PROTECTION & RESILIENCE STRATEGIES

FOR NONVIOLENT ACTIVISTS

REPORT

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THOUGH MOST ACTIVISTS
AGREE THAT THEY NEED
PROTECTION, MANY FAIL
TO CREATE AN EFFECTIVE
APPROACH TO SHIELDING
THEIR CAMPAIGNS.

ABOUT THIS
REPORT

Nonviolent activists and change-makers face many threats as they fight to build more democratic, just, and equal communities. These threats — ranging from online harassment to surveillance and assassination — risk ending their campaigns. Though most agree that they need protection, many fail to create an effective approach to shielding their campaigns.

To address this gap in campaign management, the Center for Applied NonViolent Actions and Strategies (CANVAS) has combined its nearly two decades of experience educating activists from over 50 countries and consulted with subject matter experts in journalism, academic research, security, and mental health to create the evidence-based training curriculum, Protection & Resilience Strategies for Nonviolent Activists.

Our team examined more than 255 literature sources, interviewed dozens of activists and practitioners, and conducted one multilingual online survey to identify the most pressing risks activists face globally and recommend best practices and creative techniques to mitigate them.

This research produced a series of six interactive training modules and exercises intended to provide activists with the skills to identify and analyze threats, and to develop easily adoptable techniques to ensure smarter protection decisions in their day-to-day work.
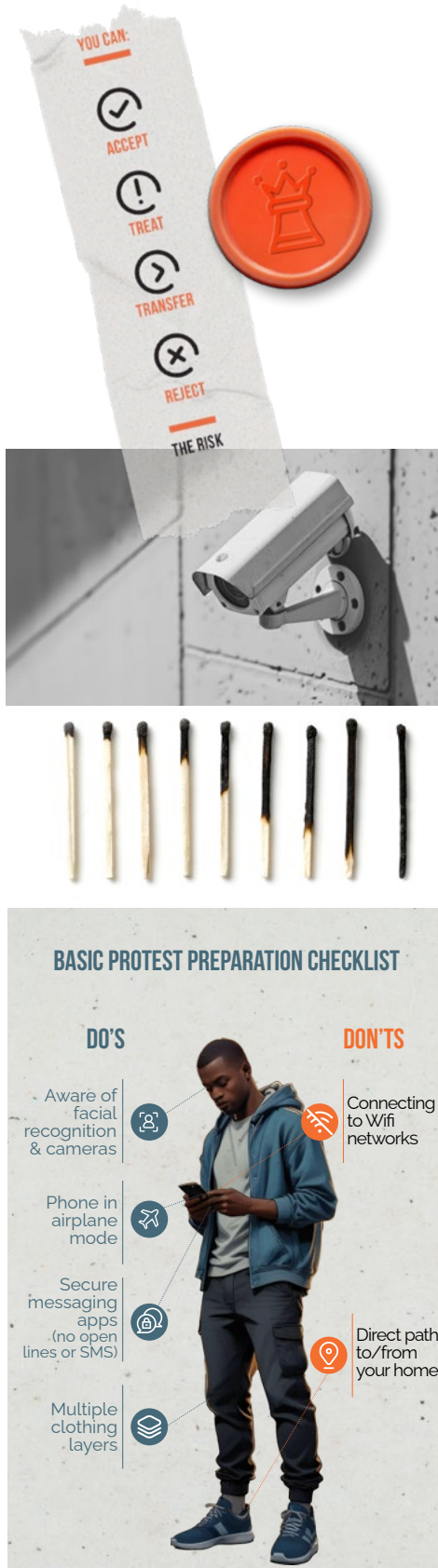
Importantly, participants will also leave with a protection and resilience strategy framework for their campaign as a whole, as well as templated tools (i.e., exercises) to proactively protect the campaign's digital and physical infrastructure, activists' emotional wellbeing, and ensure the campaign is resilient enough to withstand repression.

The modules are designed to be conducted either in person over the course of one week (one or two modules and one exercise per day) or virtually over the course of five weeks (one module and one exercise per week).

In addition to presenting our team's key findings, the following report aims to serve as a summary of the curriculum for nonviolent movements and activists seeking to improve their resilience and improve their chances of triumphing over violence, bullying, and intimidation at the hands of their authoritarian opponents.

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GLOSSARY

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

Models that use automation and data mapping to learn and repeat actions or processes. There are two primary types of AI: predictive, which uses past patterns to predict future scenarios, and generative, which creates new content.

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BACKGROUND CHECK

Research on an individual, group, or location to identify potential threats to the movement and to confirm or gather information in support of logistics.

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BACKUP PLAN

A plan used to guide the campaign during and after active repression. The best practice is to have a high-level backup plan in case the campaign experiences high-impact repression and backup protocols for responding to low to medium-impact repressions such as detentions, protests, and kidnap.

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CAMPAIGN INTELLIGENCE

A process of gathering and analyzing indicators of potential threats to a campaign or activists' security, followed by assessing these threats and identifying and implementing appropriate mitigation measures.

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CAMPAIGN SECURITY PLAN

Outlines a campaign's security strategy, structure, roles, and protocols to protect and respond to threats. The plan covers physical safety, digital security, as well as mental health.

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COUNTERINTELLIGENCE

Planned activities to gather information on opponent(s) and to protect against espionage, monitoring, sabotage, and assassinations.

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DENIAL OF SERVICE (DOS) ATTACK (DDOS)

A cyberattack wherein attackers temporarily or permanently interrupt a network to make a computer, server, or network resource inaccessible to its users/owners.

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DIGITAL SECURITY

Training and protocols that safeguard information (data), devices (phones, laptops) and digital infrastructure (WiFi routers, SharePoint, applications, tools).

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DIRECT ACTION

Any action of resistance and non-cooperation to pressure an opponent to negotiate and achieve victory. Forms of nonviolent direct action include but are not limited to marches, flash mobs, pickets, sit-ins, and prayer vigils.

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ENCRYPTION

A method of converting messages or documented information into confidential codes to ensure that the content cannot be interpreted by a third party. END-TO-END ENCRYPTION refers to a communication system that uses message encryption to prevent third parties from viewing, reading, or becoming aware of information exchanges.

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INDIRECT ACTION	Strategies and tactics that avoid direct confrontation or physical intervention with the opponent. Indirect action often aims to achieve structural and systemic changes by influencing institutions and public opinion. Some of these tactics include covert information campaigns, boycotts, and inflicting reputational damage on individuals or entities.
INDIRECT VIOLENCE	Harm perpetrated through social structures or institutions, such as when political or economic authority is used to limit the opportunities of an individual or a group, as opposed to targeted physical violence or incarceration.
INFORMATION SECURITY PROTOCOL	A protocol outlining steps and actions to keep campaign and activist information secure, both digitally and physically.
MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING	Psycho-education and tools to take care of activists' emotional and psychological wellbeing; supports individuals with coping with stress and burnout.
MULTI-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION	A practice of requiring more than one type of ID to gain access to data, websites, or applications.
NONCOOPERATION	Methods of nonviolent action that involve deliberate restriction, discontinuance, or withholding of social, economic, or political cooperation (or any combination thereof) with an opponent, activity, institution, or regime.
NONVIOLENCE	The belief that violent acts are prohibited on religious or ethical grounds. Some belief systems eschew not only physical violence but also hostile thoughts and words. Certain belief systems also enjoin positive attitudes and behavior toward opponents, or even a rejection of the very concept of opponents. Such believers may or may not participate in nonviolent struggles for pragmatic reasons.
NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION	Thoughtfully communicating by focusing on your own emotions and withholding judgment. The process of nonviolent communication can include observing events that have impacted your mood, identifying your feelings following those events, tracing those feelings to your own needs, and requesting actions from others to help satisfy those needs.
PHYSICAL SECURITY	Training, protocols, and management practices that safeguard activists, the campaign brand, spaces, and anything that adds value to the campaign outside of the digital realm.
PILLARS OF SUPPORT	The institutions and segments of a society that supply a regime or organization with the critical sources of power (such as legitimacy, human resources, material resources, skills and knowledge, or the ability to impose sanctions) necessary for it to function. Without its pillars of support, a regime or organization would collapse.

PROTECTION MEASURE	Proactive behavior or controls intended to reduce the likelihood of repression occurring and/or the impact of repression if it does occur.
PULLING PILLARS	Refers to persuading those institutions to turn away from the regime and support your movement instead.
RESPONSE MEASURE	Protocols and reactive capabilities aimed at effectively managing an incident or crisis to prevent escalation.
RISK APPETITE	The amount of risk or potential harm an organization is willing to accept in pursuing its goals.
RISK ASSESSMENT	The practice of determining potential risks to activists, the likelihood of these risks, and the impact of further repression on individuals and the movement.
SPYWARE	Malicious software installed on electronic devices to covertly gather information without a user's consent.
STRATEGIC NONVIOLENT STRUGGLE	The art of engaging in social and political confrontation to create change and resolve differences while resolutely abstaining from the use of physical or emotional violence. Activists achieve institutional changes by applying political pressure to their opponents, using direct actions like boycotts, protests, and noncooperation, and by taking part in making institutional changes during the post-victory phase.
VISION OF TOMORROW	VISION OF TOMORROW — a set of specific and actionable goals or changes the movement aims to achieve through its strategic nonviolent struggle. Communicates what the campaign is about to supporters and opponents.
VPN (VIRTUAL PRIVATE NETWORK)	VPN (VIRTUAL PRIVATE NETWORK) — a digital tool that establishes a connection between your digital device and a remote server owned by a VPN provider, creating a tunnel that encrypts your personal data and masks your IP address.

INTRODUCTION

PHOTO: Thomas Leuthard

PROTECTIVE MEASURES ARE VITAL FOR ANY CAMPAIGN TO SUCCEED

To some, engaging in pro-democracy activism might seem like an inherently dangerous affair, while developing a comprehensive security strategy might seem complicated and futile.

So let us address the skeptics at once.

In developing this curriculum, our team engaged 39 seasoned activists and subject-matter experts from across 20 countries, who all agreed that protective measures are vital for any campaign to succeed. Nearly all of these activists and movements relayed the importance of having some form of "security" in place, such as being mindful of information sharing, turning off location tracking on mobile devices, or communicating through encrypted messaging apps.

Yet even those waging their struggle in EXTREME risk locations (see Graph 1), admitted to treating security as secondary to other aspects of their campaigns, only implementing protective measures *in response* to repression. Our literature and case studies review corroborated this observation: the vast majority of activists lack a comprehensive strategy that would allow them to *get ahead* of repression and avoid a scenario whereby an opponent could tear down the entire movement with one act of persecution.

GRAPH 1: **Nonviolent Activism Risk Scale**

| RISK LEVEL	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE LOCATIONS *
LOW	Civil liberties & press freedoms are broad, inclusive, enshrined in law and widely respected. There is minimal surveillance and rare legal loopholes exist.	• Finland • Japan • Taiwan • Costa Rica
MEDIUM	Civil liberties & press freedoms are biased against minorities. Issues from indirect violence exist despite freedom guarantees. Surveillance is frequent, but biased. Conflict of interest in government exists and prison industrial complex is highly safisticated.	• India • Brazil • The U.S. • South Africa
HIGH	Civil liberties & press freedoms are legally limited for one or multiple communities. Laws are manipulated to benefit minority elite. Surveillance is widespread & includes threat or use of violence. Government is co-opted, often featuring military or oligarical rule	• Phillippines • Georgia • Serbia • Hong Kong
EXTREME	Civili liberties & freedoms do not exist. Government repressions are widespread and include methods of direct violence.	• Egypt • Iran • Zimbabwe • China

Relevant as of July 2024*

While the general public is primarily familiar with complex security structures like national militaries and law enforcement agencies in major cities, the primary aim of protecting a campaign is simple: prevent outside access to its personnel, locations, computers, network, and information. Resilience is equally simple: survive repression to keep fighting another day.

The strategies we identified — even in the most EXTREME risk locations — are just as simple as the objectives. In fact, many are rooted in the same general principles already known to activists from our Nonviolence 101 curriculum, including unwavering commitment to nonviolent discipline, rigorous knowledge of your opponent, and focusing on small but certain victories.

Our literature review and interviews with nonviolent activists battling repression identified new concepts from the industry standards and best practices of risk management using real life examples.
When developing a risk assessment for selecting a specific campaign's direct actions, for example, activists will inevitably conclude that large-scale street demonstrations are very high risk, since the only real way to mitigate the impact of police violence is through numbers — in other words, hundreds of thousands of participants. This means that for the most part, street protests should be used as a tactic of last resort, employed only when the movement has reached its highest mobilization potential and managed to pull more than half of the pillars of support (see Graph 2).

GRAPH 2: **Pillars of Support**
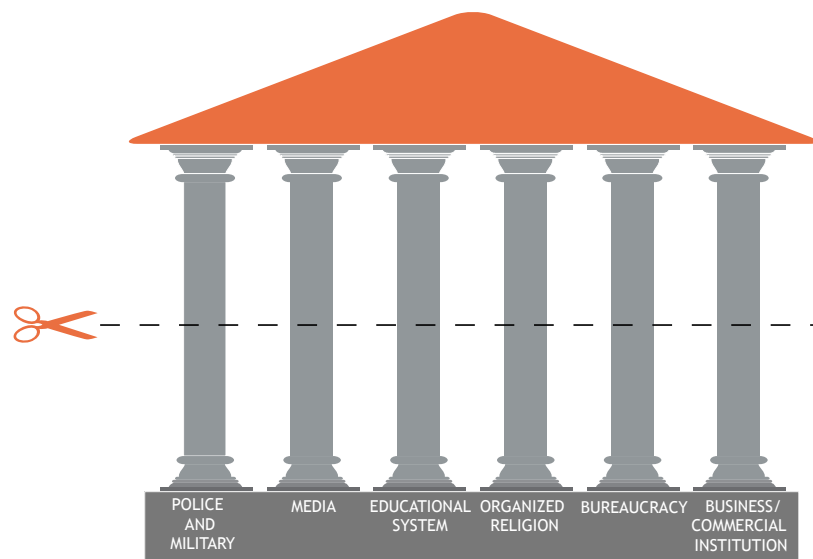
The primary conclusion of our research is clear: Developing a well-thought-out security strategy is imperative for ensuring the longevity of a nonviolent movement and for increasing its chances of victory against any opponent.

But we also hope to show that while this vital task requires much attention and commitment from all of a movement's members, it's actually less complicated, scary, and annoying in practice than it might seem.

This report aims to serve as a road map for activists, explaining the ins and outs of developing security and resiliency strategies and contingency plans, and offering advice on working in uncommon circumstances, such as in exile or in modern colonial states.

We hope that our readers, no matter where they are, will make practical use of this entire report, including the accompanying annexes, when taking steps to protect their movements.

THIS REPORT AIMS TO SERVE AS A ROAD MAP FOR ACTIVISTS, EXPLAINING THE INS AND OUTS OF DEVELOPING SECURITY AND RESILIENCY STRATEGIES AND CONTINGENCY PLANS

DEVELOPING A SECURITY STRATEGY

YOU CAN:

ACCEPT

TREAT

TRANSFER

REJECT

THE RISK

A well-thought-out security strategy supports clear strategic and tactical objectives in a movement's Vision of Tomorrow.[1]

Once they've established clear objectives, activists must analyze current and future threats to the campaign itself and develop mitigation techniques to reduce the potential impact of repression. This process of analysis, known as a risk assessment, serves as the foundation of the campaign's protection strategy and is a tool that should be revisited often.

Risks identified in an assessment prompt the campaign leadership to make a decision and take one of the following actions:

ACCEPT the risk without any precautions

TREAT the risk with precautions

TRANSFER the risk to a different chapter/committee/person within your movement or shift tactic variables such as time, target, location, or scale

REJECT the risk and all activities associated with it

The tendency to lean further towards accepting or rejecting certain risks is also known as **risk appetite**, which is measured as an average of:

- The willingness to face repression
- The willingness to change objectives with regard to the Vision of Tomorrow
- The amount of available resources, including financial, human, and time
- The level of nonviolent discipline

Risk appetite acts as a guide post throughout the campaign lifecycle, providing the leadership with boundaries when selecting specific tactics or making decisions on logistics, including communications, financials, and tactic selection. It is likely to change as the threats to the movement evolve and will differ from activist-to-activist, requiring regular check-ins.

[1] See CANVAS Core Curriculum for further guidance

CASE STUDY 1

Let's consider members of a movement campaigning for legal protections against domestic violence in Türkiye, which we rank as an **EXTREME** risk location for nonviolent activists.

The movement's spokeswoman, who uses her real name when interacting with the press and/or posting on social media accounts, is highly likely to be subjected to direct judicial and extrajudicial repressions by the government. The spokesperson's risk appetite, therefore, would be much higher than that of a member who anonymously helps the movement with online fundraising activities.

At the same time, an ethnically Kurdish spokeswoman supporting a local campaign in the Kurdish-majority Van province would have an even higher risk appetite than her ethnically Turkish counterpart working in the capital Ankara. This difference is due to additional risks posed by ethnic discrimination and the elevated threat of physical surveillance in minority-majority areas, among others.

AN ANONYMOUS FUNDRAISER

TURKISH SPOKESWOMAN IN ANKARA

KURDISH SPOKESWOMAN IN VAN

LOW ←——————— RISK APETITE ———————→ HIGH
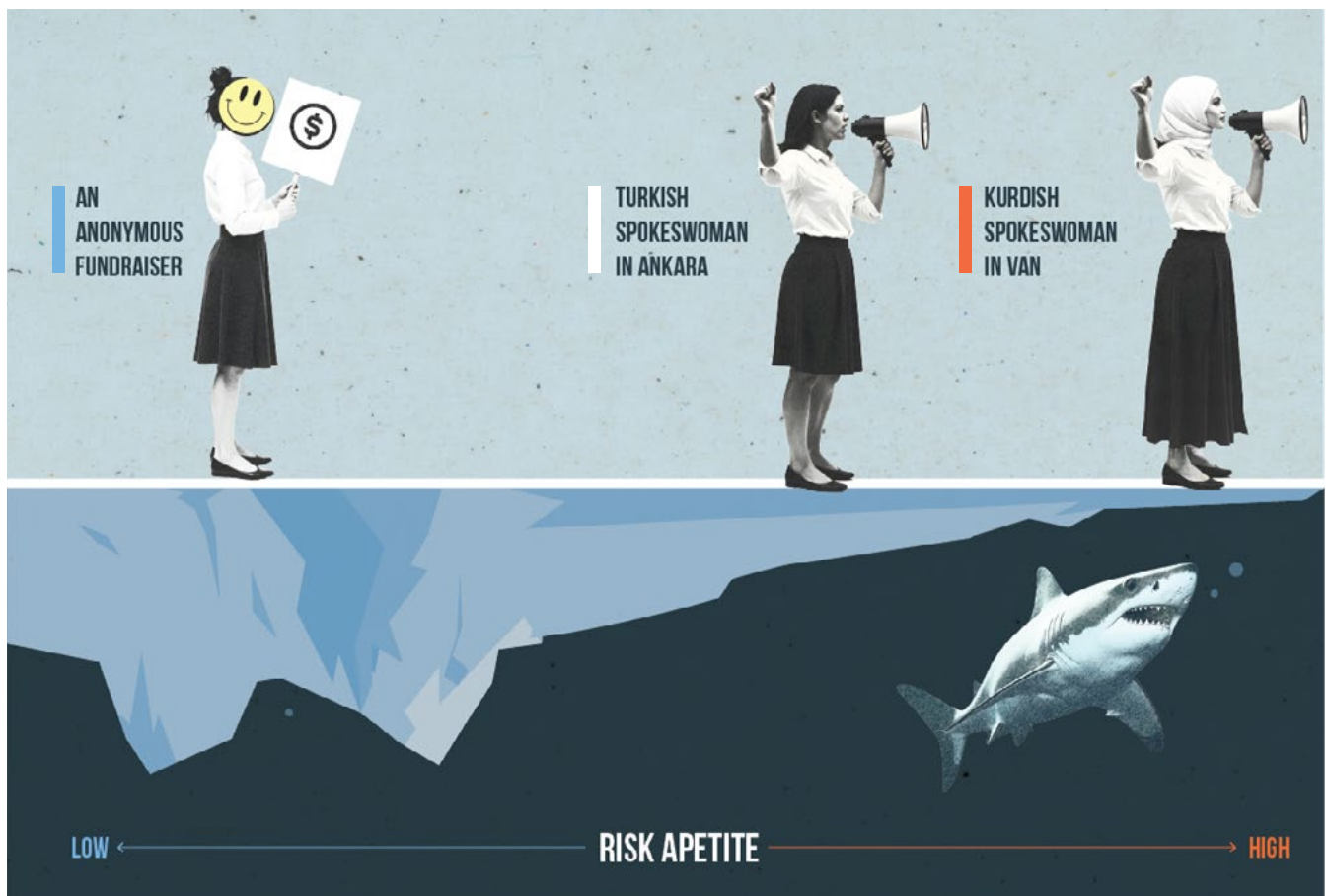
Risk assessment and **risk appetite** will continually provide the campaign with a view of what direct actions are feasible now and what needs to change (threat levels or mitigation measures) to reduce the potential impact of repression. Forward-looking risk assessments will give the campaign the foundation of an effective security strategy that is:

· Easy to follow
· Affordable
· Proactive in nature

And, most importantly:

· Seamlessly woven into the structure and functionality of a movement or an individual campaign

Our research found that **the most successful way to set up such a strategy is to integrate it into the campaign structure by dividing roles and responsibilities and establishing clear lines of communication.** The most resilient structure is a decentralized model with loosely connected leadership cells, as well as national chapters (where applicable).

See, for example, Graph 3, which depicts a possible structure of a movement working in an EXTREME risk location. In this scenario, several possible chapters of a movement maintain regular communication with **the strategy chapter**, but do not necessarily have any direct contact with each other.

GRAPH 3: **Possible Movement Structure for Activist in EXTREME Risk Locations**

A MOVEMENT'S CHOSEN COMMUNICATION STRATEGY CAN MAKE OR BREAK A CAMPAIGN.
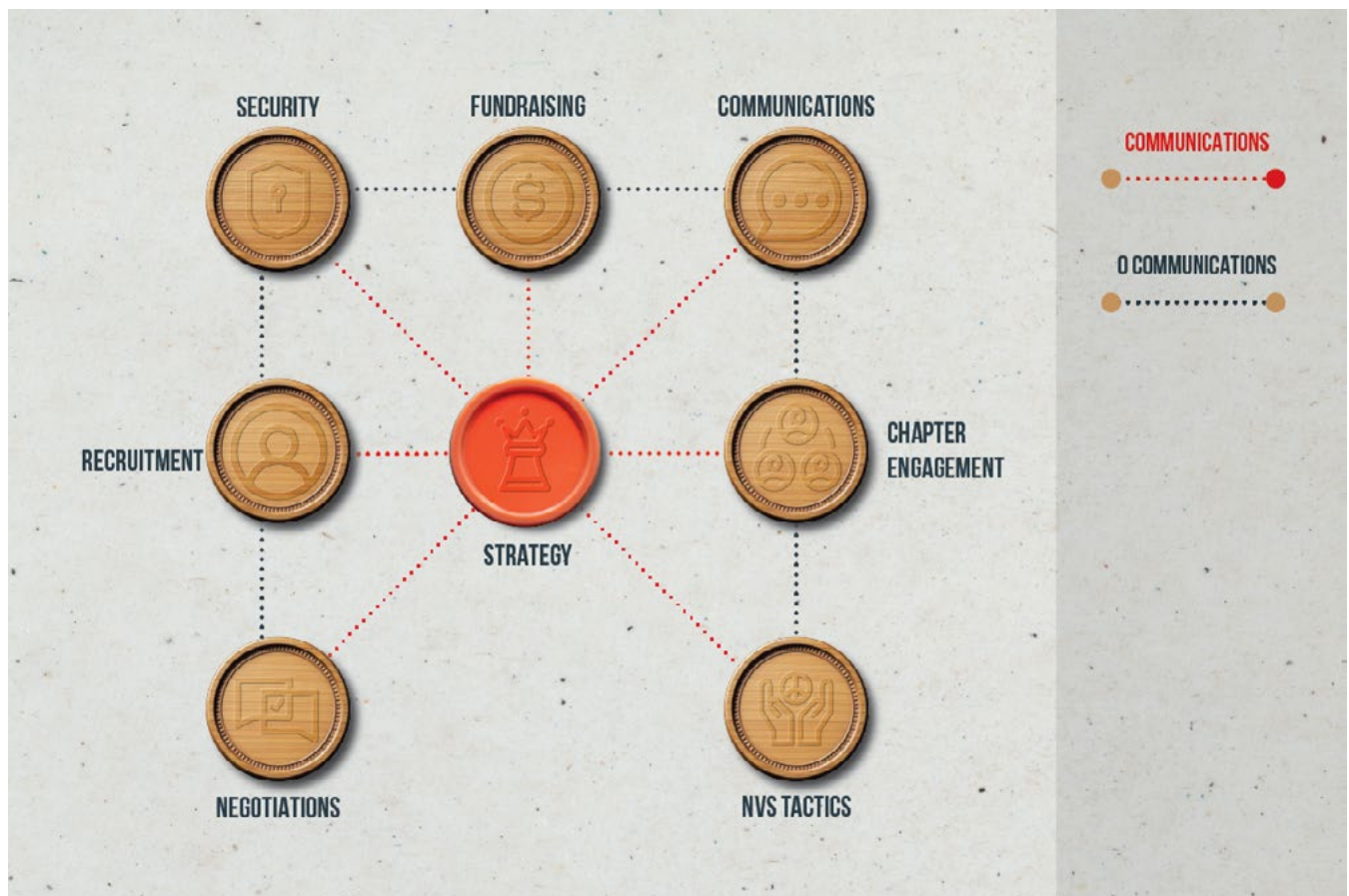
Our research found that **decentralized organization, paired with anonymity even within the campaign, is a key technique for creating opacity around the campaign strategy and leadership.**

This approach provides longevity for multi-year campaigns, protecting against persistent threats, such as the opponent trying to steal plans, obtain supporter data, or find evidence to press charges against an activist.

Siloing information internally also offers a buffer against infiltrators because even if one activist, tactic, or chapter's data are compromised, other parts of the movement would remain protected and able to continue their work.

To maintain a dynamic protection strategy, **most movements will require a dedicated team (cell) to design and oversee their security.** In practice, this means collecting and analyzing intelligence from campaign networks and online sources, regularly updating security protocols and testing capabilities, and fostering preparedness through simulations and tests.

While tasks allocated to the security team will be discussed elsewhere in the report, we would like to underscore the importance of the **communications cell.**

As pro-democracy movements and human rights advocates gain followers, opponents are more likely to target them through coordinated smear campaigns aimed at undermining their reputation and instilling fear of targeted reprisal through online bullying. This type of attack threatens emotional distress and fear in activists, but we also identified several cases of government forces using it as a first step in intimidation, before escalating to bogus charges and physical assault.

Our research found that this type of attack is impacting campaigns globally. From the opponent's perspective, AI-generated content — including deep fakes — spread across social media platforms using bots is a cheap and effective way to damage a campaign's reputation and bring down morale.

We expect this to become a common tactic with recent advancements in AI — but a communications team working in coordination with a security strategy can help movements prepare for and protect themselves against this type of threat.

To create this layer of protection, **the communications team must act as the guardian of the movement's Vision of Tomorrow,** serving as the official campaign source of truth for the public and supporters. This means maintaining a strong social media presence, but also establishing bonds with independent newsrooms that can help amplify the movement's voice and counter AI-generated misinformation.

When the communications team expects or experiences a sudden spike in trolling targeting a specific post or the account of an activist or a campaign, there should be a protocol in place to notify security, who will in turn provide guidance on protective measures. This may include an activist using safe houses for 30 days to reduce an opponent's ability to track their movements, or engaging a media network with an official statement denouncing the attack as an infringement of human rights and freedoms.

The cell should work in cooperation with the security team to develop strict guidelines for media interviews and public information sharing for all other members of the movement. The guidelines, for example, can include instructions on location sharing and exposure of donor relations.

FOR A SAMPLE MEDIA ENGAGEMENT PROTOCOL, SEE ANNEX A.

PROTECTING THE MOVEMENT
BEFORE REPRESSION

DIGITAL

Developing a well-thought-out plan for managing digital security needs is vital for any movement. Our team's own risk assessment of campaign vulnerabilities identified information as the most attractive target of any opponent. We therefore recommend setting up a digital strategy as the first priority of any campaign because it will inform campaign roles and responsibilities, individual access to sensitive information, and the design of lines of communication between those roles.

But while activists can adopt certain costless or low-cost measures (see, for example, Graph 4) to protect their digital assets — including information, devices, digital finances, or online branding — it is important to remember that **a grassroots movement will always be disadvantaged in digital space compared to opponents such as governments or non-state criminal actors.**

Every year, governments around the globe spend billions of dollars on improving their cybersecurity and digital surveillance capabilities; cybercriminals are also waging increasingly sophisticated attacks — their progress driven, among other things, by the widespread accessibility and rapid enhancement of AI.

However, this is not to say that a movement should feel helpless about or simply give up on digital security, but rather that activists should look for more clever, innovative ways to conduct their campaigns instead of merely trying to outmaneuver their opponents.

Though it might seem like digital space should always offer the movement or a campaign ample possibilities for quick gains, our research suggests that **movements already operating or transitioning to operate in EXTREME risk environments should consider moving the vast majority of their operations offline.**

GRAPH 4: (Just SOME) **DIGITAL HYGIENE Basics**

2FA ON ALL PLATFORMS

UP-TO-DATE DEVICE SOFTWARE(S)

REGULAR FILE BACKUP

VARYING & FREQUENTLY CHANGED PASSWORDS

ANTI-VIRUS SOFTWARE RUNNING ON ALL DEVICES (EVEN ON YOUR IPHONE!)

3 - 2- 1 BACKUP RULE

MAINTAIN AT LEAST **3 COPIES** OF YOUR DATA

TURN OFF LOCATION-SHARING

CHECK IF YOUR ACCOUNT HAS BEEN USED ON COMPROMISED WEBSITES

haveibeenpwned.com

KEEP **2 COPIES** STORED AT SEPARATE LOCATIONS

STORE AT LEAST **1 COPY** AT AN OFF-SITE LOCATION

MOVEMENTS ALREADY OPERATING OR TRANSITIONING TO OPERATE IN EXTREME RISK ENVIRONMENTS SHOULD CONSIDER MOVING THE VAST MAJORITY OF THEIR OPERATIONS OFFLINE.

To better understand the reasoning behind this advice, let's consider the following case study:

CASE STUDY 2

Let's imagine a movement with a pro-democracy and pacifist agenda operating in Russia, an **EXTREME** risk location.

Following its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the Russian government introduced an array of legal mechanisms aimed at silencing opposition movements. One such mechanism is outlawing a movement or an organization as "undesirable" or "extremist."

These designations aim to hamper activists' work by forcing them to battle with additional stigma and upping psychological pressure, and by criminalizing demonstrations of support for their movements. Meaning, a supporter could be imprisoned for reposting a photo from the movement's Instagram page on their personal account or even for "liking" it. The movement in question began its work before these laws became widely used and managed to build an ample online presence with millions of followers across various social media accounts.

But it also adopted a decentralized operational model whereby regional chapters operated independently of each other and most of its in-country members remained anonymous within the movement, while those living in exile abroad assumed public roles.

The in-country cells primarily banked on recruiting supporters through close-knit personal networks, while also waging a counter-propaganda campaign by distributing free underground newspapers.

Given the vastness of the movement's offline operations, the authorities outlawing it as "extremist" had little effect on its day-to-day work inside the country.

In addition to the importance of offline operations, the above case study also highlights the benefits offered by full digital anonymization or the creation of a digital persona.

Anonymity within the movement offers additional protections to both individual activists and the movement as a whole and can be achieved — among other measures — by adopting a nom de guerre and using a burner device for all activism-related work.

ANONYMITY WITHIN THE MOVEMENT OFFERS ADDITIONAL PROTECTIONS TO BOTH INDIVIDUAL ACTIVISTS AND THE MOVEMENT AS A WHOLE.

At the same time, a key prerequisite for successfully going anonymous is ceasing all personal social media activity.

Regardless of whether they choose the anonymous route or not, all movement members should consider measures such as those outlined in Graph 5.

GRAPH 5

| Using simple, easy-to-dispose devices for activist work | Using a tailor-made campaign VPN | Setting up a separate digital workspace | Switching to well-tested encrypted messaging apps |

NGOs and digital security enthusiasts have published an abundance of resources and checklists meant to aid activists, journalists, and small organizations. So why do they still fall prey to government surveillance and cybercriminals time and time again?

BECAUSE KNOWING DIGITAL SECURITY BASICS IS NOT ENOUGH AND TESTING IS EVERYTHING.

Our interviews with activists revealed that many implement digital measures at first but then become lax over time, particularly if there is a perceived lack of value in the measures or a reduced sense of threat from their opponents.

Building habits is an effective way to ensure people maintain hygiene measures, even during "calm" times. Habit across the campaign can be built using cost-effective training exercises driven by automation, such as phishing simulations with premade campaigns for purchase.

While individual training is critical for ensuring that members maintain basic digital hygiene measures on a daily basis, the campaign's central digital security leader must also be in charge of protecting the campaign's digital space. This includes setting up a campaign VPN, putting the network behind a firewall and creating permissions for information access.

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

It is no secret that activism is a demanding endeavor that takes its toll on one's physical health, as well as one's emotional and mental wellbeing.

Over decades of working with movements, we have repeatedly observed activists experiencing significant stress, burnout, survivor's guilt, and even suicidal thoughts or attempted suicides. It became increasingly evident to us that neglecting mental health can hinder the effectiveness of activism and that one's ability to drive sustainable change within communities directly depends on their emotional wellbeing. **Mental health and activism are closely intertwined, each profoundly influencing the other.** Therefore, both require thoughtful and deliberate attention.

Recognizing a knowledge gap when it comes to the mental and emotional challenges activists face, we conducted a multilingual survey among 43 activists hailing from 16 different countries and communities.

As expected, the results clearly concluded that respondents are waging their campaigns while navigating significant emotional well-being challenges, while carrying the weight of trauma.

SELF-CARE IS A VITAL ASPECT OF ACTIVISM.

SUSTAINABLE ACTIVISM REQUIRES MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT; WITHOUT IT, THERE ARE INHERENT LIMITS TO ITS EFFECTIVENESS.

55%
of respondents have experienced physical abuse at least once in their lifetime

41%
sexual abuse

25%
reported to have attempted suicide

Nevertheless, our results indicate that rates of suicidal ideation are in fact higher among activists compared to a national average. While activists are feeling the impact of these challenges, experiencing rage attacks or brain fog, 30% reported that they are "not comfortable at all" in asking for mental health help. The majority still indicated that if financial constraints were not a factor, then they would eagerly seek out emotional support, believing it would also signifcantly benefit their movement.

CASE STUDY 3

Let's consider the case of an environmental activist from Iraq, an **EXTREME** risk location.

One day the activist, who was then engaged in an advocacy campaign for sustainable solutions to water-related issues, heard a police siren while taking a walk. A few minutes later, he was detained, taken into custody, and tortured for several days.

Following the incident, the activist developed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition that led him to dissociate whenever he was reminded of his time in detention. Some encounters that triggered his PTSD included listening to someone else's recollection of their own detention, taking an academic course on autocracies, and hearing emergency sirens.

The condition had a profound negative impact on this person's ability to engage in activist work. He could no longer self-regulate and would feel as if he were "outside of his body" for hours on end.

To help manage his PTSD, the activist chose to engage in individual and group lessons led by a mental health expert, where he learned about trauma and nervous system regulation, and developed resources and techniques to support his wellbeing.

After working with a mental health specialist, the activist was able to fully resume his duties within the movement and establish a safe homebase in exile for himself and his family.

He continued to run the movement from exile and was able to make a remarkable contribution to the environmental cause through his role as a public speaker and advocate for water-related issues in Iraq.

Anxiety and burnout were two challenges the activists who responded to our survey face most frequently.

Burnout is a state characterized by emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion from prolonged stress that can lead to feelings of overwhelm, emotional drain, and a loss of motivation. As stress accumulates, it diminishes productivity, energy, and enthusiasm for the work toward positive change that once inspired a person's activism (see Graph 6).

GRAPH 6: **The 12 Stages of Burnout**

SEEKING TO FEEL VALUED OR WORTHY ENOUGH	WORKING PAST REASONABLE LIMITS	CHANGING LIFE TO ACCOMMODATE WORKING MORE	WITHDRAWAL	DEPERSONALIZATION	DEPRESSION
THE COMPULSION TO PROVE ONESELF	NEGLECTING NEEDS	REVISION OF VALUES	WITHDRAWING FROM SUPPORT SYSTEMS, VULNERABLE TO VICES	FEELING DISCONNECTED CYNICAL, ROBOTIC	APATHETIC, HOPELESS GIVING UP
01	03	05	07	09	11
02	04	06	08	10	12
WORKING HARDER	DISPLACEMENT OF CONFLICTS	DENIAL OF EMERGING PROBLEMS	ODD BEHAVIORAL CHANGES	INNER EMPTINESS	BURNOUT SYNDROME
TAKING ON MORE AND WORKING LONGER	'RATIONALIZING AWAY' PROBLEMS/ WARNINGS SIGNS	HARMFUL MENTAL NARRATIVES STRENGTHEN	ALARMING CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR	FEELING NUMB, MORE VULNERABLE TO VICES	MAY CAUSE MENTAL OR PHYSICAL COLLAPSE (MEDICAL ATTENTION RECOMMENDED)

The impact of burnout extends beyond activism, affecting one's personal life, work, and social interactions. But it can also lead to long-term health consequences and autoimmune issues, like irritable bowel syndrome, chronic pain, and fibromyalgia, among others, meaning that early intervention is critical.

ACTIVISTS CAN BE TRAINED IN TECHNIQUES THAT CAN HELP THEM HANDLE ACUTE MOMENTS OF STRESS — LIKE IN THE EVENT OF DETENTION OR INTERROGATION — AND MORE CHRONIC STRESS OR BURNOUT.

Tools such as psycho-education, meditation and breathing techniques, and learning the importance of sleep, healthy eating, and movement are key to maintaining the long-term emotional and physical wellbeing of activists.

PHOTO: Alexander Zemlianichenko AP

PHYSICAL

PHYSICAL SECURITY RESEMBLES COMMON SENSE SAFETY PRECAUTIONS FRAMED IN A STRATEGIC PLAN.

While digital security provides the foundation for protecting a campaign and emotional wellbeing ensures individual resilience, physical security is the cornerstone of an effective security strategy. It is a critical consideration in action and tactic selections when pulling pillars, as it deals with the most concerning risk of all — the threat to life.

Unlike a digital safety plan — certain aspects of which require specialized technical knowledge — physical security resembles common sense safety precautions framed in a strategic plan.

Any non-digital persons, objects, events, or actions that add value to a campaign constitute an attractive target for both criminal actors and political opponents.

Threat actors targeting a movement's physical assets can, in turn, be detrimental for an activist campaign.

At its core, doing physical harm to a member of a movement is not only meant to provoke fear, trigger demoralization and discourage supporters, but also to stifle the movement by inflicting a severe toll on the mental health of the victim and their fellow activists.

Much like digital threat actors, physical threat actors don't limit their work to certain operational hours. Activists — particularly those working publicly — are equally likely to be attacked during a direct action event such as a protest as they are during "off hours" in their daily life. More concerning even, the opponent will inevitably seek out other avenues to inflict physical harm, including targeting an activist's loved ones.

CONTINUOUS AND COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING IS KEY TO ENSURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A PHYSICAL SAFETY PLAN.

The risks individual members of a movement face and the protection protocols necessary to mitigate them vary according to their security environment, which can differ even within a single country (see, for example, Case Study 1).

Regardless of the level of risk, activists are physically most vulnerable when they are in transit between core locations (such as their home and a favorite cafe) or when traveling, as well as when they stay in one location for a prolonged period of time.

Most campaign opponents will have the upper hand when it comes to carrying out reconnaissance or an attack in public spaces. They use this advantage to identify activists' locations and routines by using extensive camera, microphone, and informant systems to surveil their movement patterns. An opponent then uses this information to ambush the activist, attacking them when they are most distracted by daily life — such as when they are using public transport, walking into their apartment building, or working on their laptop in a public space.

Day-to-day mitigation measures are intended to support activists in deterring or avoiding a physical threat, while tactic specific ones are meant to provide tools for reacting to a direct attack.

While it is important to ensure that activists in a movement have access to legal help, each individual must also know their legal rights, what to expect in the event they are detained, and basic talking points that should be followed during an interrogation.

Activists operating in HIGH and EXTREME risk environments are advised to always keep an emergency grab bag ready for use in case of detention or emergency evacuation (see Graph 7).

EACH ACTIVIST MUST KNOW THEIR LEGAL RIGHTS

GRAPH 7: **Emergency 'Grab Bag' Checklist**

ORGANIZE OTHER PERSONAL DOCUMENTS IN A SINGLE FOLDER, INCLUDING MEDICAL RECORDS

KEEP ORIGINAL TRAVEL DOCUMENTS (PASSPORT) WITH A TRUSTED CONTACT
ENSURES THEY ARE NOT TAKEN DURING A SEARCH

PASSPORT

MONEY

SMALL FIRST-AID KIT

MEDICATION

DISABLED SIM

CLEAN POWERED-OFF PHONE
(DO NOT TURN ON NEAR CURRENT/ ACTIVE PHONE)

HYGIENE PRODUCTS

CASE STUDY 4

Let's consider pro-democracy activists operating in Belarus, an **EXTREME** risk country.

Belarusian authorities frequently employ mass extrajudicial detentions, public humiliation actions, and torture in an attempt to silence pro-democracy activists and their suspected sympathizers.

In most cases, authorities carry out such actions in retaliation for "illegal" social media activities, which include reposting, commenting, or "liking" posts that criticize the government or express sympathy towards the opposition.
To continue their operations, most Belarusian activists incorporate extreme digital hygiene methods into their routine. For example, they regularly de-

lete emails, hide and anonymize their contacts, and sometimes completely delete their social media accounts.

Most also keep an emergency grab bag at home, which contains items needed to survive the first few days or weeks in prison, including a change of underwear and hygiene products.
To ensure the longevity of their movement and to maintain morale, some public activists operating in Belarus also choose to pre-record video appeals to their supporters. Such appeals are often shared with trusted independent media outlets or individual journalists able to publish the footage in the event of an activists' arrest.

PHOTO: Maxim Shipenkov/EPA

Similarly, **movements planning to use mass protests as a tactic of resistance should ensure that both their members and supporters participating in the action follow basic security precautions** (see, for example, graphs 8 and 9).

GRAPH 8   GRAPH 9

BASIC PROTEST PREPARATION CHECKLIST

DO'S

- Aware of facial recognition & cameras
- Phone in airplane mode
- Secure messaging apps (no open lines or SMS)
- Multiple clothing layers

DON'TS

- Connecting to Wifi networks
- Direct path to/from your home

WHAT TO TAKE WITH YOU:

- Subtle small disposable masks
- Passport copy
- Charged phone (ideally a clean, backup phone)
- Cash
- Water/ snacks
- Prescribed medication with official seals
- Hygiene products
- PASSPORT
- LAW FIRM
- Power of attorney

It might seem counterintuitive, but **everyday physical threats pose the highest risk to activists.** Such risks include, for example, road traffic accidents, opportunistic crime, and fraud.

As commonplace and trivial as such incidents might seem, they can impede a movement's work, at the very least by lowering morale among its members.

AFTER-
WORD

We hope that whether you are a practicing activist, an ally, an academic, an aspiring security practitioner, or a curious bystander, you found this report useful.

Most importantly, we hope that this snapshot of a year-long research undertaking showed that even though some might associate the word "security" with something daunting and complicated, much of it is, in fact, rooted in simple practices and thought processes.

When it comes to practitioners of nonviolence, we hope that this report reaffirmed your commitment to the practice by showing its multifaceted application, including when it comes to physical and digital resilience.
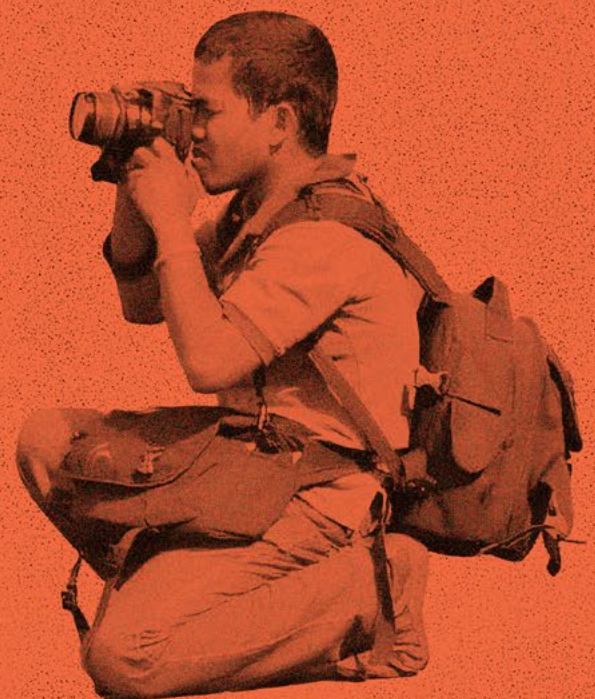
ANNEX A

SAMPLE MEDIA ENGAGEMENT PROTOCOL

1

CREATE A DEDICATED PUBLIC RELATIONS (PR) COMMITTEE

- Choose a public face/spokesperson for the movement
- Ensure that the person taking on the role is willing and prepared to take associated risks and train for them

2

REACH OUT

- Find reporters who cover causes and issues similar to yours
- Send a pitch when you spot a news story connected to your movement or when you have organized a successful action
- Start local (smaller media companies are more likely to respond)

3

PREPARE YOURSELF

- Make the interaction about your movement — not yourself
- Outline your key points
- Have important facts and figures to aid your perspective
- Be kind and friendly. Aim to establish long-term positive relationship with the media

4

PREPARE FOR THEM

- Consider if you or your movement could face legal repercussions for speaking with this news outlet
- What is the goal for those interviewing you?
- Who is the interviewer? Do they have a personal agenda they are likely to push?
- Think of the questions they are likely to ask and prepare answers beforehand

5 KNOW THE AUDIENCE

- What matters to them?
- Avoid touching on divisive topics and making polarizing statements

6 PROTECT SENSITIVE INFORMATION

- Predetermine names, locations, and circumstances that shall remain secret
- Avoid sharing future plans
- Protect whistleblowers (where applicable)
- Defend anonymity
- Prep whistleblower for social/professional cost of the story breaking
- Research international, country and local laws regarding whistleblower protection

7 DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Repeat key messages
- Use common language
- Share your message, not yourself
- Be brief and specific

8 AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- If it went well, send a thank you email!
- You can ask a reporter to see the final interview transcript before publishing, though journalists retain the right to refuse
- Only attempt to correct factual information that may be wrong. DO NOT get in an argument over opinions; you can't control the media, but you must maintain the relationship

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PROTECTION & RESILIENCE STRATEGIES

FOR NONVIOLENT ACTIVISTS