocking Putin's hypocrisy while inviting viewers to share in the indignation.

The outrage ignited a wave of protests not seen in Russia in years. In January 2021, tens of thousands took to the streets in over 100 cities, many of them young people who had grown up under Putin's rule. The chant "Putin is a thief" echoed across Russia—amplifying Navalny's message far beyond the documentary itself.

**"The palace was not just a building, but a symbol of twenty years of Putin's rule. A symbol of what he considers acceptable, of what he considers his own."**



## LENI ROBREDO

### **A sharp contrast to Duterte**

#### PHILIPPINES

In the shadow of Duterte’s brutal populism, Leni Robredo ran a 2022 presidential campaign rooted in integrity, transparency, and public service. While Duterte’s allies were exposed for misusing COVID-19 funds—such as the overpriced medical supply contracts revealed in the Pharmally scandal—Robredo’s team built a clear moral contrast. They didn’t just expose wrongdoing—they modeled the alternative.

Her campaign emphasized her modest lifestyle, community-based pandemic response, and decades of principled leadership. A decentralized, volunteer-led movement known as the “kakangpink” energized her campaign from the ground up—mobilizing through art, house visits, community kitchens, and creative messaging.

The contrast struck a nerve. While Duterte’s overall approval ratings remained high, he did suffer a dip after the corruption scandal, and public trust dropped sharply, from 77% in September 2020 to 52% a year later, at the height of the spending controversy.

**“How can these people sleep at night? When many Filipinos are suffering; their mind is on making money.”**



# LEARN MORE

## D-HUB RESOURCES



D-Hub. 2025. "Clash of Dynasties."  
*The Fight for Democracy Chronicles*,  
Volume 3



D-Hub. 2025. "A Surprise Comeback!"  
*The Fight for Democracy Chronicles*,  
Volume 4.

## OTHER RESOURCES



Navalny, Alexei. 2021. "A Palace for Putin." *Web page*



– 2021. "Putin's palace. The story of the world's biggest bribe." *YouTube*



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Tsao, Chip. 2024. "Satirical strategies: exposing corruption with humour." *YouTube*

6

# CALL TO ACTION

Motivate people with clarity,  
urgency, and empowerment

# THE PLAY

**A compelling Call to Action (CTA) is essential for turning engagement into tangible results. It is the bridge between awareness and impact that transforms passive supporters into active participants. In the context of anti-authoritarian campaigns and movement building, well-crafted CTAs must be often included in your content, and inspire urgency and purpose while being easy and simple to follow.**

**Authoritarian leaders often rely on apathy and disillusionment to maintain control. In this context, a strategic and clear CTA, which encourages small actions carried out by many people, can counter this scenario by empowering individuals and fostering collective efforts that create ripple effects.**

**To achieve this, your CTA should resonate emotionally and invite people to do something truly relevant to the cause, connecting with the desire of so many to be part of meaningful change. It must leave people feeling that their contribution is not only valuable but indispensable to defending their way of life.**



# WHY IT WORKS

- **CLARITY MOVES PEOPLE.** A clear, focused CTA cuts through noise and confusion, making it easy for supporters to get involved.
- **URGENCY DRIVES ACTION.** Time-sensitive CTAs motivate people to act now rather than delay when momentum matters most.
- **COLLECTIVE ACTION FEELS POWERFUL.** Framing action as a shared effort inspires belonging, making each individual feel part of something bigger.
- **VISIBLE RESULTS BUILD TRUST.** Showing how actions are connected to real impact boosts confidence and encourages deeper, ongoing engagement.



# HOW IT WORKS

## 1

### ANCHOR YOUR CTA IN CLEAR GOALS

Define the specific action you want people to take, ensuring it is actionable, achievable, and relevant to everyday life. Avoid vague or abstract requests—clarity is key. For example, instead of saying “*fight for democracy*,” say “*sign this petition to demand free elections and make your voice count*” or “*register to join us at this rally next week*”. A well-defined goal increases participation and boosts confidence.

## 2

### CREATE EMOTIONAL RESONANCE

Frame your CTA around shared values and emotions. Emotional appeal—to hope, unity or the desire for justice—fosters a deeper connection with your audience, making them more likely to act. Use symbols to tie the action to their identity and aspirations.

### 3 SIMPLIFY AND STREAMLINE THE ACTION

Ensure that the steps required in the CTA are simple, accessible, and immediate. Provide clear instructions and reduce all barriers to action. For digital actions, such as sharing content or donating, include direct links or QR codes. For offline actions, focus on creating a meaningful experience that reinforces the movement's purpose, emphasizing how the action contributes to broader goals and ensuring participants feel their involvement is impactful.

### 4 FOSTER COLLECTIVE MOMENTUM

Highlight the collective power of taking action together. Use phrases that emphasize community and a shared purpose, such as *"Join thousands of others in standing for freedom."* This sense of unity can transform individual actions into a broader movement and a higher feeling, building momentum and morale.

### 5 INCLUDE URGENCY AND A DEADLINE

Add a sense of urgency to encourage immediate action. Phrases like *"Only 24 hours left to sign!"* or *"Your voice is needed today!"* prompt people to act without hesitation. Deadlines create focus and motivate people who might otherwise delay or disengage.

# 6

## LEVERAGE TRUSTED MESSENGERS

Boost the impact of your CTA by delivering it through voices that your audience trusts— influencers, community leaders, or peer advocates. Trusted messengers who have already carried out the CTA add credibility and inspire confidence, making people more likely to follow through.

# 7

## TRACK ENGAGEMENT AND ITERATE

Monitor the performance of your CTAs, using metrics like click-through rates, participation numbers, or event attendance. Test different messages and formats to assess what resonates most with your audience. Use this data to refine your approach and maximize impact.



# TIPS

## A KEEP IT FOCUSED

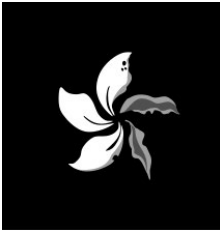
Avoid overloading your CTA with multiple requests. Focus on one clear action at a time to prevent confusion or dilution of impact. When people are presented with too many options, they are likely to feel overwhelmed and may opt out entirely. A focused CTA simplifies decision-making, making it easier for supporters to act quickly and effectively. So keep it simple.

## B CONNECT THE ACTION TO IMPACT

Clearly explain how the action will contribute to the broader goal. For example, *"Your signature can help us reach 50,000 supporters and put pressure on Congress."* This approach builds confidence that the effort will make a difference. Be transparent about the next steps and how citizen participation fits into the bigger picture, whether it's influencing a policy change, supporting a campaign milestone, or amplifying public awareness. People are more likely to act when they see the visible results of their contributions.



# WHO'S DONE IT WELL



## HONG KONG PRO-DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT

### Mobilizing Through Clear CTAs

CHINA

During the 2019 protests in Hong Kong, the pro-democracy movement showcased the power of precise and impactful Calls to Action (CTAs) in sustaining mass mobilization against an increasingly authoritarian regime. The movement relied on highly organized and accessible CTAs to transform widespread discontent into coordinated collective action, often at great personal risk to participants.

The CTAs were designed to be simple, urgent, and widely disseminated, ensuring accessibility across diverse demographics. Protest leaders used encrypted messaging apps like Telegram, social media platforms, and offline methods to reach as many people as possible. Each CTA focused on a specific, actionable, and attainable goal, such as joining a march, participating in a sit-in, or engaging in international solidarity campaigns like letter-writing initiatives to foreign governments.

A defining feature of the movement's CTAs was their clear alignment with shared values and purpose. Protesters were united by five core demands, including universal suffrage and the withdrawal of a controversial extradition bill. Each CTA reinforced these demands, making it clear how individual actions contributed to the broader goals of justice and democracy.

The movement also excelled at adapting CTAs to changing circumstances. For example, during periods of intense police crackdowns, organizers shifted their focus to decentralized "be water" tactics, encouraging smaller, more flexible protests rather than mass gatherings. This strategic agility kept the movement alive and allowed participants to continue demonstrating without centralized leadership.

Despite heavy repression, police violence and arrests included, the clarity and purpose of the CTAs empowered

**"We needed to be like water, adaptable and formless. Our calls to action were clear and swift, allowing us to mobilize quickly and effectively. This flexibility was our main strength against the rigid structures we opposed."**

millions to act collectively. This mobilization was critical in maintaining momentum and global attention on Hong Kong's pro-democracy struggle. The movement's success highlights the importance of CTAs that are easy to follow, emotionally resonant, and grounded in a shared vision for change.



# LEARN MORE



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Ganz, Marshall. 2009. "What Is Public Narrative: Self, Us & Now."



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# WE CAN HELP YOU.

At the Democracy Hub, we understand the emotional and strategic challenges of confronting modern authoritarianism—uncertainty, confusion, pressure, and relentless attacks on democratic values.

But you are not alone.

D-Hub is a vibrant community dedicated to defending and renewing democracy. We have the knowledge, tools, and experience to help you fight back effectively.

Our mission is to increase the effectiveness of those fighting authoritarianism. We emphasize collaborative peer-to-peer learning, comprehensive training, coaching, strategic support, and fostering networks of solidarity and exchange. We aim to ensure that democracy advocates worldwide are equipped with the vital relationships, deep knowledge, and essential skills they need to fulfill their mission.

→ IF YOU NEED SPECIFIC ASSISTANCE,  
PLEASE CONTACT US AT [CONTACT@DHUB.ORG](mailto:CONTACT@DHUB.ORG)



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Reach out to us. Together, we can defend democracy.

# **D-HUB IS A VIBRANT COMMUNITY COMMITTED TO DEFENDING AND RENEWING DEMOCRACY.**

Our mission is to improve the effectiveness of those who fight against authoritarianism. We emphasize collaborative learning among peers, comprehensive training, coaching, strategic support and the promotion of networks of solidarity and exchange.

Our goal is to ensure that democracy advocates around the world are equipped with the vital relationships, deep knowledge, and essential skills they need to fulfil their mission.