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# PROTEST TO POLICY:

Case Studies and Program Recommendations

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Social movements and protests are an integral part of democracy. On any given day there are protests all over the world in varying intensities with a wide range of demands. While some protests succeed in achieving their goals in terms of policy change others run out of steam after a few days or weeks. What are the factors that contribute to a successful protest movement? Can we distill any lessons from successful protest movements from the recent past? What skills can prepare democratic practitioners and activists to lead successful protest movements?

To answer these questions, the International Republican Institute (IRI) closely examined five different cases of protests that to a certain degree succeeded in extracting concessions from government. IRI studied protests in **Bangladesh, Ecuador, Georgia, Lebanon, and Nigeria** that took place between 2018-2022. The present report distills some common factors that contributed to the protest movements achieving their goals in the five country cases studied and identifies some skills that could help practitioners and activists in the field in increasing the likelihood of success of a democratic protest movement.

PROTEST TO POLICY: WHAT WORKS	PROTEST TO POLICY: CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimize Hierarchy</li> <li>• Diversify Non-Violent Tactics</li> <li>• Use Social Media and Digital Communications</li> <li>• Pursue and Manage Alliances</li> <li>• Use Targeted Slogans</li> <li>• Utilize Diaspora</li> <li>• Recruit Celebrities</li> <li>• Understand Political Incentives and Calibrate Demands</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building Class Inclusivity</li> <li>• Countering Anti-Protest Propaganda</li> <li>• Winning Over Traditional Media</li> <li>• Managing the Risk of the Internet and Smart Phones</li> <li>• Setting Achievable Objectives</li> <li>• Planning for Today and Tomorrow</li> <li>• Taming Violent Elements</li> </ul>

This product is complimentary to IRI's [Protest to Policy: A Framework for Democratic Transitions](#), an analytical framework that provides policymakers and program designers with a tool to calibrate successful approaches to supporting transitions based on the examination of deeper structural factors that constrain the options available to their local partners. The Framework is intended to guide staff of funding and implementing organizations in ensuring that program design (objectives, theories of change, results chains, indicators, and activities) is sensitive to the local context and cognizant of the constraints facing local partners.

The findings from this report have also informed an accompanying toolkit. The toolkit includes five training modules developed based on the analysis and four in-country pilots in Ecuador, Iraq, Montenegro, and Nigeria. These materials focus on key skillsets activists must develop to organize efficient protest movements: effective communication, building successful social movements, designing advocacy campaigns, policy design, and inclusive partnership and coalitions building. The five training modules which are part of the toolkit are presented as separate accompanying booklets for easy access and can be used independently of one another. The toolkit can be obtained by contacting IRI.

Taking together, this report and the toolkit are intended to be used by field-based champions of democracy to equip themselves and their peers with skills that will help them to effectively participate or contribute to policy-reform oriented protest movements.

# INTRODUCTION

Why do some protests succeed in achieving their goals while others fail? Across the world, protests are common, but most do not succeed. According to the Global Protest Tracker, a database maintained by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace that tracks protest movements worldwide,<sup>1</sup> there were 312 protests between 2018 and February 2022. One-third of these protests occurred in “partly free” and “not free” countries, as ranked by Freedom House. Two-thirds of the protests resulted in no policy or leadership change. In the one-third of cases where the government took action, it was often half-measures and small compromises that did not address the demands of the protests.

This report derives insights and lessons from five recent protests that succeeded, to different degrees, in extracting concessions from the government: the quota reform movement in Bangladesh (2018), the End SARS protest in Nigeria (2020), the fuel subsidy protests in Ecuador (2019), the hydropower plant protests in Georgia (2020/2021), and the October Revolution in Lebanon (2019). In Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Ecuador, the government made significant concessions to the protesters. In Georgia, protesters have achieved a partial and potentially temporary success. In Lebanon, the government conceded on early demands but has resisted the protesters’ most substantial demands. The report examines the conditions that explain this variation, including the tactical and strategic choices of the protest movements and broader political, economic, and social environment in which both the protesters and government decisionmakers operated.

## The case studies were selected using the following rationale:

- **Successful protests with internal variation:** The report focuses on successful protests because this is the rarer outcome. In addition, by examining protests that were successful to varying degrees (from partial to fully), the report explores the distinct and common conditions that explain different outcomes.
- **Regional diversity:** The report deliberately focuses on protests from different parts of the world to capture regional dynamics in protests and outcomes.
- **Regime type:** The report studies protests that occurred in “Partly free” countries, according to Freedom House. Although there is significant variation within this category, this ensures that the protests occurred in broadly similar political conditions, namely, where protesters will face serious challenges but have some chance of success.

The case study research included desk research, in-depth interviews with country experts, and key informant interviews with protest leaders, government officials, and journalists from each country. IRI conducted a comparative analysis of the data gathered to extract findings and conclusions, which are not intended to be universally applicable but instead promote informed decision-making.

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1. Global Protest Tracker, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Accessed February 5, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/interactive/protest-tracker>.

## The Political Context of Each Protest Movement

**Bangladesh's 2018 quota reform** movement occurred in a context of closing space for political competition, civic activism, and dissent. In 2018, the Awami League and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had led Bangladesh for 10 years. During this period, Freedom House documented a significant decline in freedom that included physical abuse, harassment, arrest, and extrajudicial killings of journalists, civil society leaders, academics, opposition political figures, and ordinary citizens that challenged the state. In addition, elections were rife with fraud and violence.<sup>2</sup> Student politics was a particularly violent realm. Although students have played a notable and venerable role in progressive political movements in Bangladesh (for language rights, independence, and democracy), major parties have increasingly weaponized student wings as tools to quell protests and dissent among youth and others.<sup>3</sup> As the quality of Bangladesh's democracy has declined, the space to criticize the state shrunk, which left many citizens censoring their public and private comments. These conditions continue today.

**The Namakhvani Hydro Power Plant (HPP) protests** emerged in the midst of the ongoing political crisis in Georgia and successfully consolidated a diverse range of civic groups. Besides being representative in its nature, leaders of the movement managed to avoid affiliation with the political parties and maintain their initial narrative. The current success of the movement (as of publication construction of the Namakhvani HPP is on hold), is due to numerous internal as well as external factors that took place during 2020-2021 in the country. Choosing leaders who had an authentic storyline, leveraging nationalistic sentiments and emphasizing possible environmental impacts, helped the movement win the hearts and minds of the general population. Political turbulence in Georgia and the crisis the ruling party faced were additional factors that led to the movement's success.

**The End Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) protest movement** occurred in a political context, particularly among youth, in which dissent was generally accepted. In its report for 2020, Freedom House assessed that Nigerians generally have the right to organize political parties or other political groupings and express themselves on political issues.<sup>4</sup> However, the quality of elections was in decline. President Muhammadu Burhara was elected in a peaceful transition of power in 2015, but his reelection in 2019 was rife with allegations of fraud. In addition, the rise of various security threats,<sup>5</sup> most prominently Boko Haram and Jihadism, has fed the expansion of a powerful security force that is prone to human rights abuses.<sup>6</sup>

**Ecuador's fuel subsidy protests** occurred in a political context of improving political and civic freedoms. Freedom House data show a steady decline in its Freedom in the World score under former President Rafael Correa followed by annual increases under former President Lenin Moreno.<sup>7</sup> By 2019, Moreno had taken actions to reduce power of the executive, enhance media freedom, improve judicial independence, and lift restrictions on forming non-governmental organizations.<sup>8</sup> However, Moreno's actions, while praised in many foreign capitals, mobilized leftist elements against him at home. In April 2019, Correa, while living in exile, called Moreno "[t]he greatest traitor in Ecuadorian and Latin American history" on Twitter,<sup>9</sup> and the former foreign minister called Moreno "clownish" and accused him of taking the country "back to the old elite political practices of the 1990s and early 2000s."<sup>10</sup>

**Lebanon's October 2019 "revolution"** occurred in a setting of political stagnation with general civic openness. In 2019, Freedom House described Lebanon's confessional government as highly dysfunctional and populated by an entrenched and corrupt political class dominated by militant and political leaders from the civil war period (1975-1990).<sup>11</sup> Although the Lebanese press is among the most free and diverse in the region, most outlets have been coopted to varying degrees by elite interests. Despite this, Lebanese citizens were free to organize political parties, civil society organizations, and protest movements.

2. Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2018, Bangladesh, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/bangladesh/freedom-world/2018>.

3. Julian Kuttig, Bert Suykens, and Aynul Islam, Student Politics and Political Violence in Bangladesh, 2020, <https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/8655727/file/8656194.pdf>.

4. Freedom House, Freedom in the World, 2021, Bangladesh, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/nigeria/freedom-world/2021>.

5. Aliyu Tanko, "Nigeria's security crises - five different threats," BBC, July 19, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-57860993>.

6. Amnesty International, Nigeria 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/west-and-central-africa/nigeria/report-nigeria/>.

7. Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2020, Ecuador, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ecuador/freedom-world/2020>.

8. Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2020, Ecuador.

9. Haley Ott, "How Ecuador's shifting politics led to Julian Assange's arrest, and a snarky tweet from the ex-president," CBS News, April 12, 2019, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ecuador-rafael-correa-lenin-moreno-strips-wikileaks-julian-assange-asylum-status/>.

10. Daniel Finn, "Lenin Moreno Has Betrayed Ecuador. Now the Country Is in Revolt," Jacobin, October 17, 2019, <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/10/ecuador-protests-lenin-moreno-correa-imf>.

11. Freedom House, Freedom in the World, 2020, Lebanon, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/lebanon/freedom-world/2020>.

## CASE STUDIES OF PROTEST MOVEMENTS

### Bangladesh: 2018 Quota Reform Movement

Protests over Bangladesh's quota system had gone on for years before the nominal spark for the quota reform movement in March 2018. Prime Minister (PM) Hasina gave public remarks on March 21 in which she defended the country's longstanding system of job quotas for the descendants of Bangladesh's "freedom fighters"—those who fought in Bangladesh's 1971 successionist war for independence from Pakistan.<sup>12</sup> Bangladeshi law guaranteed preferential access for government jobs to several groups: 30 percent of jobs went to descendants of freedom fighters and 26 percent were divided between women, the disabled, and other minority groups. In recent years, this left only 44 percent of approximately 3,000 government jobs to be distributed based on a merit-based exam. PM Hasina's remarks came amid growing campus agitation against the quota system and was seen as a direct rebuke to those inchoate protests.

Approximately three weeks after PM Hasina's speech, on April 8, the first large scale anti-quota protest was held. The student organization called the Council to Protect Bangladesh's General Students' Rights mobilized a rally of thousands of students in Bangladesh's capital city Dhaka. The students demanded significant reforms to the quota system, including a reduction of job quotas from 56 percent to 10 percent and filling positions according to merit if no quota-eligible candidates were qualified, which was often.<sup>13</sup> Although protesters demanded full-scale quota reform, it was clear the "freedom fighter quota" was the animating issue. A protestor told a news outlet, "[w]e're not against disadvantaged people getting a leg up...[b]ut these quotas are discriminatory."<sup>14</sup>

The protests and resulting state response intensified over the following several days. An estimated 50,000 students from all 38 public universities and 50 of 96 private universities took to the streets.<sup>15</sup> The government's rhetoric and actions became increasingly harsh. Government officials called the protesters traitors.<sup>16</sup> The police and ruling party supporters, often from the party's student wing, physically attacked protesters. The Dhaka Tribune described the scene as "mayhem."<sup>17</sup> A report on the protests described "excessive use of force by law enforcement agencies" and significant violence and harassment targeting the protesters, including beatings, death threats, false criminal charges, and rape threats.<sup>18</sup>

On April 11, three days after the protests commenced, PM Hasina announced the elimination of the quota system.<sup>19</sup> However, no policy action was taken in the following months. Throughout the summer of 2018, small-scale protests reemerged calling for the implementation of PM Hasina's promised reforms. These protesters also faced violence from ruling party supporters.<sup>20</sup> Many key organizers of the quota reform protests were arrested.<sup>21</sup> In October 2018, the Bangladesh government officially ended quotas for first- and second-class

#### Bangladesh

**Protest:** Quota Reform Movement

**Key Demand:** Elimination of job quotas that favored supporters of one political party

**Primary Dates:** April 8 - April 11, 2018

**Outcome:** Government removes the job quota system

12. "Job quota for FF heirs to stay: PM," The Dhaka Tribune, March 22, 2018, <https://www.theindependentbd.com/arcprint/details/142483/2018-03-22>.

13. Faisal Mahmud, "Bangladesh students demand abolition of job quota system," Al Jazeera, May 14, 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/5/14/bangladesh-students-demand-abolition-of-job-quota-system>.

14. Siddhartha Roy, "Bangladesh's Students Back on the Streets in Protest," The Diplomat, April 14, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/bangladeshs-students-back-on-the-streets-in-protest/>.

15. Mahmud, "Bangladesh students demand abolition of job quota system."

16. Protesters were called "razakar," which is associated with the volunteers for the Pakistani Army during Bangladesh's liberation war. The term is pejorative and synonymous with traitor.

17. Fahim Reza Shovon, "From protest to mayhem: How it all unfolded," The Dhaka Tribune, April 10, 2018, <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/dhaka/2018/04/10/protest-mayhem-unfolded>.

18. Crushing Student Protests: Bangladesh's Repression of the Quota Reform and Road Safety Movements, Frontline Defenders, Civicus, and South Asians for Human Rights, June 2020.

19. "No longer any quota in public service: PM," Prothom Alo, April 12, 2018, <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/No-longer-any-quota-in-public-service-PM>.

20. "BCL men 'assault' quota reform movement leaders at DU," United News Bangladesh, June 30, 2018, <https://unb.com.bd/category/Bangladesh/bcl-men-assault-quota-reform-movement-leaders-at-du/151>.

21. Crushing Student Protests.

government jobs, which are considered the most prestigious, while retaining quotas for less competitive third- and fourth-class positions.<sup>22</sup> While not agreeing to several aspects of the protesters' original demands, this was a significant concession from the government.

## Georgia: 2020/21 Environmental Protests Against Hydropower Plant

Georgia's 2020/21 environmental protests, which are ongoing as of this writing, against a planned hydropower plant are the culmination of years of growing environmental activism. In 2019, the Government of Georgia granted the Turkey-based engineering company ENKA and Norway's Clean Energy Group the right to construct, operate, and own the Namakhvani HPP, located in western Georgia (Imereti and Lechkhumi regions). The project consists of two separate HPPs on the Rioni River. An HPP in Namakhvani has been planned since the Soviet era but has only come close to fruition recently. Relatively small demonstrations against the planned dam began in 2020 around the construction site on the Rioni River. These rallies, organized by the local population under the name "Guardians of the Rioni Valley," gradually expanded in scale and number of supporters, eventually reaching nationwide coverage by the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021, when ENKA started preparatory work.

In 2018, the local population of the Rioni Gorge began raising concerns about the planned construction. The local community's primary opposition to the HPP was on environmental grounds. They buttressed this argument by claiming that the plant would do little for Georgia's energy independence or economy. To block construction, protesters claimed that the government did not adhere to the necessary legal procedures for granting the construction permit. The local population and allies expressed dissatisfaction that they were neither involved in the negotiation process of the agreement nor included in discussions regarding the project. The government countered that the HPP project is essential to the country's energy security and that foreign direct investment will benefit Georgians by creating new jobs and reducing electricity prices for households. The protesters were unconvinced. From the beginning of large-scale rallies in November 2020, the protesters' main demands were that ENKA should stop construction and leave Rioni Valley and that the government should rescind the existing agreement with ENKA.

In November 2020, the situation near the HPP construction site became extremely tense. On November 14, protesters attempted to block the Kutaisi-Tsageri highway to hinder the process of transporting ENKA's machinery and equipment to the construction site. The police dispersed the rally, and protesters sustained minor injuries. By this time, protesters had been taking shifts in tents located at the construction site for almost a month. Following the police dispersal of the rally, the Save Rioni Gorge movement together with three Georgian CSOs (Georgian Young Lawyers' Association [GYLA], Social Justice Center, and Green Alternative) issued a statement claiming that the Government was using oppressive means instead of pursuing dialogue. There were other claims of human rights violations and ineffective communication from the government. For instance, one of the leaders of the Movement accused Economy Minister Natia Turnava and Environment Minister Levan Davitashvili of leaving the activists' questions unanswered and "sneaking out of" the March 12 meeting held between government representatives and the local population to discuss demands of locals and ways to achieve consensus.<sup>23</sup>

In September 2021, after months of non-stop protests ENKA announced that it had terminated the contract with the government and stopped all work on the hydroelectric plant. The work stoppage was a success for the protest movement. However, the exact nature of the stoppage is unclear, and it remains possible that the company will come to a new agreement with the government to renew their work on the project. According to Minister Turnava, the government is currently in the process of negotiations with ENKA on the terms of the company's return. In addition, the Minister stated that the government may implement the project itself if ENKA does not renew the terminated agreement.

### Georgia

#### **Protest: Hydro Power Plant Protests**

**Key Demand: Prevent the construction of a hydropower electric plant**

**Primary Dates: October 25, 2020–September 22, 2021**

**Outcome: Construction paused amid renegotiation of the construction contract**

22. "Quota circular issued amid protests," The Daily Star, October 5, 2018, <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/quota-system-in-bangladesh-scrapped-officially-1642534>.

23. "Massive Anti-Namakhvani HPP Protest in Kutaisi Demands Economy Minister Resignation," Civil.ge, March 3, 2021, <https://civil.ge/archives/405832>.



## Nigeria: 2020 End SARS Movement

Nigeria's 2020 End SARS movement has its origin in several years of incidents of police brutality and protests. In 1992, the Nigerian government formed a police unit called the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, or SARS, to investigate crimes associated with armed robbery, carjacking, kidnapping, and other violent crimes. SARS initially focused on surveillance and facilitating arrests in the city of Lagos, but in 2002 its purview was expanded across the country. With new power, SARS became increasingly abusive, facing accusations of extortion,<sup>24</sup> extrajudicial killings, torture, and other human rights abuses.<sup>25</sup> The first major anti-SARS protest emerged in 2017, when activists, young people, and celebrities led protests calling for the disbandment of SARS. The hashtag #EndSARS became a widely known protest slogan.<sup>6</sup> In each of the three years preceding the 2020 protests, the Nigerian police temporarily suspended SARS over allegations of abuse and promised to restructure the unit.<sup>27</sup>

On October 3, 2020, a video of SARS officers killing a man went viral on social media. The authorities initially denied the allegation and arrested the man who posted the video.<sup>28</sup> This video came two weeks after Anti-Kidnapping Unit officers (who were originally believed to have been SARS members) killed a young musician named Daniel Chibuike Ikeaguchi, popularly known as Sleek.<sup>29</sup> Amid the growing controversy online, the first nationwide protest emerged on October 8. Prominent activists, celebrities, and youth led the protests. Although the protests were largely decentralized, key leaders declared six core demands: to disband SARS; to release all arrested protesters; to provide justice and compensation for victims of police brutality; to create an independent body to oversee investigations of police misconduct; to evaluate all former SARS officers before they can be redeployed; and to increase the salary of police officers.<sup>30</sup>

The government's response became increasingly repressive. On the third day of protests, police began deploying tear gas and water cannons to disperse protesters.<sup>31</sup> In many locations, protests turned deadly.<sup>32</sup> On the fourth day of protests, October 11, the Nigerian Police announced the dissolution of SARS, but this did not quell the protests because of previous instances where SARS was suspended without serious reform. In addition, the protesters issued a set of related demands that went beyond eliminating SARS. The government, having—in its view—met the movement's key demand, used significant force to end the protests. The police beat and shot protesters and "armed thugs" affiliated with the government attacked activists.<sup>33</sup> As protests waned in late October, Amnesty International reported that at least 56 people had been killed during the protests, including 12 in an infamous incident at the Lekki toll gate in Lagos.<sup>34</sup>

### Nigeria

**Protest:** End SARS Movement

**Key Demand:** Dissolve the SARS security force over abusive tactics

**Primary Dates:** October 3 – October 22, 2020

**Outcome:** Government dissolves SARS unit

24. Sada Malumfashi, "Nigeria's SARS: A brief history of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad," Al Jazeera, October 22, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/10/22/sars-a-brief-history-of-a-rogue-unit>.

25. Nigeria: 'You have signed your death warrant': Torture and other ill treatment in the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, Amnesty International, September 21, 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/4868/2016/en/>.

26. Samuel Ogundipe, "#EndSARS: Nigeria Police threaten leader of campaign against notorious anti-robbery squad," Premium Times, December 5, 2017, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/251453-endsars-nigeria-police-threaten-leader-of-campaign-against-notorious-anti-robbery-squad.html>.

27. Jacob Segun Olatunji, Olalekan Olabulo and Wale Akinselure, "For Fourth Time In 4 Years, IGPs Ban SARS," Nigerian Tribune, October 5, 2020, <https://tribuneonline.ng.com/for-fourth-time-in-4-years-igps-ban-sars/>.

28. "#EndSARS: Nigerians protest against police brutality," Al Jazeera, October 9, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/9/endsars-nigerians-protest-over-police-brutality>.

29. Dennis Naku, "Rivers police shot Sleek, left him to die on floor of Keke Marwa -Sister of late musician," Punch, October 4, 2020, <https://punchng.com/rivers-police-shot-sleek-left-him-to-die-on-floor-of-keke-marwa-sister-of-late-musician/>.

30. "Five demands from #EndSARS protesters," October 12, 2020, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/10/five-demands-from-endsars-protesters/>.

31. Stephanie Busari, "Nigerians take to the streets in mass protests against controversial police unit accused of brutality," CNN, October 9, 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/09/africa/nigeria-police-sars-police-brutality-intl/index.html>.

32. "One killed as anti-SARS protests turn violent in Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Abuja," Punch, October 11, 2020, <https://punchng.com/one-killed-as-anti-sars-protests-turn-violent-in-oyo-ogun-osun-abuja/>.

33. "Nigeria: Crackdown on Police Brutality Protests," Human Rights Watch, October 16, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/16/nigeria-crackdown-police-brutality-protests#>.

34. Sam Olukoya and Lekan Oyekanmi, "Nigerian forces killed 12 peaceful protesters, Amnesty says," Associated Press, October 21, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/police-violence-police-brutality-lagos-nigeria-98ee3550fb576d561d84b372a65cc95f>

## Ecuador: 2019 Fuel Subsidy Protests

Ecuador's fuel subsidy protests have their origin in the economic policies of former President Correa. Correa won the 2006 general election by criticizing Ecuador's neoliberal economic policies and the influence of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in Ecuador. In office, Correa implemented left wing policies that significantly expanded social welfare provisions. These policies were funded by a rise in commodity prices and loans from China that fed money into state coffers. When Ecuador's economy began to falter in 2014, state debt rose, and Correa's popularity declined. Correa decided not to run for reelection; instead, he tapped then-Vice President Moreno as his successor, who was perceived as a loyalist. However, once in power, Moreno showed independence on several issues. Economically, Moreno was faced with a severe debt crisis and pressure from international financial institutions for austerity measures in exchange for bailout funds. Moreno began reversing Correa's economic policies, which antagonized the former president and his supporters and cost Moreno significant popularity.

On October 1, 2019, Moreno announced a series of economic measures that sparked protests. Among the most controversial provisions<sup>35</sup> was the elimination of 40-year-old fuel subsidies, which overnight doubled the price of diesel fuel and prompted a 30 percent increase in petrol prices.<sup>36</sup> The following day, on October 2, a coalition of university students, unions, and indigenous groups—including the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE)—announced nationwide protests and a general strike until the government reversed its decision. Protesters blocked roads and bridges in major cities, bringing transportation to a standstill, and violently clashed with police.<sup>37</sup>

Over the next week, the standoff between the government and protesters escalated. Moreno refused to reverse his economic policies. Protesters abducted and held hostage army officers, occupied oil fields, and stormed the presidential palace and national assembly. October 8, Moreno relocated his government to the coastal city of Guayaquil in order to forestall what he claimed was a coup attempt coordinated by Correa with the help of Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro.<sup>38</sup> On October 11, Moreno agreed to negotiations as protests continued to escalate: protesters set fire to a government office, a television news station, and a newspaper headquarters; security forces countered with abusive and deadly force.<sup>39</sup> On October 13, the crisis came to an end when the Moreno government agreed to end the austerity measures announced two weeks prior and to collaborate with opposition groups on new economic measures to combat debt. The fuel subsidy remains a contentious issue in Ecuador, in October 2021 President Guillermo Lasso reversed his plans to raise fuel prices after threats of protests. Negotiations and protests are still ongoing as of February 2023.

### Ecuador

**Protest:** Fuel Subsidy Protests

**Key Demand:** Reinstate fuel subsidies removed as part of austerity measures

**Primary Dates:** October 1 – October 13, 2019

**Outcome:** Government reinstates the fuel subsidies

35. Other provisions included a 20 percent cut in wages for new contracts in public sector jobs; requiring workers to donate one day's worth of wages to the government each month; and a decrease in vacation days from 30 to 15 days. (Al Jazeera)

36. Kimberley Brown, "Ecuador unrest: What led to the mass protests?" Al Jazeera, October 10, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2019/10/10/ecuador-unrest-what-led-to-the-mass-protests/>.

37. "Ecuador protests: State of emergency declared as fuel subsidies end," BBC, October 4, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-49929272>.

38. Robin Emmott, "Ex-Ecuador president Correa denies planning coup attempt from exile," Reuters, October 8, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ecuador-protests-correa/ex-ecuador-president-correa-denies-planning-coup-attempt-from-exile-idUSKBN1WN11P>.

39. Human Rights Watch, "Ecuador: Lessons from the 2019 Protests," April 6, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/06/ecuador-lessons-2019-protests>.

## Lebanon: 2019 October “Revolution”

Lebanon’s 2019 October “Revolution” was sparked by a proposed tax increase that followed a series of short-term and long-term crises showcasing the government’s incompetence.<sup>40</sup> In September 2019, the government’s ineffective response to over 100 wildfires<sup>41</sup> drew criticism.<sup>42</sup> Inflation was hitting staple goods.<sup>43</sup> These challenges occurred amid Lebanon’s persistent problems with unclean water, unemployment, poor sanitation, inconsistent electricity, and other basic service delivery issues.<sup>44</sup> Speaking in 2021, an expert described Lebanon as transforming from “a once highly educated, middle-income country known for its diversity and urbane sophistication,” to “an impoverished failed state that may become the region’s newest humanitarian catastrophe” because of long-standing political paralysis, an economic debt crisis, pernicious foreign influence, and widespread corruption.<sup>45</sup> Among ordinary Lebanese citizens, these factors generated discontent, fed a rising perception of elite incompetence, and provoked an urgent desire for wholesale political change.

On October 17, news broke that the government was planning to increase taxes on tobacco, gasoline, WhatsApp, and other goods and services. By the evening, thousands of protesters had taken to the streets to oppose the new taxes but also call for a broader “revolution” and for the “fall of the regime.”<sup>46</sup> That night the government announced that it would not impose a tax on WhatsApp. This did little to quell the protests, which increasingly gave voice to deep-seated frustration with the political class. On October 18, protesters vandalized the offices of several political parties and clashed with riot police. Civil servants announced a strike. Security forces responded to the protests with tear gas and violent force that killed at least one protestor. Supporters of factions aligned with the government, including Hezbollah, led violent counterprotests<sup>47</sup> and claimed the movement was an Israeli and American plot.

Amid the street protests, the government took more steps to mollify protesters. President Saad Hariri called for dialogue and chaired a series of meetings to discuss economic reforms, anti-corruption, and other issues.<sup>48</sup> Protesters rejected these calls for compromise and demanded Hariri resign.<sup>49</sup> On October 29, with violent protests continuing, Hariri announced his resignation. Although Hariri’s resignation was among the protestor’s goals, his abdication did not mollify the ever-growing demands of the movement. One protestor told The Guardian newspaper, “We just want to say that this is the first out of many...We’re waiting for the others to show some dignity. But I doubt they have it.”<sup>50</sup>

Hariri’s resignation did not end the protests. By the end of October 2019, the amorphous movement embraced a broad set of complaints that sustained protests throughout the year, including the lack of electricity, unpaid salaries at government institutions, foreign influence, corruption, and sexual harassment. They demanded

### Lebanon

**Protest:** October Revolution

**Key Demand:** Major political and economic reforms

**Primary Dates:** October 17 – December 31, 2019 (First phase of protest movement)

**Outcome:** Government makes small economic and political concessions but resists full-scale reform

40. This case student focuses on the first phase of the October Revolution: October 2019 until December 31, 2019.

41. “Lebanon battles worst wildfires in decades,” BBC News October 15, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-50063429>.

42. Timour Azhari, “Lebanon wildfires: Hellish scenes in mountains south of Beirut,” Al Jazeera, October 16, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/16/lebanon-wildfires-hellish-scenes-in-mountains-south-of-beirut>.

43. The World Bank, Inflation, consumer prices (annual %), Lebanon, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG?locations=LB>.

44. Reuters Staff, “Explainer: Why is Lebanon in an economic and political mess?,” Reuters, November 6, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-protests-causes-explainer/explainer-why-is-lebanon-in-an-economic-and-political-mess-idUSKBN1XG260/>.

45. Mona Yacoubian, “Lebanon: Assessing Political Paralysis, Economic Crisis and Challenges for U.S. Policy,” Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism, U.S. Institute of Peace, July 29, 2021, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/07/lebanon-assessing-political-paralysis-economic-crisis-and-challenges-us-policy>.

46. “Protests erupt in Lebanon over plans to impose new taxes,” Al Jazeera, October 17, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/17/protests-erupt-in-lebanon-over-plans-to-impose-new-taxes/>.

47. “Lebanon protesters reject concessions, block key roads,” France 24, October 25, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20191025-lebanon-protesters-reject-concessions-block-key-roads>.

48. “Hariri chairs meeting on looted public money recovery law,” MTV, October 23, 2019, [https://www.mtv.com.lb/en/News/Local/980557/Hariri\\_chairs\\_meeting\\_on\\_looted\\_public\\_money\\_recovery\\_law](https://www.mtv.com.lb/en/News/Local/980557/Hariri_chairs_meeting_on_looted_public_money_recovery_law).

49. “Lebanese protesters reject president’s appeal for talks,” Al Jazeera, October 25, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/25/lebanese-protesters-reject-presidents-appeal-for-talks/>.

50. Martin Chulov, “Lebanon’s PM Saad Hariri resigns as protesters come under attack,” The Guardian, October 29, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/29/lebanons-pm-saad-hariri-resigns-amid-angry-protests>.

a neutral, technocratic government to address these myriad issues. In 2020, disparate protests continued regarding US policy toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the government's COVID-19 response, economic policies, abusive policing, and the Beirut factory explosion, among other issues. Hariri's replacement as prime minister, Hassan Diab, was forced to resign in August 2020. Outgrowths of the 2019 protest movement continued through 2021 as it took on longstanding and new grievances on which to challenge the government. The 2022 elections saw 13 leaders of the 2019 protest movement get elected to Parliament.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM PROTEST DYNAMICS: WHAT WORKS

The reasons for a successful protest movement—one that extracts its demanded concessions from the government—are multifaceted and highly contextual. As outlined below, successful protest movements often share one or more organizational, tactical, and strategic features that contribute to their scale, mass appeal, and persistence in the face of government intransigence and often violence. But most protest movements fail, even those that follow best practices. The case studies in this report illuminate the important role of political incentives in explaining why governments compromise with some protest movements and not others.

The desire to stave off a greater political threat is a key political incentive that explains the respective state responses to these movements. In Bangladesh and Nigeria, youth-led movements were not demanding fundamental political reforms. Although the governments of both countries resisted making concessions, the persistence and scale of the quota reform and End SARS movements, respectively, created concern in the ruling party that broader social unrest could grow. In Bangladesh's increasingly repressive environment, a journalist said of the protests, "The Bangladesh political situation is a teapot with the lid sealed tight. Inside the water is boiling. If you don't open the lid at one point in time, when it is too hot, it will explode... if the government continued to resist demands, it could finally erupt in a bigger political movement that is a threat to the government." In Nigeria, a protest leader said that the government expected the protests would dissipate, but as they expanded, "they saw we were serious. They had to concede. People were all over the streets." In Ecuador, government officials believed the protesters' true goal was a coup d'état that could only be prevented through concessions. A government official called the rollback of austerity measures a "matter of survival for the state...We negotiated with terrorists. It was blackmail." In these three countries, government officials believed the protesters presented a direct or indirect threat to their power, which increased their willingness to concede.

Similarly, in Georgia, the stakes of the HPP protests were less existential for the government, but domestic politics appeared to play a role in the outcome. Amid increasingly tense and unruly protests, the incumbent prime minister, who had signed the contract with ENKA, resigned due to unrelated events. Under challenging political conditions, the ruling party then shifted tactics in the lead up to municipal elections, embracing a softer approach to avoid alienating voters. Simultaneously, a highly influential Czech energy company, which provides 85 percent of Georgia's electricity,<sup>51</sup> was at loggerheads with ENKA over business and legal disputes. This tension led to electricity cutoffs at the construction site and amplified ENKA's logistical and political problems in Georgia.

Lebanon's October Revolution protests had the least defined and most ambitious set of demands. The short-term goal of ending the government's proposed tax increase was achieved less than 24 hours after the start of the protests. The movement's secondary goal of removing Hariri from power occurred 12 days after the protests began. But the ever-growing list of demands—driven by significant discontent with the political elites—left government officials with little ability to satiate the protesters. Furthermore, the primary demand—a technocratic government and elimination of the political class—was a direct threat to elected officials. This

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51. "Security of Supply Statement in Electricity Sector," Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, 2021. [http://www.economy.ge/uploads/files/2017/energy/security\\_of\\_supply\\_statement\\_electricity/security\\_of\\_supply\\_statement\\_electricity\\_2021\\_geo.pdf](http://www.economy.ge/uploads/files/2017/energy/security_of_supply_statement_electricity/security_of_supply_statement_electricity_2021_geo.pdf)

created greater unity among the political class, for whom the movement was an existential danger, than the protesters, who did not have one clear set of demands. As a result, political leaders were less amenable to compromise and more willing to use harsh tactics. As one protest leader said, “The protesters used a lot of means, but these were not effective for the medium or long term. Protesters faced an evil political class. The tactics weren’t effective, but there was no effective way. The political class will unite for itself to divide the protesters on the basis of confession, region, et cetera.”

Although the reasons for a successful protest movement are complex and highly dependent on the local context, the case studies examined in this report indicate that successful movements utilize a common set of strategies. In the case of the protests movements analyzed in this report, these strategies did not guarantee success, but the movements that utilized them effectively were more effective in extracting concessions from the government.

## Minimize Hierarchy

*Minimizing hierarchy empowers more leaders, can expand the support base, and reduces the effectiveness of government suppression.*

The most successful protests used a small level of organizational structure at the top to articulate demands and negotiate with the government, but key leaders did not dictate tactics across the country. In Bangladesh, the Council to Protect Bangladesh’s General Students’ Rights issued statements on behalf of the quota movement. In Ecuador, the CONAIE emerged as the primary negotiators with the government in the fuel subsidy protests. In Nigeria, an informal group of individual leaders became key spokespersons for the End SARS movement. The GRV in Georgia has six core leaders that led the local movement at the location of the hydropower plant but made a concerted effort to expand the movement’s support and online activism beyond the core site. One GRV leader said, “my goal was to increase the awareness in the society why Namakhvani was a problem for everyone and not only for those who lived in the region.”<sup>52</sup>

The statements of these groups or individuals influenced protests across the country, but substantive coordination was minimal. A Bangladeshi protest organizer outside Dhaka said, “Technically, there was no coordination, but there were social media groups. We got messages from those groups. We looked at those groups all day for information: What are they doing? What are they saying? What are they demanding?”<sup>53</sup> While the Georgia protests focused on a single location, the movement cultivated a set of online Facebook pages that were maintained by people across the country.

The lack of rigid hierarchy helped spread these movements across the country. Local protest leaders routinely added new demands or localized grievances. A Nigerian protest leader said, “Lack of leadership also gave sense of ownership to young people.”<sup>54</sup> Allowing protest movements to organically localize makes them harder to predict, control, and disrupt. The protest’s opponents are forced to guess the strategy and tactics of national and local leaders in disparate locations. Arresting one of these leaders does little to interrupt protests in other locations. Leaderless movements are also safer. A Lebanese protest leader said, “Lebanon has a history of leaders being harassed and assassinated.” Fewer leaders mean fewer targets for government retaliation. That said, while less hierarchy is beneficial, a degree of organization, coordination and representation is needed, especially when negotiating with government officials.

## Diversify Nonviolent Tactics

*Diversifying tactics, particularly using nonviolent tactics, can expand the movement’s support base.*

Across these movements, protests deployed an array of tactics including rallies, marches, human chains, sleep-ins, sit-ins, and traffic blockages. Many people with government jobs walked out in organized strikes. Protesters occupied key economic centers like a marketplace or, in Ecuador, oil fields to disrupt economic activity and raise the costs of the protest for the government. Protesters also used creative approaches to spread their message. Graffiti, wall murals, and music were key components of protests. Lebanon’s protest was particularly notable for

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52. Interview with author, November 2021

53. Protest leader from Khulna, interview with author, September 2021.

54. Interview with author, October 2021.

its use of unconventional tactics during rallies including yoga, hookah bars, techno dance parties, and soccer matches. These tactics prompted one newspaper to call Lebanon's protest a "millennial revolution."<sup>55</sup>

These nonviolent approaches contributed to the movements' ability to build active and passive support from a diverse array of citizens. Protest leaders said women and men, young and old, able bodied and disabled, and families with children joined the movement. Several protest leaders noted that women's participation was tactically important, as security forces are less likely to use violence against female protesters. Many people who did not join the streets provided moral or logistical support, including money and supplies. A Bangladeshi protest leader said, "Ordinary people supported the students. They supported us mentally; they helped us; gave us water; said 'you are doing a great job'. The owner of a tea stall gave free tea."

In Bangladesh, the protest's nonviolent tactics created space for state actors to join the movement. The ruling party deployed its student wing to break up the protests. Yet, according to a Bangladeshi journalist, student wings sympathized with the protest movement and pressured the ruling party to concede. He said:

"As a show of allegiance to the party, [student wing members] did what they needed to do; they used violence. But at the end of the day, going back home, meeting with their parents, they thought about their future. Many were convinced deep down they are not the grandchildren of freedom fighters, not disabled; they are general members of society. This was also their cause."

A Bangladeshi journalist noted that after days of violence and protest, the ruling party's student wing leaders held a meeting with party officials in which they advocated for compromise with the protesters. The protesters' refusal to reciprocate with violence against the student wing members likely increased their support for compromise.<sup>56</sup>

Some protest movements used violence. Ecuador's fuel subsidy movement was particularly violent. Protesters forcibly occupied state-run TV and radio stations, captured and held hostage police officers and military personnel, hurled Molotov cocktails at police, vandalized the presidential palace and parliamentary building, and burned down several newspaper headquarters and government offices. In Lebanon, some protesters vandalized buildings and clashed with police. A Lebanese protest leader said, "We tried not to criticize any tactics" in order to continue the movement's momentum. It is unclear to what extent this violence constrained these movement's ability to build greater support. The research of Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan shows that nonviolent movements are twice as effective as violent movements and more likely to lead to democratic outcomes.<sup>57</sup> In Ecuador and Lebanon, violent tactics did not discernibly weaken their respective movement's ability to achieve its goals but could have weakened their mass appeal and undermined their ability for sustainable progress.

## Use Social Media and Digital Communication Tools

*Social media and digital communication platforms are strategic tools for movement building and coordination.*

Across the selected protests, social media and digital communication tools played a key role in how protesters communicated, recruited, strategized, and organized. As one Bangladeshi protest leader said, "everyone has a smart phone; everyone uses social media."<sup>58</sup> The pervasiveness of smart phones—specifically apps like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp—gave protesters several advantages.

First, it allowed protesters to organize nationwide movements more easily and organically. Georgia's GRV protesters faced the challenge of nationalizing an environmental issue in a remote area. To do this, they livestreamed protests and speeches on Facebook and encouraged the creation of aligned but independent Facebook pages that support the protest. The protests in Ecuador, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Lebanon focused on urban areas, but each movement also had a presence in peri-urban and rural areas. Protest leaders credited social media for accelerating the movement's momentum at little cost or effort. Protest updates, government actions, negotiating tactics, slogans, protest sites, and other information was spread rapidly across social media and digital communication tools. In Nigeria, the movement's key slogan was a Twitter hashtag--#EndSARS—which yielded over 28 million Tweets in one weekend alone during the early part of the movement.<sup>59</sup>

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55. Areti Jaber, "From hookah to yoga: Five reasons why Lebanon's protests are actually a 'millennial revolution,'" *The New Arab*, November 8, 2019, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/opinion/five-reasons-why-lebanons-protests-are-millennial-revolution>.

56. Interview with author, August 2021.

57. Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (Columbia University Press, 2012).

58. Protest leader from Dhaka, interview with author, September 2021.

59. Yomi Kazeem, "How a youth-led digital movement is driving Nigeria's largest protests in a decade," *Quartz Africa*, October 13, 2020, <https://qz.com/africa/1916319/how-nigerians-use-social-media-to-organize-endsars-protests/>.

Second, social media can be used tactically to evade state detection and mitigate violence. In Bangladesh, protesters used Facebook Live to livestream the actions of police or counterdemonstrators to deter violence. In Nigeria, protesters knew state authorities were monitoring social media to identify rally locations. In response, protesters put fake information online to send police in the wrong direction.

## Pursue and Manage Alliances

*Creating formal alliances can build more support and amplify pressure on the government, but the politics of alliance-building needs to be managed carefully.*

Across protest movements, leaders sought to inspire or cultivate solidarity among domestic allies. In Lebanon, public sector employees in various sectors staged a work stoppage in alliance with the protestor's goals. In each country, civil society organizations published statements of support on social media or their websites; gave supportive comments to the press; and joined street protests. Protest leaders typically embraced or sought these demonstrations of unity. In Georgia, the highly influential Georgian Orthodox church played a role in facilitating negotiations between protesters and the government.

However, these movements—most youth-led—were often wary of formal alliances for several reasons. First, politics could corrupt the movement. Movement leaders were reluctant to stand with opposition political parties, which could politicize and thereby delegitimize their idealistic goals and spark a harsh government crackdown. A Bangladesh protest leader said, "The opposition tried to join. The Leftist party tried; but we denied them. If we agree to let them join, then it will turn into a completely political movement. We would be tagged as a political movement. This is a student movement. Not a political movement."<sup>60</sup> In Georgia, the far-right political party Georgian Idea, which is known for xenophobic and regressive social positions, organized protesters to join demonstrations because of ENKA's Turkish background.<sup>61</sup> GRV's leaders said they distanced themselves from groups "wanting to get personal political dividends"<sup>62</sup> out of the protests and did not actively coordinate with outside groups, which Georgian Idea leaders confirmed.<sup>63</sup>

Second, protest leaders were wary of formal alliances with established organizations that could coopt the movement and disrupt its organic, youth-focused character. A protest leader in Nigeria explained, "Youth are very reluctant to join CSOs. We did platform them, take their banners. We wanted it to be decentralized..We took their support, but we didn't formally align. We were afraid to politicize the movement. This was an organic protest and we wanted to keep it that way. We do not want to carry anyone's banner or logo—for their safety and for ours." In Georgia, likeminded environmental CSOs and legal-assistance movements supported the HPP protests, but GRV leaders refused to coordinate with them. A member of an allied CSO said, GRV "leaders wanted to form a grassroots movement without any affiliation; they wanted to distance themselves from politics and organizations because it was a universal movement."<sup>64</sup> In Ecuador, analysts noted that CONAIE became hegemonic in the movement and crowded out early protest leaders.<sup>65</sup>

Third, the often-intense partisan character of civic space made alliances difficult. On the one hand, independent or anti-government CSOs and unions are often under intense government pressure and therefore reluctant to join a protest movement that directly challenges the government. On the other hand, labor unions, university administrators and faculty, and CSOs in these countries are often pro-government, which made them hostile to the protesters.

Ultimately, the protest movements examined opted for a careful approach to coalition-building. This intentional management of alliances enabled protesters to strike the right balance between representativeness and impact.

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60. Protest leader from Khulna, interview with author, September 2021.

61. International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, "A Coordinated Network of the 'Georgian Idea' Party on Facebook," June 21, 2021, <https://isfed.ge/eng/blogi/qartuli-ideis-koordinirebuli-gseli>.

62. Interview with Varlam Goletiani, November 2021.

63. Interview with Guram Palavandishvili, November 2021.

64. Interview with Giorgi Tkebuchava (HRC), November 2021.

65. Interview with author, February 2022.

## Use Targeted Slogans

*Two approaches to sloganeering are common: One dominant message; or a diverse array of localized messages within a broader theme.*

Some of these protest movements utilized a single, core slogan that was supplemented by related sloganeering, while others featured a more diverse array of slogans. In Lebanon, many protesters declared, “Everyone means everyone,” but this was joined by other criticisms of the government that often included comedy.<sup>66</sup> In Nigeria, “EndSARS” was the key slogan. Georgian protesters yelled “No to the Namakhvani HPP.” In Bangladesh and Ecuador, slogans of equality, fairness, and accountability revolved around the key goals of ending job quotas and reinstating fuel subsidies, respectively. Yet even in Nigeria, where “EndSARS” became the ubiquitous tagline of the protests, one leader said, “everyone had different tags—like end police brutality, soro soke (“speak up” in Yoruba)—which emerged organically.” Two divergent tactics appear effective. First, nationalistic slogans can cloak the movement in patriotism. For example, in Bangladesh, protesters sang songs from Bangladesh’s liberation war in the 1971. Second, protesters can add local issues to the movement’s messaging in order to draw larger crowds in their areas. In Georgia, the slogan “No to the Namakhvani HPP”, resonated with the local population and the peaceful protest tactics, which was an effect of the local leadership, created a perception of sincerity within the society which helped to get the support based diversified and grow.

## Utilize the Diaspora

*Diaspora communities and likeminded international movements can increase international attention on the domestic situation, demonstrate solidarity, and provide needed resources.*

The protests in Nigeria, Lebanon, Georgia, and Ecuador showcase the ways in which diaspora communities can assist protest movements. The first is organizing solidarity protests. Expatriates from these countries gathered around the world, often at the consulates or embassies of their home country. Ecuadorians gathered in Madrid and Paris. Lebanese joined protests across Europe, the United States, and Australia. Nigerians assembled in London, Washington, DC, and elsewhere. These international protests played a twofold role in bolstering the morale of protesters on the ground as well as raising international attention on the issue. A Nigerian protestor said, “The diaspora played a great role. It gave us attention. International pressure was also impactful. We had our friends outside the country doing protests on the same thing we are protesting. We know our government doesn’t care about us, but they did.” The second role of diaspora allies is funding. While the exact amount, nature, and impact of diaspora financial support is difficult to document, several protest leaders said co-nationalists abroad provided important funds.

Nigeria’s End SARS protests also illuminate the ways in which similarly themed international protests can inspire each other. The End SARS protests of October 2020 began only a few months after the height of the anti-police violence protests in the United States which were led by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. BLM issued a statement of solidarity with the End SARS protests that condemned police violence and declared “the interconnectedness of our struggles as people of African descent across the world.”<sup>67</sup> Celebrities such as Beyonce, Rihanna, and Kanye West also voiced support for End SARS as part of a global campaign advocating for Black lives. Some Nigerian protesters said that police protests in the United States inspired their own. “If some of us didn’t see how Black Lives Matter protesters in America forced some local governments to defund their police departments, we wouldn’t have believed it is possible for any action to be taken against the police,” one Nigerian told the newspaper USA Today.<sup>68</sup>

The phenomenon of protest “contagion” is not new. Anti-communist protests in Europe in the 1980s and the Arab Spring protests in the Middle East against autocratic regimes in 2011 demonstrated how protests can spread across adjacent borders. However, the connection across continents between the BLM and End SARS protests suggests the contagion effect is stronger and more diffuse. Protest leaders in one country can draw on the example and inspiration from a very different context to mobilize citizens. However, one Nigerian protest

66. Timour Azhari, “Comedy, satire and the Lebanese protest movement,” Al Jazeera, October 28, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/28/comedy-satire-and-the-lebanese-protest-movement>.

67. Black Lives Matter, “Black Lives Matter Stands in Solidarity with #ENDSARS Movement Against Police Brutality,” October 23, 2020, [https://blacklivesmatter.com/black-lives-matter-stands-in-solidarity-with-endsars-movement-against-police-brutality/?\\_cf\\_chl\\_jschl\\_tk\\_=etD576W\\_wtnvInF\\_TuaKIB6dA.w2ykdWwR0HCLFpeA-1637252514-0-gaNycGzNCKU](https://blacklivesmatter.com/black-lives-matter-stands-in-solidarity-with-endsars-movement-against-police-brutality/?_cf_chl_jschl_tk_=etD576W_wtnvInF_TuaKIB6dA.w2ykdWwR0HCLFpeA-1637252514-0-gaNycGzNCKU).

68. Philip Obaji Jr., “Nigeria’s #EndSARS protesters draw inspiration from Black Lives Matter movement,” USA Today, October 26, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2020/10/26/nigerias-endsars-protesters-draw-inspiration-black-lives-matter/6044452002/>.



leader downplayed the impact of BLM. "There is no connection. A lot of people are not following BLM. Most Nigerians do not relate to American culture.... It would be lazy to say that BLM influenced End SARS.... We did not think 'Oh, Black people are rising!...We don't talk about 'blackness!...You'll see people parroting the language of American politics, but it's not our struggle."

Diaspora support can have unintended negative side effects. While the diaspora can provide essential funds to maintain the movement, it creates pressure for financial accountability and management that these protests often lack. As money flowed into these movements, it was often used on an ad hoc and individual basis. A Lebanese protest leader said she personally recruited and spent funds from the diaspora for the protest with little oversight. In Georgia, donations came from Georgians outside the country, but the GRV did not have a system to ensure accountancy, which risked delegitimizing the movement, according to some protest leaders. Moreover, international funding and statements of solidarity risk undermining the authenticity of grassroots movements, making them appear foreign funded and coordinated.

## Recruit Celebrities

*The support of celebrities can draw people to the streets and constrain the state's response.*

Across most of the protests, celebrities joined the movement. Nigeria's End SARS protest had the most vibrant and wide-ranging celebrity involvement. Comedians, rappers, media personalities, and other famous individuals took to the streets across the country. The presence of celebrities has two primary effects. First, it draws more news coverage, raises the profile of the protest, and can inspire more people to join. A Nigerian activist said, "The influence of celebrities was strong. When you see your favorite celebrity on the street, you are moved. When one celebrity came out, he drew a large crowd. We would not have garnered that crowd on our own. There were people who wouldn't have come out at all, but then they think the celebrity's life is worth more than theirs and they are inspired." In Lebanon, a protest leader said many actors and musicians joined the movement. "It was 'cool' to join the revolution," she said. "The kids of politicians were bullied because their parents were on the wrong side of the revolution." The second effect is that it tames the government's response or amplifies attention on the state's harsh response. When police arrested Nigerian celebrities, it generated high profile media attention that escalated pressure on the government to compromise.

## Understand Political Incentives and Calibrate Demands

*The government's response to protesters' demands is closely linked to its political standing and incentives, which are often outside the protesters' control but should be understood strategically.*

In addition to protest tactics, a key driver of the government's response to policy protests is the ruling party's or coalition's broader political incentives. A ruling party that is concerned about an upcoming election or a broader uprising against its rule is more likely to concede on comparatively small policy issues. In contrast, a ruling party that is confident in its political standing or views the protest movement's demands as an existential threat is more likely to resist; perhaps giving small concessions but remaining obstinate to the movement's most costly demands.

The timing of the protest and the nature of the demands are therefore key to its likelihood of success. Although many protests are sparked by an unforeseen occurrence, some protests can be timed to begin with—or be extended to correspond with—a key political event, such as an election. This can amplify the political pressure on the ruling party to concede. The timing of a protest can also propel individual leaders or protest organizations into political prominence. In Ecuador, CONAIE built on its prominence during the fuel subsidy protests to reestablish its standing with Ecuadorians for elections in 2021. Moreover, a movement's demands should be calibrated to the outer boundary of the ruling party's willingness to bend. Demands that lack ambition will draw a quick and costless concession from the state; while demands that go too far will provoke an uncompromising and often violent reaction.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM PROTEST DYNAMICS: CHALLENGES TO CONSIDER

Protest movements will inevitably encounter challenges as they attempt to successfully extract concessions from their respective governments. The case studies presented in this report show seven recurring challenges that protest or social movements are likely to encounter. However, protest movements able to mitigate these challenges are more likely to successfully extract concessions and see them implemented.

### Building Class Inclusivity

*Many protest movements were perceived as elite, which undermined their mass appeal.*

Many protest movements struggled to include people from lower income and lower education levels. Georgia and Ecuador were exceptions among the case studies because of the issues driving the protest. In Georgia, the regional nature of the environmental protest appealed mostly to local areas that are predominantly lower middle class. In Ecuador—although the removal of the fuel subsidy hurt middle and upper-class drivers significantly—protests drew heavily from working-class truckers and union members and from poor indigenous communities.

Other protests were hampered by elitism. In Bangladesh, the nature of job quotas, which are generally only available to college-educated individuals, made the protest an inherently elite movement. Universities were the focal point of protests across Bangladesh, and only approximately two percent of Bangladesh's population is enrolled in a university.<sup>69</sup> In Nigeria, well-off youth also dominated the End SARS protests. "Social media skews educated and middle class, so the movement was kind of elitist," said one Nigerian protest leader. Another Nigerian activist said the movement was "dominated by the educated and middle class." A Lebanese activist said the October Revolution was led by people who were "well educated and talk well on TV."

The elite character of these protests not only limited the movements' mass-based support but in some cases left them vulnerable to government manipulation. In Nigeria, the government and protest opponents recruited and paid counter-protesters from low-income communities. A Nigerian activist said, "We know the government is fond of recruiting poor people. The government can exploit their economic status. We knew this. We could have nipped this in the bud. We could have talked to these communities. They might not understand our elite English and slogans. We could have fixed this. It was our fault." Another Nigerian activist said the elite background of most protesters undermined the radicalism needed to extract concessions from the government. Middle class protesters had too much to lose. "This wasn't working class," she said. "How far toward burning it to the ground will this [middle class] person go?... If we had more lower-class people, we wouldn't have given in so easily."

### Countering Anti-Protest Propaganda

*Protest movements often face harsh rhetorical attacks that need to be countered to maintain public support.*

Bangladesh and Georgia illuminate aggressive rhetorical strategies from the government to malign protesters as anti-state actors and traitors. In Bangladesh, pro-government journalists and commentators called the protesters "razakars." Historically, the term is used for the volunteer paramilitary force of Bengalis who joined forces with the Pakistan army to suppress Bangladesh's independence movement in 1971. In Bangladesh, razakar is synonymous with traitor. In Georgia, anti-protest media claimed the protesters were against energy independence and, by extension, pro-Russia. Russian influence in Georgia evokes a highly nationalistic response, which made this charge against the protesters provocative and likely effective at undermining support with some Georgians.

69. Abdul Mannan, "Achieving our higher education targets," The Daily Star, March 1, 2017, <https://www.thedailystar.net/education-employment/achieving-our-higher-education-targets-1366513>.

The Bangladesh quota movement demonstrated one tactic to address the charge of traitor. The protesters made a concerted effort to be nonviolent and frame their demands around fairness. This approach, according to a Bangladeshi journalist, protected them against allegations of anti-state treachery. "The narrative was counterproductive," said the journalist regarding the pejorative *razakar*. "This did not go well with the general people. People saw among the leaders of the movement students who were known as pro-liberation in their previous statements and activities. Just because they are criticizing the quota does not mean they are *razakars*."

## Winning Over Traditional Media

*Many protest movements did not have a coherent strategy to approach and shape traditional media.*

Protest movements often received better coverage from international media outlets than from local media. This was partly due to the partisan nature of media in their countries. In Bangladesh's tense political environment, journalists are often cowed by government surveillance and harassment. Protest leaders felt that many journalists were sympathetic with the movement, but their coverage of the protests often towed the government's line. One protest leader said, "Most of the media is under the power of political leaders. Journalists can't do what they want... They can't give some news in their newspapers."<sup>70</sup> In Nigeria, a protest leader said of the media, "Everyone is trying to keep their license in Nigeria. The government is ruthless...News reporters were beaten for videoing protests."

Pro-government newspapers often tried to undermine the protesters by covering negative incidents or conspiracies about the movements. In Bangladesh, a Dhaka-based journalist said pro-government media "gave coverage to narratives that the protesters are *razakars*". In Lebanon, some news outlets excessively covered protest violence even while much of the movement was peaceful. In Georgia, many media outlets presented the protesters as standing against national interests and energy independence, giving credence to the conspiracy of Russian manipulation of the movement.

However, protest leaders often acknowledged that their movement did not have a media strategy, particularly for targeting domestic media. In Bangladesh, protesters made some outreach to sympathetic journalists to shape the news coverage, but they mostly relied on bypassing traditional media in favor of social media. In Nigeria, a protest organizer said, "[The media] reached out to us. We didn't reach out to them." A Lebanese protest leader said, "We do have relationships with journalists, but mostly for international media because they know how to find us."

## Managing the Risks of the Internet and Smart Phones

*Social media and communications platforms provide enormous benefits, but they can be easily hacked, monitored, and corrupted with disinformation.*

Social media platforms and communication apps like WhatsApp are highly effective tools for organizing, promoting, and crowdsourcing ideas, demands, and tactics quickly and safely. However, the state can monitor and infiltrate these internet and smart-phone based platforms and applications often more easily than an in-person meeting of organizers. Many protest leaders said state security officials hacked into social media platforms or penetrated discussion groups to gather information, sow discontent, and spread misinformation. Protest organizers in Lebanon said their accounts were hacked and monitored. In Nigeria, the police closely monitored public social media posts to preempt protests (in response, protesters used tactical disinformation to mislead authorities).

Social media also aided the spread of state-manufactured disinformation. In Bangladesh, the online discussion of the protests, specifically on Facebook, was rife with anti-protest disinformation. A Bangladeshi journalist said, "Many [protesters] used social media to get themselves organized and also to disseminate information... [But] social media has a lot of misinformation. Opponents of the protest put out information on Facebook that wasn't always true."<sup>71</sup> Pro-government counter-protesters flooded Facebook with exaggerated or false stories that quote movement supporters were using violence or had Islamist affiliations.<sup>72</sup> In Ecuador, fake images of violence and instability, which were linked with external actors, created a perception of chaos and government

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70. Protest leader from Khulna, interview with author, September 2021.

71. Journalist, interview with author, August 2021.

72. Interview with author, August 2021.

weakness. In Georgia, protest leaders said anonymous Facebook users created pages and groups to spread false information about the environmental movement. In Lebanon, protest leaders alleged the government allies used less tech-savvy forms of disinformation: they sent a belly dancer into the protests to make the movement seem immoral and libertine to Lebanon's conservative groups.<sup>73</sup>

## Setting Achievable Objectives

*Protest movements that do not set specific and realistic goals are less likely to achieve them.*

The protest movements in Ecuador, Bangladesh, Georgia, and Nigeria demonstrated the importance of setting specific, achievable, and realistic goals under the political, economic, and social conditions that existed. While the demands of these movements elicited strong and violent pushback from the state, the concessions asked of government were calibrated to ensure the possibility of success. However, this was not always easy. As one protest leader from Nigeria said of the five demands of the End SARS protests: "Young people wanted much more than five. This was an opportunity. We wanted to say everything with this opportunity. Nigeria is a concoction of injustice. Young people are tired. How do we fit every piece of injustice into this protest?"

Lebanon's October Revolution showcases the danger of escalating demands beyond what is achievable. The Lebanese government quickly conceded on the ostensible spark for the projects—the WhatsApp tax—and the Hariri government ultimately resigned. But the protest's short-term and long-term goals evolved over time in response to genuine rage at the political class, becoming increasingly maximalist. Many protesters' declared goal was a wholesale change to Lebanon's political system and the removal of the political class. This goal provided elites no room for compromise. In Ecuador, Bangladesh, Georgia, and Nigeria, political elites were reluctant to compromise with protesters, but the demands created space for elites to make concessions without giving up power. While this approach to movement-building failed to achieve structural political changes in these countries, it created a pathway for success on specific issues.

## Planning for Today and Tomorrow

*Protest movements that do not create a strategy to win during and after the protests are less likely to extract concessions and see them implemented.*

Many protest leaders, even those involved in successful protests, lamented a lack of planning for maintaining pressure on the government after the protests ended. In Nigeria, although the SARS force was disbanded, the individuals from SARS were simply placed in new units. "I think the protests failed," said an End SARS protestor. "What did we get in the end? No answers. No justice. Nothing. Same problems." In Bangladesh, the government ended the quota system but ignored the students' other demands. "The protest was not a success," concluded one Bangladeshi protestor who felt that the government gave in on a single demand to end the protests quickly. In both protests, organizers and supporters largely dissipated after key demands were met. In Georgia, while the protests have succeeded in the short term, this progress could be rolled back if the government negotiates a new contract for the hydropower plan. Yet protests have largely stopped.

In Lebanon, where the October Revolution's achievements fell well short of its ambitious demands, a protest organizer regretted the lack of planning and coordination. She said, "We wanted to create a 100-day plan with the government, but some people objected because we were giving them a chance. Let's plan and not be reactive. Our problem is that we always react. We don't have a one-year or five-year plan. We react to incidents outside of our control." A Lebanese government official sympathetic with the protest said, "The majority of Lebanese people supported the revolution with different intensities. But there was no unified committee for strategy. This was a source of failure for the revolution...The protest movement did not have professional management."

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73. Mortada Alamine, "Lebanon's loyalists: The other side of change," Synaps, October 14, 2020, <https://www.synaps.network/post/lebanon-uprising-revolution-loyalists-parties>.

## Taming Violent Elements

*Even the protest movements that choose a nonviolent approach struggle to maintain this tactic in the face of state violence.*

The protest movements studied in this report had different strategies regarding the use of violence. Yet all faced violence from the state, which increased the likelihood for reciprocal violence. In Ecuador, elements of the movement embraced violence. In other protests, nonviolence was a stated goal. Bangladesh's quota reform movement and Nigeria's End SARS movement had the most success in limiting violence as a protest tactic. A Bangladeshi journalist said the quota reform movement "tried holding programs nonviolently: peaceful assembly, human chain, and things like that. Still, when they encountered violence from ruling party's student association, they didn't counteract. They were falsely accused of violence, beaten."

In Georgia and Lebanon, incidents of violence occurred. Georgia's HPP protesters declared strategy was nonviolence, but conflict with the police arose. Protest organizers blamed the violence on government infiltrators. In Lebanon, the government and its allies attacked October Revolution supporters in the streets. The government also allegedly paid Lebanese from poor communities to confront protesters. A Lebanese protest leader said once this violence occurred, it become impossible to control. "When we started throwing things at the police, non-violence was just a slogan; we would hit back," she said.

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## PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

The uniqueness of the factors that led to success or presented a challenge underscore the need for context-sensitive, tailored support to current and future protest movements. The pilots IRI conducted in validating this toolkit highlighted the importance of tailoring the modules for each country context to best benefit participants. IRI partnered with local in-country experts to incorporate information on implementing public policy in a divided society for the Montenegro pilot, additional modules on conflict prevention and resolution in Nigeria, conflict mediation and negotiation in Ecuador, and examples applicable to each country. Participant feedback confirmed that the customizations resulted in more relevant and useful training for participants.

Yet, there are some common skillsets, tools and resources that might maximize the chances of popular mobilizations that seek policy change, depending on the country context. International donors, development partners, and domestic advocacy groups should consider the following interventions at the program level to bolster protest movements.

### Support Effective and Secure Communication

**Lesson:** Effective communication is key to successful protest movements. In most cases inadequate and ineffective communication plays a critical role in deflating momentum and/or diverting protest movements away from their goals.

**Recommendation:** Assist the development and use of secure communication tools, including cyber security measures, to facilitate the spread of protest information within diffused and decentralized networks. Communication tools enable protesters to recruit, strategize, and organize more easily.

**Lesson:** While protesters can leverage social media to advance their cause, government agencies also use social media to monitor or infiltrate those movements and spread disinformation. Protest movements would benefit from knowledge of these risks and how to mitigate them.

**Recommendation:** Provide targeted assistance on effective and secure social media usage.

**Lesson:** Targeted messaging aimed at diverse sets stakeholders involved can boost the reach and impact of the movement by incorporating additional voices and perspectives. It is an effective way to ensure sustained engagement of the target audiences.

**Recommendation:** Hold tailored trainings on message development with the goal of using creative and strategic slogans to appeal to the broadest segment of the population—including education, class, race, ethnicity, and other relevant identity categories—and anticipate anti-protest propaganda from the state. Assist in rigorously evaluating the effectiveness of different messages through AB testing and other techniques.

**Lesson:** In most cases the media is critical in shaping public opinions and support for protest movements. Protest movements may receive positive coverage in international media outlets, but they often lack coherent strategies for targeting domestic media. By effectively engaging the media, movements can gain a lot of momentum.

**Recommendation:** Support skills development on media outreach, editorial writing, and citizen reporting.

## Assist Strategic Mobilization Efforts

**Lesson:** To succeed in gaining broad support for a cause, the first condition is to publicly disavow the use of violence. Violence diminishes chances for protest movements to succeed, as it can dissuade potential supporters who are on the fence from actively participating. Violence is also antithetical to democratic governance.

**Recommendation:** Support the development of nonviolent protest tactics that appeal to the broadest segment of the population and that can withstand intense government pressure and violence. Nonviolent tactics contribute to a movement's ability to build support.

**Lesson:** To strategically enhance the reach of the movement, it is important to reach those living outside the country. Diaspora communities are well plugged into the local contexts, generally have access to finance, and are not restricted as local actors.

**Recommendation:** Facilitate connections between diaspora communities and local protest leaders. Diaspora communities can assist protest movements by raising international attention on the issue and providing financial support to help sustain the movement.

## Foster Greater Analytical Skills

**Lesson:** Good knowledge of the political landscape and actors involved is a critical skillset for a protest movement, as it equips those trying to advance a reform with information on those who might be persuadable and veto players. Protest moments that can adapt and respond to changing scenarios have increased chances of success.

**Recommendation:** Conduct a stakeholder mapping exercise with protest leaders to understand the key stakeholders and interests of potential allies and opponents of the protest. In addition, engage on scenario planning with protest leaders to identify and understand the political incentives facing decisionmakers and their likely reaction to different demands and tactics, as well as plan for continued activism and policy advocacy at the protest's conclusion.

## Build Organizational Capacity

**Lesson:** Strong organizational capacity among leaders of the protest movement is always crucial while managing protest movements. Without the right organizational infrastructure, movements are less able to conduct the necessary activities to advocate for reform.

**Recommendation:** Work with protest leaders to hold a SWOT exercise to understand where organizational structures, processes, and capacities, including financial management, can be strengthened. Based on the assessment of strengths and weaknesses, provide tailored support.



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