HOW TO TALK ABOUT CIVIC SPACE:

A GUIDE FOR PROGRESSIVE CIVIL SOCIETY FACING SMEAR CAMPAIGNS

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LIBERTIES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Political parties, nonprofits, churches, social movements and media outlets with authoritarian agendas are attacking progressive causes like human rights, social justice, environmental protection and equality, and the institutions that protect and promote them, including civil society organisations (CSOs). One of the reasons that authoritarian forces are able to advance their agendas is that they are adept at communicating in a way that mobilises their supporters and sways persuadable parts of the population over to their cause. Unfortunately, CSOs and others who promote progressive causes have difficulty developing messages that fire up their base and persuade people outside their existing supporters. If CSOs are to preserve and expand the vital role they play in protecting and advancing progressive causes, they need to build greater support among the public for the work they do.

This guide is a tool for campaigners who wish to push back against smear campaigns aimed at destroying public trust in CSOs that promote progressive causes. The recommendations and findings are also likely to be useful for those working in academia, national human rights institutions and international organisations that promote and protect progressive causes like human rights and are interested in engaging a public audience. As well as constituting intimidation of themselves, smear campaigns are often used by authoritarian governments and their allies to create public support for (or depress resistance against) regulatory measures to inhibit the work of CSOs.

The guide includes:

- A summary of research on public attitudes towards CSOs and what factors affect public trust towards CSOs.

- Examples of narratives, frames and messages that campaigners can adapt to their particular circumstances.

- An explanation of what kinds of arguments and habits campaigners should avoid using.

- For those wishing to dig deeper, an Annex containing a review of research into public attitudes towards CSOs.

This guide has been written with the situation facing CSOs inside the EU in mind. However, it is likely that much of the messaging advice is relevant for campaigners in other parts of the world.

Below is a summary of the principles of good communications on this topic, drawn from the contents of the guide.

Don't	Do
Repeat damaging frames by using your opponents' framing. When you directly contradict your opponents, you will usually be reinforcing their negative framing.	Lead with what you want to say. Check whether the terminology and framing you're using is working against you and re-frame if necessary.
e.g. Hypothetical situation:	*e.g. Reframed response that says what you stand for:*
The government proposes a 'Law on political interference' aimed at removing public benefit status from CSOs working on progressive issues.	*Most of us want representatives who listen to our concerns so that they can govern for all of us. We make it possible for those of us who want to, to come together to talk to our leaders about what we find important.*
Response that accidentally reinforces the damaging frame: *'Although CSOs talk about political issues, we do not interfere in politics. And we have much less influence than corporate lobbyists.'*	
Use a myth-busting approach for addressing smears. Myth-busting involves repeating your opponents' frame, which will reinforce it.	Use a 'truth sandwich' instead: a) lead with what you want to say b) allude to, but don't repeat, your opponent's smear and explain their malign motive and c) come back to your main message.
e.g. Hypothetical attack:	*e.g. Truth sandwich response:*
Activists are spreading an ideology that harms our children. We must stop this propaganda.	*No matter who we vote for, most of us agree that our leaders should govern for all of us. But some politicians are so desperate to hold onto power that they try to divide us based on who we love. They hope we'll be too busy blaming each other to realise the problems they've caused while they've been in power. But we know, no matter who we love, most of us want the same things, like being able to support our families and pay the rent. When we unite across our differences, we can demand leaders who work for all of us. That's what this government is afraid of.*
Myth-bust response:	
We are not spreading harmful propaganda. Recognising LGBTQI persons is not an ideology. It is a human right recognised in international law and our constitution that every person should be treated equally, no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation.	
Focus only on describing the harms of the problematic situation. Your audience will tend to interpret bare facts according to their 'common sense', which may include the content of smear campaigns.	When you explain the problem, break down who is doing what or what systems are in place that allow that harm to happen. If relevant, point to the motives behind those responsible for the harm.
e.g. Explanation of the problem that merely lists harms without explaining the agency:	*e.g. Explanation of the problem that explains the agency:*
The government is harassing us. The justice ministry has ordered tax inspections of 20 CSOs in the past 2 years. It has cancelled grants for and stopped existing cooperation agreements with CSOs offering legal and integration assistance to asylum seekers. Now we are being forced to publish lists with the details of all our donors on our website.	*The public services that our communities depend on are crumbling, because politicians in the ruling party are pocketing our resources for themselves instead of funding the things we need. To distract people from their failings, they're pointing the finger for these problems at people who come to our country and at organisations like ours who help people who migrate build a new life.*
If your audience's main understanding of CSOs comes from government smears about corruption and mismanagement, they may well interpret this list of harms as proof that CSOs aren't trustworthy.	

Don't	Do
Talk only about the problem. This can overwhelm your audience and make them feel like the situation is inevitable or cannot be solved.	Remind your audience of what the situation should be and what the world should look like. Once you've explained the problem, show them that there is a solution that they can support.
e.g. Message that focuses only on the problem and the situation that we do not want:	*e.g. Message that balances the problem against our vision and solutions:*
The ministry has excluded CSOs from taking part in planning decisions. This means that only corporations will have a voice before the committees that decide whether to sell them public land and build on it. Within a decade it will be impossible to enjoy our beaches unless we can afford to pay the entry prices demanded by a private park or hotel owner.	*Most of us look forward to summer days on the beach with family and friends. CSOs have spent the last 50 years making sure that all of us can enjoy our seasides by blocking planning decisions to sell off the coast. Now the ministry wants to kick us out of planning decisions so they can sell our beaches off to their corporate friends to build fancy hotels. Only the wealthy will be able to afford to enjoy our beaches. Let's keep CSOs on the planning committee so that our children and grandchildren can continue to enjoy days at the beach like we have.*
Talk about marginalised groups in a way that makes them seem separate from your audience. This will perpetuate othering.	Appeal to the shared humanity of people from the marginalised group by reminding your audience of what we have in common. Stimulate empathy with shared values, shared experiences and by bringing the issue closer to your audience and people they care about.
e.g. One in three women experiences violent or sexual abuse. We must ratify the Istanbul Convention to stop women and their children suffering harm.	*e.g. When we think of the women in our lives who are in relationships, we hope they're with partners who love and respect them. But some of us can end up in a crisis marriage where things aren't working, and a woman and her children are in real danger. We need to show care and compassion and offer them a route to safety. One day your sister, daughter, granddaughter or friend might need it.*
Use technical abstract language for non-expert audiences. This will make your audience tune out and makes it harder for them to connect the issue to shared values.	Break down the standards you're promoting by pointing out how they bring to life things that your audience finds important.
e.g. The right to freedom of association is guaranteed in international law and our constitution. It guarantees citizens the right to form and run an association, and to receive funding.	*e.g. When we work together we can accomplish bigger things than if we work alone. We have the right to create organisations so we can come together with like-minded people. Whether that's to play sports, negotiate a better wage with our employer, or talk to our leaders about our concerns.*

Don't	Do
Focus your messaging on how honest, transparent or well-managed your CSO is. This can backfire and instil or reinforce the idea that CSOs are not trustworthy.	Even when you're facing smears about corruption or mismanagement, focus your messaging on the values you promote and how these have a tangible impact on your audience's lives. Address disinformation using a 'truth sandwich' format.
e.g. Our organisation is fully accountable and our finances are transparent. We are audited every year by independent accountants to check that all our funds are spent legally. Most of our funding comes from foreign governments and foundations. They also check carefully that we spend all their funds in line with rigid safeguards	*e.g. No matter who we vote for, most of us agree that the leaders we elect should do what is best for everyone. But some politicians are passing laws that just help corporations who donate to their party. Like cutting taxes for businesses that should be contributing their fair share to fund our schools and hospitals. They don't like it when we call them out on this, so they try to make voters distrust us. We will continue to give you the information you need to work out if your representative is working for you or just for themselves.*
Rush into relying on the argument that CSOs are beneficial for the economy, security, tradition, religion, or your country's standing in the world when talking to a broader public audience. Unless they are carefully phrased, these arguments will tend to demotivate your base and move persuadable audiences in the wrong direction.	When speaking towards a broader public audience, root your messaging in favour of CSOs in arguments about how CSOs help give people control over their lives, allow citizens to work together and care for each other, and help us create a society where we all have the same chances to do well in life.
e.g. Our organisations are helping to keep down crime because we are promoting a more equal society. When people have more opportunities to do well in life, they are less likely to resort to crime for an income.	*e.g. Most of us want the same things, like a job that allows us to support our families and to be in good health. We're working with citizens to make sure that all of us have the same chances to do well in life. Whether that's having roads and buses that get us to work, or schools that give our kids the best start in life.*

I. ABOUT THIS GUIDE

A. Why write this guide now?

Progressive civil society organisations (CSOs) are a vital part of the infrastructure that promotes causes like human rights, equality, social justice and environmental protection. This guide is a tool for progressive CSOs to stimulate public support for the causes they promote and for the role they play in making democracy work for everyone.

During the last decade in the European Union, political parties, social movements, religious bodies, media outlets, think tanks and CSOs promoting authoritarian agendas have grown in strength and popularity. They have succeeded in halting or reversing progressive gains on a range of issues such as equality for women, LGBTQI persons and ethnic minorities, environmental protection, media freedom, the rule of law and democratic participation. As well as weakening progressive standards, authoritarian forces attack the infrastructure that protects and promotes them, such as progressive CSOs.

One reason for their success is that authoritarian forces are adept at communicating in a way that stimulates public support for and depresses resistance against their retrogressive agenda. Unfortunately, progressive CSOs do not tend to communicate in a way that people outside their existing supporters find persuasive. When authoritarian forces can increase public support and de-motivate resistance, they can implement their agenda more easily. To preserve and promote progressive causes, CSOs need to resist limitations on and expand their freedom to operate. Which means they need to build greater public support for the causes they promote and the role they play in facilitating democracy. This guide offers progressive CSOs messaging they can use to grow public support.

B. Who is this guide for?

This guide is for campaigners who wish to mobilise public support in favour of CSOs advancing progressive causes, particularly when facing smear campaigns and restrictions on their activities. The guide sets out narratives, frames and messages that activists can use for inspiration in their communications when campaigning. The guide has been written for campaigners working in EU member countries, and the guide's advice has been written with an EU context in mind. However, it is likely that the recommendations and findings in the guide remain useful for campaigners working in other regions, even if they require some adaptation to local circumstances. The recommendations and findings are also likely to be useful for those working in academia,

national human rights institutions and international organisations that promote and protect progressive causes like human rights and are interested in engaging a public audience.

C. Where do narratives fit into campaigning?

The narratives suggested in this guide are not final communications products. They are intended to be used as the basis from which campaigners can develop their communications products, such as videos, images, interviews and articles that convey their stories and messages. Campaigners should also take into account that a compelling narrative is only one element of a campaign strategy. For example, campaigners need to set measurable and achievable goals, determine which audience they should target to achieve these, learn about the views of that audience and how best to reach them. This includes understanding which channels to use, what kinds of communications products their audience prefers and what messengers are credible to them.

Depending on the resources available to campaigners, changing the public's way of thinking and the narratives that dominate public debate can take years. A one-off campaign in reaction to smear attacks, even if well crafted, is unlikely to be enough. This is why CSOs should treat narrative change as a continuous line of work that complements and is reflected in other tools such as advocacy, litigation and public mobilisation.

D. How is the guide structured?

The guide begins with a brief outline of public attitudes towards CSOs, and an explanation of the factors that influence opinions on CSOs; in particular, the role that shared values play in stimulating trust. It then gives recommendations for narratives, frames and messages that campaigners can use and adapt to their particular contexts. The guide then explains how your opponents communicate, why they choose particular messages, and sets out the kind of messaging campaigners should avoid and why. For those interested in further detail, annexed to the guide is a review of research into the factors that influence how the public forms attitudes about civil society.

Although the narratives, frames and messages in this guide have been developed using the best available research and expertise in progressive communications, they have not been tested. Campaigners are encouraged to test the suggestions in this guide, and develop creative outputs from these narratives that they can test with their target audiences.[1]

E. Terminology

This guide uses certain terms to mean specific things that might not be familiar to readers or that might mean

different things to the reader than intended by the author. For clarity, here are explanations of what the guide means when it uses particular terms.

A civil society organisation (CSO) refers to campaigners, activists, movements and organisations that promote progressive causes such as human rights, anti-corruption and environmental protection. It's not the author's assumption that CSOs only promote progressive causes. Rather, the term CSO appears so many times in the text that specifying 'progressive CSOs' on every occasion makes the text harder to read.

CSOs can be labelled in many ways. For example, 'activist', 'movement', 'NGO', 'rights group', 'campaigner', 'civic organisation'. The guide picks one term for consistency and to avoid confusion. This doesn't mean that campaigners should necessarily use this term in their communications to refer to themselves. You should be aware that the terms you normally use may have acquired negative connotations because of smear campaigns. For example, research in Italy in 2017 (when NGOs were under fierce attack for rescuing people who migrate) found that people reacted more negatively to the word 'NGO' by comparison to the word 'volunteer' or 'voluntary associations'.[2] Research in Canada also found that levels of trust towards NGOs differed depending on whether they were described as working on 'social justice', 'human rights', 'development'

or 'poverty'.[3] Whether the terms campaigners use have positive or negative connotations will depend on public debate in their country. This means it's entirely feasible that the same term could provoke different reactions in different countries.

Campaigners should consider testing how people in their country react to different terms. If the term you usually use has become a liability, then it may be time to start using another label and agree with other CSOs to popularise it.

Values refers to deeply held guiding principles that determine how we see the world, what we think is important and our attitudes, which in turn have an influence on our behaviour. Values tend to work in the background, and we tend not to be consciously aware of them. The messages that people hear repeatedly can trigger and reinforce certain values, which then have an impact on their attitudes.

A narrative refers to a line of reasoning that follows a specific four-part structure (values – problem – solution – call to action), that is designed to persuade your audience to support your position and act on it. A narrative frames the values, problems and solutions in a way that draws your audience to adopt your understanding of the phenomenon you're dealing with. For example, a narrative on marriage equality might go something like this: a) all of us have experienced love and most of us want

the freedom to commit long-term to someone we love; b) but the law denies this to some of us, just because we love someone of the same gender; c) we can change the law so that our grandchildren and children can grow up being able to commit to the person they love regardless of their gender; d) vote 'yes' in the upcoming referendum. Chapter III (Narratives that can stimulate support for CSOs and the causes they work on) explains in greater detail the ingredients of a narrative and includes examples for readers to adapt and use.

A frame refers to a mental model or short-cut. For example, if you think of a restaurant, it contains certain features (tables, waiting staff, a place to order and eat food) and excludes others (a doctor and an operating table). In the above example, marriage is framed as freedom to commit to a person you love. The law is framed as unfair and non-sensical for failing to reflect what marriage is about. The solution is framed as an act of love and care towards our own families that we can realise by changing the law.

(Values-based) Framing refers to the process of shaping a story or a message that promotes a particular narrative. In telling a story of a same-sex couple who aren't able to have their relationship legally recognised, one could choose to focus on how the couple is unable to get hold of that piece of paper that certifies a partnership that many of us take for granted. Or one could instead choose to focus on the love and commitment between the couple and how this is the same for heterosexual couples. The latter promotes the narrative outlined earlier better than the former.

A story refers to an account of something **happening** with a beginning, middle and an end. A message doesn't need to have this structure and can merely be a statement observation or slogan that captures the core of the narrative.

Authoritarian refers to an anti-human rights, equality, democracy, rule of law, environmental protection agenda. **Progressive** refers to being pro-human rights, equality, democracy, rule of law and environmental protection. These terms are not used in a party-political sense. It's possible for parties on the left and the right of the political spectrum to promote authoritarian or progressive agendas. In this sense, all member countries of the European Union have committed themselves to a progressive agenda, since all these principles are recognised as founding values, goals or legal standards of the EU.[4]
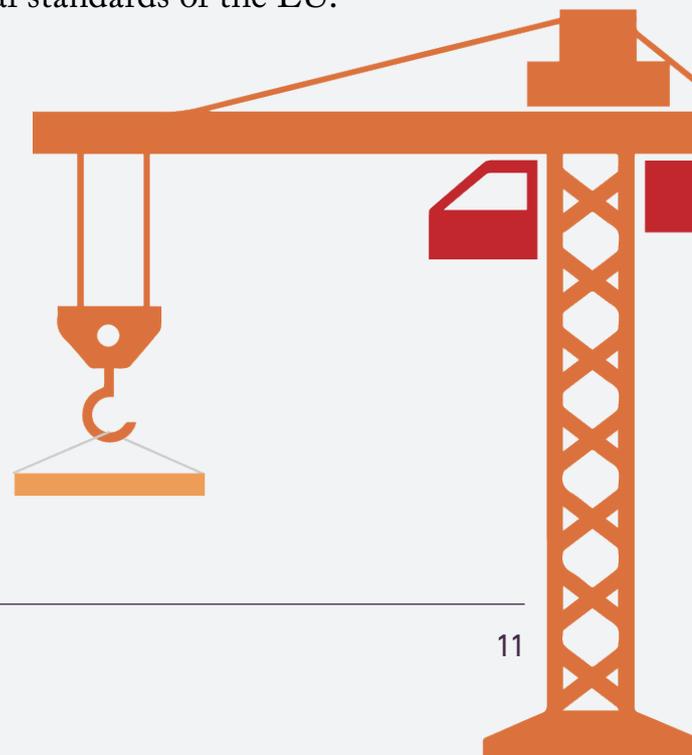
II. WHAT INFLUENCES PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS CSOS?

This chapter sets out what we know about how people form their attitudes on CSOs and progressive issues in general. It begins with a summary of research into public attitudes on CSOs; in particular, what ways of thinking people have about CSOs and what factors influence trust towards CSOs. This is primarily based on research covering EU countries, though it is likely that many of the findings, for example on trust, remain valid for other regions of the world. An in-depth review of this research is available in the Annex to this guide. This section also explains how public attitudes are influenced by the values that people prioritise.

A. What do we know about public attitudes on CSOs?

When developing narratives, campaigners should take existing public attitudes and ways of thinking into account so they know what ways of thinking they need to dissolve and what they can build on. Unfortunately, only a handful of surveys give us a peek into what people think of CSOs across the EU. Research concerning attitudes towards CSOs is patchy. Some surveys ask respondents what they think of CSOs in general. But it's likely that attitudes towards CSOs are affected by what topics they work on,

which is something these surveys don't tell us. Other surveys are more focused and look at particular CSO sectors in particular countries. But the number of these studies is low, so we don't have a comprehensive picture.

i) Attitudes towards CSOs

Having said this, it's possible to extract some general ideas about what people think of CSOs.

- Broadly speaking, CSOs are often see as more trustworthy and ethical than other institutions, like government, business and the media.

- The public also seems to have some understanding that CSOs play a role in making democracy work and that sometimes governments try to stop them doing their job.

- There is also evidence that the public sees activists themselves negatively, considering them to be militant, dictatorial and generally unpleasant. Furthermore, when the public thinks that an activist fits this negative stereotype, they become reluctant to support their cause.

ii) What can we take from this?

• The idea that CSOs are considered relatively ethical and trustworthy and that they play a role in facilitating democracy is a way of thinking that campaigners need to encourage in their audience. Campaigners can do this by communicating how CSOs promote shared values, such as allowing people to join together to demand that leaders hear their concerns and work for everyone.

• The recognition that governments sometimes try to stop CSOs doing their job is also something campaigners can build on by explaining that when governments impose restrictions on and smear CSOs, they do so for malign motives. When CSOs expose the ulterior motives behind disinformation, it makes it more likely that the public will reject the disinformation.

The suggested narratives, frames and messages in Chapter III (Narratives that can stimulate support for CSOs and the causes they work on) of this guide will give further examples of how to implement both of these takeaways.

• The negative images associated with the stereotypical activist may be a way of thinking that campaigners want to dissolve. Unless, of course, they have taken a strategic decision to be the more radical voice in a broader movement. If this is not the case, campaigners can counter negative stereotypes by adjusting their tone, having more of a dialogue about people's concerns (rather than telling people what they should think) and choosing the right messengers.

iii) Factors affecting trust towards CSOs

Most existing research tells us not what opinion people have of CSOs, but rather what factors shape their opinions. And in particular, what factors have an impact on trust towards CSOs. Trust is probably the key connection to their audience that CSOs need to cultivate. Research shows that people who trust CSOs are more likely to support them and the causes they promote. For example, by donating, volunteering, defending them from criticism, participating in protests and campaigns, or repeating their messages to others.[5] The messaging used by authoritarians to smear CSOs is calculated to undermine trust in CSOs. When public trust towards CSOs is low, it becomes easier for authoritarian governments to further harass them and restrict their activities because they face less resistance from voters.

Trust is mostly built on shared values. If your audience sees that you promote things that they find important, they're more likely to trust you. This means that CSOs should focus on communicating the values that they promote and

how they put this into practice. Section B (What role do values play in stimulating support for progressive causes?) of this chapter picks out in more detail which values to focus on to promote support for progressives causes, and Chapter III (Narratives that can stimulate support for CSOs and the causes they work on) gives examples of narratives, frames and messages that are likely to convey these values.

• It seems likely that trying to stimulate trust by focusing your communications on how accountable, responsible and transparent a CSO is, is likely to backfire. When you audience shares your values, they will trust you. Talking about safeguards like transparency makes it seem like you're not trustworthy, because it can make your audience question why you needed to create accountability mechanisms to begin with.

• In the EU, where CSOs are probably more engaged in advocacy or in providing services to marginalised groups (rather than the mainstream population), campaigners cannot expect people to instinctively understand how their work connects to shared values.

• As common sense might suggest, negative media coverage and smear campaigns influence levels of trust towards CSOs, and levels of trust towards CSOs vary from one country to another. Even during times of smear campaigns when trust may fall, it seems that a certain level of trust in CSOs always persists.

iv) What can we take from this?

• In situations where CSOs have not been smeared as corrupt or mismanaging their finances, emphasising your own transparency in your communications is likely to unwittingly cause your audience to call your trustworthiness into question.

• In situations where CSOs have been accused of corruption or mismanagement, focusing your communications on directly responding to these smears by talking about how accountable you are is likely to perpetuate the damaging message of your opponents. Instead, CSOs should always focus on communicating their values and what they're doing to bring these into their audience's lives. It's possible to address and discredit smears, e.g. mismanagement or corruption, using a 'truth sandwich', which is explained in Section B of Chapter IV (Some mistakes to avoid when you react to smear campaigns). This is not to say that CSOs should not be transparent about their finances or management. Rather, campaigners can refer people to where this information is published when asked, and focus their messaging on shared values.

• Campaigners need to get across to their audience the values they promote but also how their work implements those values. Campaigners need to speak in tangible terms that connect to the experiences of their audience. For example, rather than saying 'we promote the right to health', a CSO might say 'we believe that when a loved one is sick, we should be able to take them to see a doctor to get treated quickly, no matter what's in our wallet.' Further examples are given in the following chapters of the guide.

• Campaigners should find out what levels of trust are towards them in their country. There will be a 'base' in society supportive of progressive causes who is likely to be unmoved by smear attacks. But smear campaigns will mobilise your opponents and will shift people in the moveable middle of society to distrust you. Although support for CSOs won't collapse, it can shift by enough percentage points to make it easier for hostile governments to introduce restrictions on CSOs without fearing a voter backlash.

B. What role do values play in stimulating support for progressive causes?

Research from the field of social psychology shows that a fixed range of values is hardwired into humans across cultures. Although these values are present in every person, the priority an individual attaches to particular values varies depending on which values are emphasised by things like culture, the media, politicians, education, religion, workplace, upbringing and peers.

Research shows that individuals who are supportive of issues associated with progressive causes like human rights, social justice, equality and environmental protection tend to place more priority on values of universalism, benevolence and self-direction. Narratives that emphasise these values can stimulate support in a target audience for things like civil liberties, activism, social justice and climate action. Put otherwise, communications that trigger universalism, benevolence and self-direction can increase the priority that your audience attaches to these values and make people more supportive of progressive causes and the CSOs that promote them.

This means that when trying to stimulate support for progressive causes or support for CSOs to do their work in general, campaigners should try to stimulate self-direction, universalism and benevolence in their messaging. The guide will briefly illustrate these here. Chapter III (Narratives that can stimulate support for CSOs and the causes they work on) goes into much greater detail.

The value of self-direction is connected to individual freedom and autonomy. Campaigners can activate this value

FREEDOM • • BROADMINDEDNESS • • EQUALITY • UNIVERSALISM
SELF-DIRECTION • BEING PART OF NATURE • • PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT
CURIOUSITY • • INNER HARMONY
INDEPENDENCE • • A BEAUTIFUL WORLD • SOCIAL JUSTICE
CREATIVITY • A WORLD AT PEACE •
STIMULATION WISDOM •
DARING • CHOOSING • MY OWN GOALS • SPIRITUALITY
VARIETY • PRIVACY • • LOVE • FORGIVENESS
HELPFULNESS •
• AN EXCITING LIFE • FRIENDSHIP BENEVOLENCE
SELF-RESPECT • MEANING IN LIFE • • HONESTY
ENJOYING LIFE • RESPONSIBILITY • • LOYALTY
SELF-INDULGENCE • • PLEASURE • INTELLIGENCE
• HUMILITY
HEDONISM CONFORMITY
CAPABILITY • SELF-DISCIPLINE •
SUCCESS • POLITENESS • • HONOURING YOUR ELDERS DETACHMENT •
INFLUENCE • AMBITION • • HEALTH • MAINTAINING TRADITION • RELIGIOUS DEVOTION
FAMILY SECURITY •
ACHIEVEMENT SOCIAL ORDER •
• CLEANLINESS OBEDIENCE • TRADITION
SOCIAL • RECOGNITION • RECIPROCATION OF FAVOURS
A SENSE OF • BELONGING
WEALTH • • NATIONAL SECURITY • MODERATION
• AUTHORITY
SOCIAL POWER • PUBLIC IMAGE • SECURITY • ACCEPTING MY LOT
POWER

Taken from Holmes, T., Blackmore, E., Hawkins, R. & Wakeford, T., 'The Common Cause Handbook', Public Interest Research Centre, 2011. Based on research from: Schwartz, S. (1992). Universals in the content and structure of values: theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. In M.P. Zanna, ed. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 25. Orlando: Academic Press, 1992, pp. 1–65; Rokeach, M., 'The Nature of Human Values', New York: The Free Press, 1973.

by communicating how CSOs give the public control over their lives. An example of a message that does this would be:

'When we organise ourselves, we can speak with one voice and make our leaders listen to our concerns.'

Campaigners can also activate the value of self-direction by communicating how the causes they promote give individuals greater liberty. For example, a CSO that promotes the right to privacy might explain its vision in a way that stimulates self-direction as follows:

'Most of us want to feel free to share our opinions, get informed, watch entertainment or shop on the internet knowing we aren't being watched. At [name of CSO] we believe that all of us should have control over what we keep private about us when we're online.'

The values of universalism and benevolence are connected to the ideas of solidarity, caring and community. Campaigners can activate these values by communicating how CSOs allow members of the public to work together to demand their representatives

improve their lives. An example of a message that does this would be:

> 'When we are free to work together, we can make sure that our representatives listen to our concerns and fund the things we want for our loved ones, like good hospitals and schools.'

C. Should I try to persuade the whole of the public?

No. A campaign should always be designed with a defined audience in mind. Campaigners should first decide who the target audience of their campaign is, depending on their aim and resources, and then try to understand more about how that segment of the public thinks.

Societies, broadly speaking, can be segmented into three groups on moral issues. Those who will be predisposed to firmly support your position (the base), those who are firmly against your position (the opposition) and those who hold conflicted views and can be persuaded to go either way (the persuadables). This moveable middle group is usually the largest on any given issue and can often be broken down into sub-groups.

Shared values

When this guide uses the term 'shared values', it's talking about universalism, benevolence and self-direction as values that you share with your base and with the moveable middle.

An effective narrative will mobilise your base and persuade the middle. Generally speaking, campaigners will need to engage at least part of the moveable middle to gain sufficient support for big policy changes. Campaigners do not need to and should not aspire to persuade the opposition. This is because messages designed to resonate with your opposition will appeal to values (i.e. achievement, power, security, tradition, religion and conformity) and frames (e.g. that organisations and activities are only important if they create wealth) that are in conflict with yours and make people less supportive of progressive causes. If you broadcast communications based on these values and frames, you risk disengaging your base and depressing support for progressive causes among the moveable middle. Section B of Chapter IV (Some mistakes to avoid when you react to smear campaigns) gives campaigners examples of the kinds of arguments and messaging they should avoid because of the risk of triggering ways of thinking and values that will undermine their cause.

III. NARRATIVES THAT CAN STIMULATE SUPPORT FOR CSOS AND THE CAUSES THEY WORK ON

This section explains how narratives shape the way we understand a particular issue, what elements campaigners should include in their narratives and gives examples of what these could look like. Campaigners can then mix and match the examples given under each of the narrative elements and adapt these to fit their particular context to build a full narrative.

Narratives shape the way your audience understands your issue

Smear campaigns tend to portray CSOs as threatening, either because of the causes they promote or the groups they protect. They are portrayed as a threat to security, culture and religion, the economy and the 'natural' social order. These narratives are likely to dominate public discourse during smear campaigns. Prevailing narratives form the 'common sense' that your audience reverts to to make sense of facts.

When campaigners respond to smear campaigns, they often present bare facts and expect their audience to share the same understanding as they do. For example, CSOs may point out that the government has launched x number of administrative investigations into CSOs this year. CSOs may expect their audience to instinctively recognise that a) this is a problem and b) the authorities are harassing campaigners in an effort to silence criticism. But if the dominant narrative in the media

or social media has been that CSOs are corrupt, the audience may simply decide that there is good reason to investigate CSOs and that the number of investigations reflects the scale of the problem.

Part of the role of a narrative is to change problematic ways of thinking that prevail among your audience, or what your audience takes to be 'common sense'. Instead of presenting naked facts, a narrative explains the facts you want to highlight in such a way that the audience recognises them as problematic. It does this by reminding the audience of deeply held values and stimulating empathy. This encourages the audience to recognise that they share your values and vision of the world. The narrative then shows that there is dissonance between the audience's values and the situation. Another role of a narrative is to explain how and why the problem is happening. This steers your audience to share campaigners' understanding of the causes and opens them to endorsing your solutions.

Communications experts who use values-based framing to help campaigners win on progressive issues structure a narrative around four basic elements. All of these elements are important, and so is the order they come in. Research in the USA shows that starting with shared values, and then talking about the problem, is a lot more effective than starting with the problem.[6]

Structure of a persuasive narrative

Values statement: remind your audience of shared values and trigger empathy.

Explain the problem: who is doing what to cause or allow the problem to happen and why. What is the impact of this?

Explain the solution: show how your recommendations bring the situation back in line with their values.

Reminder of past successes and call to action: counter defeatist thinking and tell your audience how to show their support.

Fighting smears with a truth sandwich

When CSOs are facing attacks built on misleading information the standard response is usually to debunk the myths pedalled by your opponents. However, myth-busting is proven to backfire.[7] This is because myth-busting tends to involve first presenting the lie, and then picking it apart with facts and

statistics. When campaigners do this, they are repeating the disinformation and repeating a damaging frame, and then trying to disprove the frame with facts rather than change the conversation. This in turn perpetuates a 'debate' where your opponents' message is frequently repeated, embedding it further in public thinking.

For example, a smear campaign may allege that CSOs are foreign agents paid by governments or philanthropists with malign intentions to damage national interests. CSOs might be tempted to react to this with evidence that they are independent of their donors, or that their donors are supporting causes in line with the country's legal obligations. This messaging does not change the frame that CSOs have foreign connections, which is likely to have negative connotations. Instead, it keeps the frame centred on CSOs with foreign connections and tries to prove that this is nothing to worry about. But people tend to think in frames. Facts that conflict with frames 'bounce off'. People are likely to stick with the dominant frame and reject facts that aren't compatible with it. And in this example, the dominant frame they've been hearing about CSOs through a smear campaign, is that they're foreign agents. Directly contradicting a frame or using a myth-busting format risks making the disinformation stick when it's heard by people outside your existing supporters.

Instead, campaigners need to re-frame the debate while discrediting their opponents and without repeating the lie. Campaigners should only allude to the lie because repeating their opponents' lie will entrench it.

Experts recommend using a 'truth sandwich' to do this. A truth sandwich is structured like a normal narrative, except that when breaking down the problem, campaigners need to expose the malign intent behind the lie. The examples given in Section B of this chapter (Explanation of the problem) all do this. That is, the examples in Section B are written as if campaigners were reacting to an attack on them.[8] More examples of truth sandwiches are given in Chapter IV (Smear campaign narratives and how not to respond to them).

A truth sandwich allows you to change the frame of the debate. You get to concentrate on saying what you stand for and what you're promoting through your values statement and your solution. By explaining your opponent's bad intentions, you have a better chance of getting your audience to reject the disinformation. And by repeating your message through the values statement and solution, you create a better chance that this will stick, without reinforcing the lie.

> Tip: Choose a credible messenger. Campaigners should choose a messenger who will be trusted by their audience. Messengers should

be perceived as warm or personable and authentic, in that they have some competence or experience to speak on the issue and are not perceived as promoting a self-interested agenda. This means that celebrities aren't necessarily a good choice, because they won't be seen as competent to talk about the issue unless they have some lived experience. As mentioned earlier, the public may hold a negative stereotype of activists as militant, unlikeable and dictatorial – the opposite of warm. When using activists as messengers, campaigners may want to check whether they perpetuate this negative stereotype. There is also a possibility that activists may come across as self-interested, rather than genuinely working for the good of others. Having said this, frontline aid workers like nurses, doctors and teachers, were found to be good messengers to talk about development aid.[9] The need to be perceived as competent doesn't necessarily mean that credible messengers have to be experts. Successive editions of the Edelman Trust Barometer suggest that audiences may find 'a person like yourself' to be trusted messengers.[10] And this seems to be corroborated by campaigns that used 'ordinary people' as messengers.[11] Using 'people like me' as messengers probably helps to avoid the perception that this person might be self-interested. Research found that bishops and centre right politicians made credible messengers to talk about the topic of poverty. For bishops this was due to their moral authority (which probably combines competence and disinterestedness) in that particular country. While for centre-right politicians this was perhaps down to their disinterestedness: these politicians did not traditionally support anti-poverty measures and weren't seen to have an obvious interest in promoting economic and social fairness.[12]

A. Values statement

This element of the narrative activates underlying values in your audience. A values statement can refer to some kind of shared experience, or a reminder of what kind of treatment or situation your target audience wants for themselves and people like them.[13]

The values statement should trigger values of benevolence, universalism or self-direction because this increases support for progressive causes: whether that's the causes that CSOs are promoting or the rights that underpin civic space itself, like freedom of association and freedom of expression. The values statement also creates a yardstick against which your audience will evaluate the problem and the solutions you suggest. When you explain the problem, the audience will encounter dissonance between the values you have reminded them of, and the reality

of the situation. When you explain your solution, the audience will see how they can correct the decisions that created the problem and bring the situation back into line with their values.

A values statement helps you connect to the values behind abstract legal standards. Often campaigners invoke principles or standards that are probably only familiar to knowledgeable supporters. This may make it difficult for your audience to appreciate how your cause connects to things they find important. For example, communications experts found that saying that certain asylum policies were wrong because they breached the Refugee Convention did not motivate people outside the campaign's existing base of supporters.[14] Chapter IV (Some mistakes to avoid when you react to smear campaigns) also sets out research showing that an audience who does not understand the technical terms you're using will tune out.

It's not that there aren't values behind the legal standards in question. It's more that most of your audience doesn't understand how, for example, the freedom of association or freedom of expression or standards on air and water quality connect to everyday life. Put otherwise, it's more important to point to what clean water or the ability to work through associations do for us, than to point to the technical standards that protect them.

When campaigners are fighting against restrictions on civic space, they have two options for explaining how CSOs promote and implement shared values. First, in a structural sense, by explaining how CSOs make democracy work properly. Second, in a substantive sense, by explaining the particular issue they work on. Campaigners may want to choose which way of explaining shared values is most appropriate in the circumstances, or try to combine the two. For example, to explain the role that CSOs play in making democracy work and then pointing to substantive examples of causes that CSOs promote and how these connect to shared values.

Explaining the structural role CSOs play in making democracy work for everyone

When explaining how CSOs make democracy work properly, campaigners should avoid getting bogged down trying to explain what a CSO is, or what 'civic space' is. These are dry technical notions that only mean something to people working at CSOs and academics. Instead of trying to define what a CSO is, campaigners should explain the values that CSOs put into practice in a tangible way that brings to life the end products and experiences that people get to enjoy when CSOs have a supportive environment in which to operate.

Values statements that explain the importance of CSOs

Don't say	Try instead
A CSO is an organisation that is not a business, is not government, does not operate to create profits and pursues a charitable purpose.	Most of us want to know that no matter where we live or how much we have in our wallets, each of us gets a fair start in life / can count on clean air to breathe and water that's safe to drink. We work with citizens to demand that our leaders deliver on things all of us find important.
Civic space refers to the room that CSOs have to operate free from undue restrictions or burdens from the government.	When citizens are free to work together we can make sure that our representatives listen to our concerns and fund the things we want for our loved ones, like good health and a good education.

Academic researchers and communications experts have found that metaphors can be a very effective tool for helping your audience understand complicated concepts.

> Tip: To be effective, a metaphor should be easy to understand, easy to remember and easy to repeat. Campaigners should test their metaphors to make sure that they transmit the desired ideas and steer people towards the desired solutions. Sometimes a metaphor may seem very clever but can lead your audience to the wrong way of thinking. So it's best to do some testing.[15]

Campaigners often use a metaphor already by referring to some types of CSOs as watchdogs that make sure that those in power stick to the rules and who alert the public when this is not the case. All metaphors have their pros and cons. The advantage of this metaphor is that most people probably understand what a watchdog is and its role. A potential disadvantage is that watchdogs are often used to guard private properties, their job is to keep people out and that they are vicious animals that cannot be reasoned with. This could bring to mind the negative stereotype of activists as aggressive and militant. Further, the watchdog metaphor might not capture the idea that civil society is there to protect public rather than private interests, and that civil society is there to facilitate public participation in democracy rather than exclude the public from something private. One way to address the potential downside of this metaphor could be to use the term 'public (interest) watchdogs'.

Campaigners could try to test other metaphors to capture different facets of how CSOs make democracy work for everyone. The different functions

performed by CSOs include: providing services; facilitating democratic participation by giving the public a channel to express their views; and maintaining accountability by holding those with influence and power to accepted standards and laws. Below are some examples.

Bridge

In between elections, our representatives can seem distant from us. We build a bridge between us and decision-makers by offering everyone a way of reaching our leaders to tell them our concerns.

Choir

Any one of us can contact a politician, but it's hard for a lone voice to make itself heard. We help citizens join their voices together like in a choir. When many of us say the same thing at the same time, we're much louder and harder to ignore.

Strength of numbers

As individuals it's difficult to make powerful politicians listen to our concerns. But we have numbers on our side. We unite

with people from all walks of life so our leaders can't ignore us.

Trainer

To keep our democracy fit we need to exercise it regularly. It's not just about having one big workout every four years when we go to vote. We work with citizens to keep our democracy in shape by talking regularly to our representatives.

Health care

Doctors and nurses help us stay healthy by diagnosing when we are unwell and getting us treatment. We work with citizens to do the same for our democracy by alerting you when there are problems and working together to solve them.

Community centre

We're like a community centre where people can work together to do things to improve our communities. Whether that's delivering meals to older people who can't go out, picking up litter in our neighbourhood, or campaigning for better schools and roads.

Coach

Some politicians are more interested in helping themselves or their business friends than in doing what's best for the rest of us. We're

like a coach. We help concerned citizens get organised so we can score victories for things like better education, fair pay or cleaner air.

When explaining the structural contribution of CSOs as making democracy work properly, campaigners may also need to talk about the core set of rights that allow them to do their job. This would be the case when the government is trying to restrict particular rights, such as freedom of association, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression and information. Below are some examples of how these rights might be broken down in a way that appeals to shared values.

Values statements that explain the importance of particular rights relevant to civic space

Freedom of association

When we work together we can accomplish bigger things than if we work alone. This is why have the right to create associations. We work through organisations to share our love of sports with like-minded people. Or to negotiate fair pay with our employers. Or to speak to our representatives about things that matter to us, like having clean air to breathe or being able to get the medical care we need to stay healthy.

Media freedom

Every day politicians make choices that affect our lives, whether that's what our children learn at school or how frequently your local bus runs. When our leaders know that we are watching the decisions they make, they're more likely to do what's best for us. But to get this information we rely on journalists who can report the truth, without pressure from politicians and corporations.

Freedom of assembly

We all want our representatives to do what's best for us. We need a
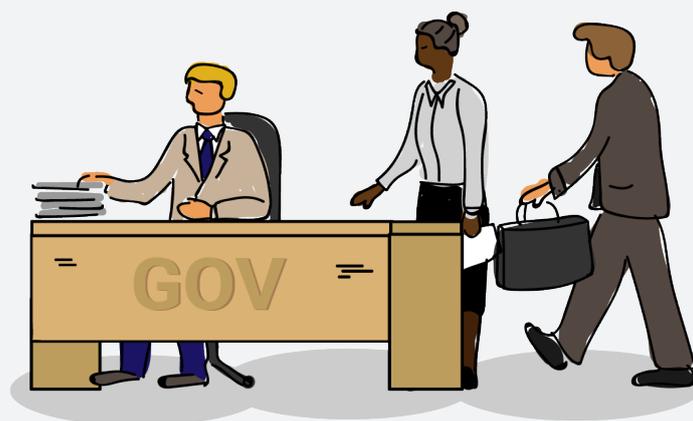
way to tell our leaders what we're concerned about, whether that's better roads or the cost of rent. This is why we have the right to protest. So we can join our voices with other concerned citizens and communicate with our representatives. It's by telling our representatives what we want while they're in power, in between elections, that we bring our democracy to life.

Depending on the circumstances, campaigners may also find it appropriate to focus on explaining the values behind the particular cause that they are promoting, rather than just explaining the structural role of CSOs in democracy. Below are some examples of how campaigners can do this.

Values statements that explain particular causes your CSO might be working on

The right to a clean environment

Most of us want good health for ourselves and the people we love, especially our children. Being healthy makes us free because it gives us independence and allows us to enjoy a long life. And that means having fresh air to breathe and water that's safe to drink.

Our right to a clean environment means our leaders have to protect the things we rely on for our basic health.

The right to seek asylum

We all want somewhere to call home. If we were forced to leave our homes, we would hope to find people who offer us shelter so we could build a new life for our families. When a person comes here asking for asylum we should treat them with dignity and compassion.

When CSOs want to communicate the shared values behind the cause they promote, but this cause entails promoting equality for marginalised groups, there is a risk that campaigners can accidentally perpetuate 'othering'. This happens when campaigners point to the harm being suffered by persons from this group without dissolving the perceived differences between your audience and the group in question. Campaigners need to appeal to the shared humanity of your audience and the marginalised group. Otherwise, your audience will at best only feel sympathy for 'them' or an 'other', instead of feeling empathy for people who are part of 'us'.

When your audience thinks of someone from a marginalised group as 'someone just like me' they're less likely to agree with smear campaigns that portray them as threatening and more likely to agree that everyone should get the same kind of treatment. Put otherwise, this broadens the audience's idea of who is part of 'we' by creating a larger notion of 'us'. Below are some examples of how you can stimulate empathy and highlight the common humanity of people from a marginalised group for your audience. There are different ways that campaigners can stimulate empathy in their values statement.

• Appeal to shared experiences. Campaigners can incorporate shared experiences into their values statement. For example, campaigners promoting marriage equality in Ireland and USA used messaging that reminded their audience that most of us have fallen in love, that we want the freedom to commit to the person we love, and that people value these things regardless of sexual orientation.[16] Similarly, campaigners promoting more humane treatment of persons who migrate have successfully used messaging that highlights how their hopes, aspirations, likes and dislikes are no different to those of their audience.[17]

• Connect your issue with your audience's loved ones. Sometimes it's difficult to get your audience to see themselves in the situation of the group you're talking about. However, it might be possible to get them to envisage people close to them being in such a situation in the future. For example, campaigners working on marriage equality asked their audience to consider their children or grandchildren who may grow up loving someone of the same gender.[18] Similarly, campaigners working on access to abortion asked their audience to consider which woman in their life might one day need their 'yes' vote in a referendum on access to abortion.[19]

• Choose a messenger whom your audience will see as 'someone like me'. And consider the perspective from which you tell stories. For example, to help an audience recognise how marginalisation of certain groups is bad for society as a whole, it may be helpful to include in your campaign materials a story told by someone from the majority population who can explain how marginalisation of other groups negatively affects them.

Below are some examples of how CSOs could ensure that their appeal to shared values stimulates empathy rather than sympathy.

Values statements that explain the importance of equality while stimulating empathy

Marriage equality

Most of us have fallen in love. We take for granted that we are free to make a commitment to spend the rest of our lives with that special person. When we look at our children and our grandchildren, we have the same hope for them. They should be able to commit to the person they love, regardless of who they are attracted to.

Equal access to education and employment

Everyone deserves an equal chance to succeed and make a good life for themselves and their families. When we do well in life, it's because we have access to services that help us stay in good health, get an education and get a job. We should make sure that these resources are available to all of us in society, regardless of whether we are white, black, or [other marginalised group], so that we can all thrive together.

The right to escape domestic violence

Many of us are in healthy relationships where we respect and love each other. But some people find themselves in a crisis marriage where the relationship isn't working. And that can become dangerous, especially for women and their children. We need to show care and compassion and offer them a route to safety. You

may have a sister, daughter, granddaughter or friend who finds themselves in need of support one day.

B. Explanation of the problem

The second step of the narrative explains what the problem is. The way you frame the problem should already set up your solution. Put otherwise, from the way you explain the problem your audience should already start to see for themselves what the appropriate solution is.

There are two parts to explaining the problem. First, showing the 'harm'. Second, explaining the agency behind the harm. That is, who is doing (or not doing) what to allow or cause this harm, or what rules and systems are in place that allow or cause this harm. And, if relevant, what's the motivation behind the people or systems responsible for the harm. Traditionally, CSOs tend to concentrate their communications on talking about the harm but not the agency.

It is vital to explain the agency behind the problem. If you present statistics or facts (e.g. about arrests of protestors) without this explanation, your audience will just rely on prevailing ways of thinking (such as negative stereotypes about disruptive activists) to interpret them. They will also be more likely to think that these harms are inevitable (even if they are regrettable). This

means that campaigners should never talk about the harms of restrictions on civic space without also talking about the agency.

Campaigners often present bare facts and expect their audience to share the same understanding as they do. For example, by pointing out that the authorities have cut their access to funding, campaigners might expect the audience to a) recognise that this is a problem and b) understand that it's a malicious tactic to escape scrutiny and accountability.

In reality, the audience interprets these bare facts according to prevailing ways of thinking about CSOs. Put otherwise, the audience will fill in their own reasons for why the authorities have cut their funding and decide whether it's problematic according to their 'common sense'. This 'common sense' is made up of ways of thinking and ideas they have absorbed from the media, politicians and others who shape how they understand the world. If government and media smear campaigns allege that CSOs are wasteful, or are serving foreign interests, much of your audience may simply decide that the reason for funding cuts is that CSOs are corrupt or dangerous.

This is why campaigners have to go beyond just presenting the facts and also explain how and why the problem is happening. This steers the audience to share campaigners' understanding of

the causes and opens them to endorsing your solutions.

Sometimes the measures used against CSOs can be difficult to explain. Here are some suggestions for metaphors to explain the nature and impact of popular tactics designed to cripple CSOs.

Explanations of certain problems facing CSOs in the form of a metaphor

A diversion

Smear campaigns are like a clever diversion. They're designed to make everyone look away while a thief slips their hand in the cash drawer.

Gossip

Smear campaigns are like a corrupt boss spreading nasty gossip about an honest worker. They're designed to discredit the worker so no one will listen to them when they point out what the boss is doing wrong.

Weights

Made-up lawsuits are lead weights the government hangs on campaigners. They are designed to exhaust CSOs so that they don't have enough money or energy to help citizens organise.

Drowning

The government is piling unnecessary bureaucracy on CSOs to drown them. Because so much energy goes to keeping their head above water it's harder for CSOs to keep the public informed or organise protests.

Foul play

Blocking funding to CSOs is like stealing the referee's shoes before a match. It allows some politicians to cheat and break the rules without getting caught because the referee can't keep up.

Smear campaigns are often part of a deliberate strategy to distract and divide the public and neutralise CSOs to stop them from informing and mobilising the public and otherwise holding the government accountable. This is often because of one or a combination of two reasons. First, because governments want to silence criticism from CSOs over corruption or other shortcomings. Second, because governments or parties aspiring to power are pursuing a strategy of scapegoating and division according to which they invent a threat (such as CSOs themselves or the marginalised groups they protect) which they claim they will address as a way of attracting voters. Below are some examples of how campaigners might explain these tactics of division and distraction. As mentioned

earlier, it's particularly important to explain the malign intent behind attacks on CSOs when campaigners are reacting to smear campaigns. This part of the 'truth sandwich' helps to discredit your opponents, so that your audience is more inclined to let go of the disinformation. It's also important, when explaining the reason behind the smear, not to repeat it, but only to allude to it. If you avoid repeating the lie then you're not contributing to entrenching it.

Explanations of particular problems facing CSOs, including the malign motives of your opponents

CSO funding

As many of us know, our schools and hospitals are falling apart because our government has not funded them. Instead, some politicians have wasted our contributions on corruption, giving out public contracts to business friends in return for bribes and special favours. The government wants to cut funding to CSOs so that we can't call out these failings and organise protests with concerned citizens.

CSO consultation

A few greedy politicians are keen to help their business friends get rich building holiday resorts in return for kickbacks and favours.

The minister wants to stop CSOs taking part in the consultations over building permits so that citizens can't have their say. Because they know that most citizens want this land to be there for everyone to enjoy, not just the few who can pay for an exclusive hotel.

Strategic division

A few politicians are only interested in power and influence. The only way they can stay in government is by spreading fear and hate. They try to divide us against each other based on who we love or who we pray to. And then they claim that only they can protect us from a threat they invented. They attack organisations like ours, because we want to unite people across their differences. When we join together, we can demand leaders who work for all of us. That's what these politicians are afraid of.

Strategic lawsuits

Our leaders are meant to do what's best for us, not just what is good for corporations who donate to their party. But some of our politicians are doing dodgy deals with public resources and they don't like it when we call them out. To silence criticism, they drag us through the courts. Even though they know they can't win they hope we will give up our investigations. They want to bankrupt us with years of legal fees

or make us collapse under the stress that court cases cause in our personal lives.

C. Explanation of the solution

When explaining the solution it's important to break down how your proposed solution can bring the situation back into line with the values you set out earlier - whether that's related to the particular values you promote or to making sure government works for its citizens. If you want your audience to support a change in law or policy, then your solutions should be structural in nature rather than about how individuals can change their behaviour. Campaigners should also avoid getting bogged down describing detailed policies. That's fine for advocacy towards law-makers, but a public audience will tune out. When talking to the public, try to 'sell the brownie, not the recipe'.[20] In other words, talk less about the policy and more about the end result that the policy delivers and the difference that the policy will make to people. Campaigners should also try to frame their recommendations in a positive way, even when they are opposing something that the government wants to do. Don't just talk about being against / saying 'no' to a restrictive measure. Instead, try to focus on what keeping the status quo allows you to do. Below are some examples. On the left are solutions that are phrased negatively and / or are too focused on policy to work with the public.

Explanations of solutions to particular problems facing CSOs

OK for policymakers	OK for public audience
On CSO funding Say no to abolishing the 1% rule[21] that allows citizens to donate a percentage of their income tax to CSOs they support.	Our groups are working to make sure that all of us, no matter where we live, who we pray to or who we love, get the same chances to make a good life for ourselves and our families. Keeping the 1% rule allows citizens to remain free to donate to causes that make all of our lives better.
On CSO consultation The government shouldn't be allowed to exclude CSOs from planning decisions. Planning decisions should be taken by an independent committee, which should have to consult and listen to citizens and CSOs	It's time to rewrite the rules about what happens to our shared resources. It should be up to citizens, not corporations, to decide what happens to our land. The new consultation law will make sure everyone can keep enjoying summer days with our families on our beaches, by our lakes and in our forests.
On strategic division We want politicians to sign up to a code of conduct that makes clear that hateful, divisive speech isn't acceptable. An independent ombudsperson should make sure that MPs follow the code of conduct by investigating violations.	The code of conduct will mean that our representatives will have to work harder to deliver what we all find important like good schools and hospitals. Because they will no longer be able to distract us from their mistakes by spreading hatred and division.
On strategic lawsuits We need a new justice law that will allow judges to throw out manifestly unfounded legal cases and protect CSOs from harassment.	If a corrupt politician knows that they can shut down investigations into them, they will use their powers to get rich instead of serving the public. Because voters will never find out. By re-writing the justice law we can make sure that voters get to know when they have a crooked politician.

D. Call to action and reminder of past successes

Although your solution is structural in nature, your call to action is meant to show people what they can do to make that solution happen. This could be asking your audience to support a petition, take part in a protest or simply share your content online. It's also helpful to point to past examples of where people have achieved big changes by working together. This is to overcome scepticism in your audience that 'nothing ever changes'.[22] This doesn't have to relate directly to your subject - it could be something more generally connected to social justice that resonates

with the particular culture or history of the country where you're campaigning. This element of the narrative will be highly specific to your campaign and your country's history, but below is an example of what it might look like.

> If you would like to make sure our leaders do what's best for all of us, share this post / sign our petition. Just like in the past, when we pulled together to get paid parental leave for men and women / a universal basic income for everyone, we can demand representatives who care for us.

E. What a narrative looks like when you put all the pieces together

> **Values statement**
>
> Most of us want the same things – a fair-paying job that allows us to put food on the table, a roof over our heads and free time to enjoy with our family and friends. We're working with citizens to make sure that all of us have the same chances to do well in life. Whether that's having roads that get our children to school or hospitals that help keep our loved ones healthy.
>
> **Explanation of the problem**
>
> But instead of using our shared resources to fund things like hospi-

tals and schools, certain politicians are giving lucrative contracts to their business friends while taking kickbacks. Our community services are collapsing because the rules allow corrupt politicians to misuse the resources we've contributed. And now they turn around and point the finger at us, hoping to cover up their failings.

> **Explanation of the solution**
>
> We need to join together to demand that our leaders fund our communities and create the care and services we all need. By creating an anti-corruption unit, we make sure that all of us can rely on the public services that give everyone a fair shot in life.
>
> **Point to past success and call to action**
>
> Just like in the past when we won victories like the right to parental leave, today we can fund our communities. If you agree, share this post and sign the petition.

As mentioned in the introduction, your narrative serves as the source from which you derive your communications products. Here are some examples of what the texts of different communications products drawn from this narrative might look like.

1-minute video voice-over script:

Well-trained teachers who can get the most out of our kids. Decent roads that take us to work or to see friends and family. A modern hospital to treat our loved ones. This is what most of us want for our communities. But the services we depend on are crumbling. Because the current rules make it easy for some corrupt politicians to divert the resources we contribute for each other, into their own pockets. An anti-corruption unit can protect our contributions and make sure that our government funds the things our communities depend on. What needs funding in your community? Share your story on #FundOurCommunities.

Social media post:

Most of us want good schools & hospitals for our children. But the services our communities depend on are collapsing because some politicians line their pockets with our resources. An anti-corruption unit will allow our contributions to fund the teachers & doctors we rely on. [Include an image that captures what you want your communities to look like with text 'Share your story on #FundOurCommunities'].

Quote for media:

The anti-corruption unit will help our communities thrive by protecting the contributions we make to fund our services. Politicians who are against this unit are saying that our resources belong in their pockets instead of in the roads, libraries and hospitals we all depend on.

Slogan:

#FundOurCommunities

IV. SMEAR CAMPAIGN NARRATIVES AND HOW NOT TO RESPOND TO THEM

This chapter outlines the messaging used by those promoting authoritarian agendas to attack progressive causes and the CSOs that promote them. Your opponents use values-based framing to undermine trust in you and stimulate opposition to your work. The chapter then lists a number of messaging habits of CSOs that are likely to backfire, such as accidentally perpetuating the smears you're trying to counter.

A. Your opponents' messaging is calibrated to destroy trust and stimulate authoritarian attitudes

It's useful for campaigners to be able to recognise the narratives that authoritarians use to smear CSOs. These narratives are designed to undermine trust towards CSOs. They do this by appealing to values that underpin authoritarian attitudes and alleging that these are under threat, or are not shared by, CSOs. Authoritarians portray CSOs as either promoting causes or trying to protect groups that threaten certain values.

Readers will notice that authoritarians use almost the same narratives to attack all the groups that they dislike. This includes marginalised groups themselves, or other institutions, like CSOs, whom they claim are part of an 'elite' that is facilitating the decline of 'the nation'. Apart from CSOs, these 'elite' institutions can include the judiciary, the media, mainstream politicians, international organisations like the UN or the EU and the cultural sector. These attack narratives can be summarised as follows.
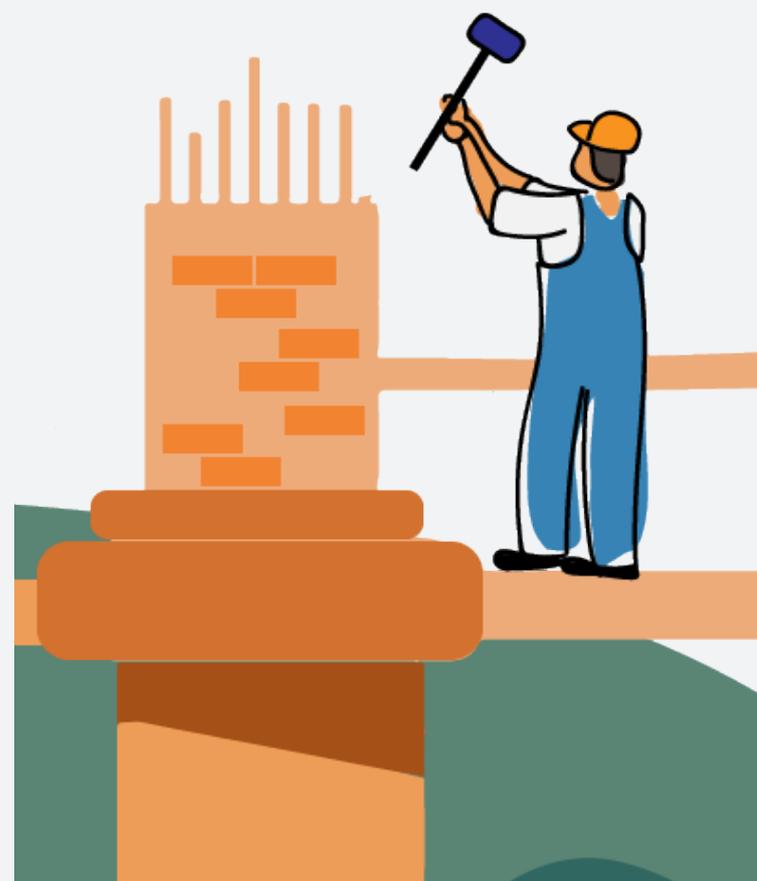
	Value	Reason given by authoritarians
CSOs threaten…	Security / health / stability / tradition / culture / religion	They protect people who migrate / ethnic minorities who are a threat to security or health or to tradition or religion
		They want to change traditional gender roles and identities and the meaning of the family
		They want to harm children with a liberal / progressive education
		They are violent / involved in crime / terrorism
		They are serving the malign interests of (foreign) donors
		They want to take away traditions such as a meat-eating diet, using petrol or diesel in our cars, using coal, oil and gas to heat our homes or generate electricity
	'Natural' hierarchies (either internal socio-economic order or the country's standing compared to others)[23]	They help people who migrate who will take jobs / resources
		They want to take away our jobs, resources and the few luxuries we have by promoting a 'green' agenda
		They want to give preferential treatment to certain groups at the expense of 'ordinary' people (e.g. women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQI persons, the homeless, prisoners, children)
		They want to make animals, plants and the environment more important than people
		They are damaging our economy and making our country weaker, e.g. by trying to close our industries or trying to prevent capitalism / free trade
CSOs don't share …	Public's values in general	They work on things that are not important / irrelevant e.g. culture and arts
		They don't share our identity e.g. they are urban / cosmopolitan / middle class / arrogant / militant / violent
		They behave like political parties promoting partisan agendas instead of sticking to 'real' charitable causes

Attacks against CSOs also include narratives that are less about values the CSO promotes through its work and more about the organisation's internal values: whether it is honest and responsible. These often come in the form of accusations that a CSO is wasteful or corrupt because it uses donations

irresponsibly, e.g. by overpaying their staff or misusing funds for personal benefit.

As well as portraying CSOs in particular as threatening certain values, the narratives used by authoritarians also trigger the worldviews that underpin authoritarian attitudes more generally. Research shows that messaging designed to make the public feel that their safety, health, culture, religion, economy, laws, traditional social hierarchies, or the international standing of their country are under threat stimulates support for authoritarian attitudes among those who are pre-disposed to authoritarian worldviews as well as the moveable middle. The attitudes triggered by these narratives include support for restrictions on rights and principles that are key to the proper functioning of civic space, such as free speech, the right to protest, the rule of law and parliamentary democracy. This messaging also triggers opposition to the progressive causes that CSOs work on, such as environmental protection, equality and civil liberties.[24]

Tip: Without public attitude research on your country it will be difficult to know exactly what public attitudes towards CSOs are. However, prevailing narratives influence how people think of CSOs. This means that during smear campaigns, part of the population is likely to be influenced by the narratives advanced by your opponents to a degree. This will mostly affect the attitudes of your opponents and the moveable middle, rather than your base. In practice, this means that the persuadables among your audience will hold conflicting (positive and negative) views of CSOs.

B. Some mistakes to avoid when you react to smear campaigns

There are several unhelpful habits in the way that CSOs tend to communicate. These messaging mistakes might not lose you support among your base. But they will not energise your base to spread your message, and they will not sway people in the moveable middle to support you.

i) Don't repeat unhelpful frames

It is common for anyone who wants to talk about an issue to use the terms that are most frequently used around that topic, especially for CSOs who want to get picked up by the media. But this can be problematic when the terms being used reinforce frames that work against the attitude or solution you are promoting. One of the most common situations in which campaigners repeat damaging frames is when they contradict them. This is one reason that activists should avoid using myth-busting as a technique to rebut attacks.

Campaigners may have come across the example given by George Lakoff of how George W. Bush framed tax cuts in the USA for top earners as 'tax relief' as if tax is a burden or affliction. Lakoff argues that even though Democrats attacked the policy of 'tax relief', they helped to entrench this thinking that tax is an unfair burden, because they repeated the frame.[25] An alternative might have been for Democrats to talk about taxation more positively as the building blocks for the things all people need to succeed such as schools, roads, and hospitals. A more recent example includes an attack on immigration lawyers in the UK. The Home Office attacked the latter as 'activist lawyers', framing legal practitioners working on asylum and migration as political activists. When lawyers and CSOs criticised this slur they repeated it, because they argued either that they weren't activists, or that if upholding the law amounted to activism, then they were proud to be activists.[26] An alternative might have been for those defending legal professionals to argue that someone in our care asking for refuge because they're in danger, is entitled to a fair hearing. Similarly, the Hungarian government recently framed a law designed to stoke homophobia and division as a 'law against paedophilia'. It became common to refer to the law using the government's labelling, even among those criticising the legislation, which probably helped to entrench the government's framing in public thinking. [27]An alternative might have been to frame the law as a tactic to divide and rule. For example, by saying that the ruling party is so scared that the political opposition can unite voters to demand better government that it will spread hatred to divide citizens against each other. Or to reframe opposition to the law as a demand that children be taught the truth about relationships, which is that they are built on love, respect and mutual support, not on gender.

Below are some examples of how a CSO might respond to attacks against them by reframing the debate to carry their own message.

Don't say	Try instead
CSOs are not… traitors / criminals / foreign agents / leftist activists / a drain on public funds	CSOs help concerned citizens come together and tell our representatives what we want from them. CSOs help keep the public informed about how our representatives are using our shared resources / the powers we have given them. CSOs help make sure that governments and corporations aren't breaking the law, for example, by taking them to court for corruption or spreading false information.

ii) Don't use myth-busting, use a truth sandwich instead

Sometimes simply reframing the issue may be enough to change the debate. But campaigners may also find it necessary to correct damaging disinformation. As explained in the previous section, a myth-busting format is likely to backfire. This is because it involves repeating your opponent's message and framing of the issue. Campaigners should instead use a truth sandwich format.[28]

Truth Sandwich

- Say what you stand for using a values statement

- Point out that the problem is that your opponent is lying for some ma-

lign reason (e.g. to divide or distract the public). Allude to but don't repeat the lie

- Return to what you stand for, expressing it as the solution or way forward

A truth sandwich allows you to repeat your own message and discredit your opponent by revealing the malign ulterior motive behind the lie. Below are some short examples showing hypothetical smear attacks, a myth-busting approach and then an alternative truth sandwich. Note that if a truth sandwich isn't being used in the context of a campaign, it need not necessarily include a call to action.

Don't say	Try instead
Hypothetical attack: Activists are spreading an ideology that harms our children. We must stop this propaganda. Myth-bust response: We are not spreading harmful propaganda. Recognising LGBTQI persons is not an ideology. It is a human right recognised in international law and our constitution that every person should be treated equally, no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation.	No matter who we vote for, most of us agree that our leaders should govern for all of us. But some politicians are so desperate to hold onto power that they try to divide us based on who we love. They hope we'll be too busy blaming each other to realise the problems they've caused while they've been in power. But we know, no matter who we love, most of us want the same things, like being able to support our families and pay the rent. When we unite across our differences, we can demand a government that works for all of us.
Hypothetical attack: CSOs are corrupt. They take money donated by ordinary people and give themselves huge salaries and fancy dinners that most people can only dream of. Myth-bust response: Our organisation is fully accountable and our finances are transparent. We are audited every year by independent accountants to check that all our funds are spent legally. Most of our funding comes from foreign governments and foundations. They also check carefully that we spend all their funds in line with their safeguards.	We're working to keep voters informed about how our representatives are using the resources we have contributed. Some politicians are giving lucrative contracts to their corporate friends to line their pockets without delivering the services we need. When we inform citizens how our resources are being misused, ministers point the finger at us. Join us to make sure this government funds the services our communities depend on.

iii) Don't co-opt the kinds of arguments used by your opponents: they're likely to trigger values and worldviews that underlie authoritarian attitudes

As noted in Chapter II Section C (Should I try to persuade the whole of the public?), campaigners should avoid using messaging that can activate the values and worldviews underlying support for authoritarian attitudes, when broadcasting their message to a broader public audience. Research shows that there are two worldviews that underpin authoritarian attitudes. People with strong authoritarian attitudes hold one (and sometimes both) of these worldviews. First, 'right-wing authoritarianism'. People who hold this worldview see the world as an inherently dangerous and unstable place and are sensitive to perceived threats to tradition, religion, security and stability. Second, 'social dominance'. People who hold this worldview see the world as a 'competitive jungle' where society is structured according a natural hierarchy with the most deserving and capable at the top. People who hold this worldview are sensitive to threats to the 'natural' socio-economic hierarchies in their society or the standing of their country compared to others.

The values underlying support for authoritarian attitudes are: tradition, religion, conformity, security, achievement and power. The worldview of right-wing authoritarianism is built on values of tradition, religion, conformity and security. The worldview of social dominance is built on values of achievement and power. Messaging that appeals to your audience based on these values is likely to stimulate support for attitudes that are not favourable for CSOs or the causes that they advance, such as restrictions on civil liberties, activism and embrace of restrictive cultural norms. In practice this means that campaigners should be cautious about using the following arguments.

'CSOs are good for the economy'. Campaigners should treat this line of argument with caution. For example, arguing that CSOs are good because they save the taxpayer money (for delivering services more cheaply or efficiently than the state), probably triggers predominantly values of power and achievement because it suggests wealth is important for its own sake, and implies that the importance of CSOs should be measured against whether they can create or save money. Similarly, arguing that CSOs are good because they create jobs might also activate power and achievement if this is framed as CSOs creating wealth. These kinds of messages that focus on wealth are likely to trigger a worldview of social dominance which brings out more individualistic ways of thinking and suppresses feelings of solidarity or caring for others. It may be possible to speak about the economic contribution of CSOs in a way that links it to self-direction, universalism or benevolence. For example, if creating jobs is framed as giving people a sense

of purpose and a way of supporting and giving back to their communities or protecting the environment (as with 'green' jobs). Or if their contribution to the economy is framed as making more resources available to fund public services.

'CSOs are good for public security', for example because they help to reduce crime by keeping people out of poverty. This argument probably triggers predominantly the value of security and conformity. It implies that the importance of CSOs should be measured according to whether they reduce crime and reinforces the idea that the world is a dangerous place. It also reinforces damaging stereotypes about poverty and crime without explaining the systemic social problems that push and trap people into crime. This kind of message probably helps to stimulate support for limitations on civil liberties. It's still possible to bring to mind the contribution CSOs can make to

creating safe communities, without making security the main message. For example, by pointing to how CSOs help communities thrive by giving people the opportunities they need to flourish, work together and care for each other.

'CSOs make our country better than other countries'. This argument probably triggers predominantly the value of tradition and achievement because it is linked to national identity and encourages the audience to think of their own country as higher in a hierarchy compared to others. This kind of messaging is likely to encourage people to be more supportive of cultural traditions, which tend to be more restrictive of equality and civil liberties compared to human rights standards. It may also discourage your audience from recognising the common humanity in people who don't share their nationality.
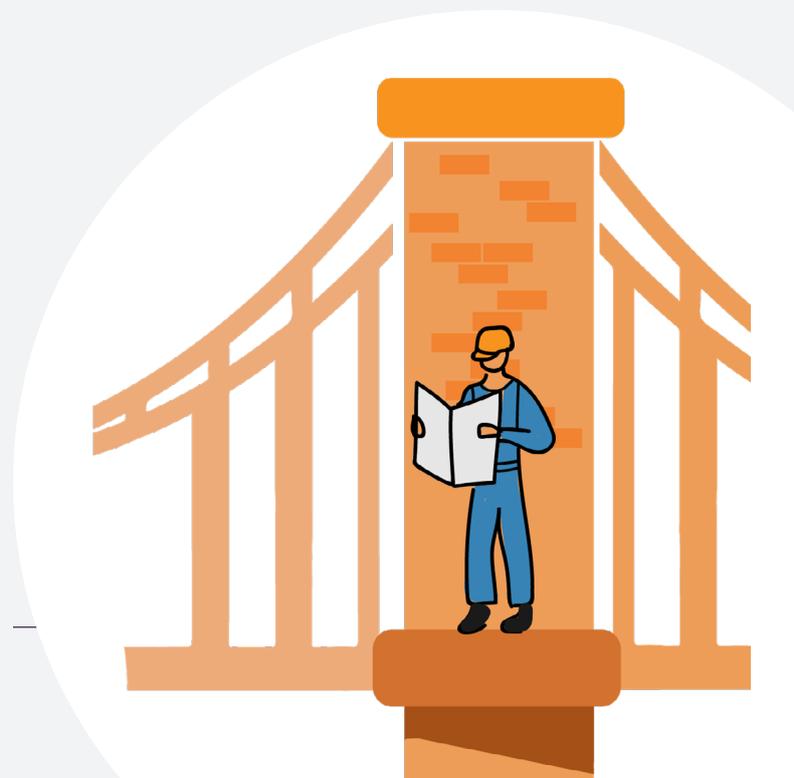
'CSOs are part of our tradition', or 'CSOs promote causes that are in line with religious rules'. Campaigners should treat this argument with caution. Generally, appeals to religion and tradition seem to encourage people to embrace the relatively restrictive (compared to human rights standards) attitudes that are part of cultural traditions and religion. However, it does seem that appeals to religion or cultural tradition could work in favour of campaigners, if campaigners can point to progressive elements of tradition or religious rules. For example, by linking national identity or religion to showing care towards others and the environment, embracing differences and being generous towards newcomers. In this way tradition and religion can become empty vessels for values of universalism, benevolence and self-direction.

This is not to say that campaigners should completely avoid using these arguments. Messaging that triggers these values and worldviews may appeal to politicians of certain political colours. So it can be OK, for example, to talk about the contribution of CSOs to the economy or public safety or cultural traditions if talking directly to politicians for whom these are priorities. But only if you can speak directly to that audience without broadcasting it as part of a campaign to the broader public. These arguments should not be campaigners' primary message in a campaign aimed at the broader public because appealing to these values risks turning off your base and moving persuadable audiences in the opposite direction to where you want them. Instead, campaigners should use arguments based on self-direction, universalism and benevolence like those set out in Chapter III (Narratives that can stimulate support for CSOs and the causes they work on).

Tip: Sometimes the principles that campaigners fight for can feel like too big a leap for the moveable middle audience. This presents campaigners with a puzzle: how can you still achieve your goal, activate your own base and win the moveable middle over? This is partly a question of how long it takes to change public opinion: do you need to break down your ultimate goal into smaller victories and change opinions gradually, or can you take a leap? It's also a question of authenticity that will probably divide CSOs between those who opt for principle or pragmatism. And it can be a question of strategy: movements often contain elements that the public regard as more moderate and more radical. The presence of CSOs with more radical messages can serve to make your audience more receptive to the messages of other CSOs whom the audience may regard as more 'reasonable'. Take, for example, the 'Together for Yes' campaign to allow access to abortion in Ireland. The traditional position of campaigners could be summed up as 'my body my rights'.

And some CSOs retained this position during the campaign. But moveable middle audiences had conflicting attitudes that included concern for both the mother and the child. The 'Together for Yes' campaign adopted an approach of 'acknowledge and redirect'. Campaigners acknowledged that some of the audience they needed to win over had difficulty with 'my body my rights' out of consideration for the life of the child. So instead, they redirected their audience to the specifics of someone in a situation where they needed an abortion, asking: when someone is in a crisis pregnancy and they need an abortion, shouldn't we treat them with compassion and make sure they can access care safely without having to travel abroad or put themselves in danger?[29]

iv) Don't only focus on the problem

CSOs frequently focus their communications on exposing the problem that they are trying to overcome. This has been described as a 'harms and horrors' approach. These messages tend to focus on the nature and scale of violations (such as the number of victims) accompanied by images of people in distress. For example, images of people who migrate in detention, or images of sexual harassment. Research shows that focusing your message only on the problem can overwhelm your audience and paralyse them. Even if they agree that the situation being described is problematic, messaging that focuses only on the problem will demotivate your audience because they will feel that the problem is inevitable, too big to solve and that there is nothing they can do about it. This is not to say that campaigners should not speak about the problems they are tackling. This is an important ingredient that can help to mobilise your audience, but only if it is accompanied by the other elements of a narrative. This was explained in more detail in Chapter III (Narratives that can stimulate support for CSOs and the causes they work on).

v) Don't use technical or abstract language to engage the public

CSOs often use language that is too technical for a public audience to understand easily, whether this is scientific, legal or policy terminology. Research suggests that it's not technical or complicated language of itself that is problematic. Rather, it's whether the level of complexity and technicality is adapted to what your audience is already familiar with. When speaking to other CSOs, policymakers and think tanks, using technical language is probably fine: these players understand each other's specialised terminology and using technical language is a way for CSOs to signal that they have the requisite expertise to speak with authority on that issue. But complicated language and jargon will put

off most people outside your policy bubble. Researchers have found that using overly complicated language and technical terms towards the general public has a number of disadvantages: your audience is likely to judge you to be of low intelligence; be less interested in learning about your topic; consider themselves not to be competent in your issue and feel unqualified to take part in discussions on the topic; and be inclined to disagree with what you're saying. These findings held true even when experimenters provided readers with definitions of technical terms within the text. In contrast, when researchers presented participants with the same information but using more understandable terms, people were more likely to judge the author as intelligent, ended up feeling more knowledgeable on the topic, felt empowered to take part in discussions on the issue and were more likely to be persuaded by the point being made.[30] Section A of Chapter III (Values statement) offered some examples of how to reformulate abstract rights or legal standards in more understandable terms that connect to people's values.

Tip: Hostile governments will often try to divide CSOs to isolate the CSOs they don't like. For example, by labelling CSOs that work on some issues as 'good', and CSOs working on anti-corruption, equality, the environment, or civil liberties as 'bad'. CSOs from different sectors should show solidarity towards one another and use a common narrative exposing the government's true intentions. This is more likely to make their audience question the government's messaging because it undermines the government narrative.

Another reason to avoid technical language when talking to a non-specialist audience is that jargon makes it harder to connect your cause to their shared values, as discussed in Section A of Chapter III (Values statement).

GET IN TOUCH

If you're a campaigner interested in receiving training on values-based framing or would like assistance with or feedback on communications products you are developing based on the narratives in this guide, feel free to contact us. You can email the author (i.butler@liberties.eu) or Liberties (info@liberties.eu). We're also happy to hear about any experiences you might have from testing out the recommendations in the guide.
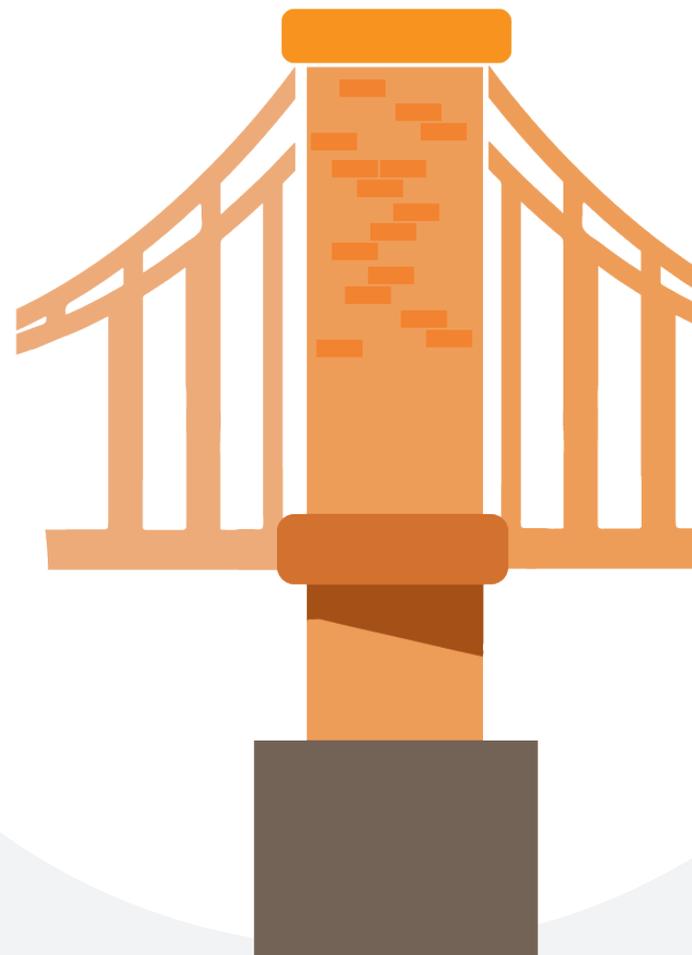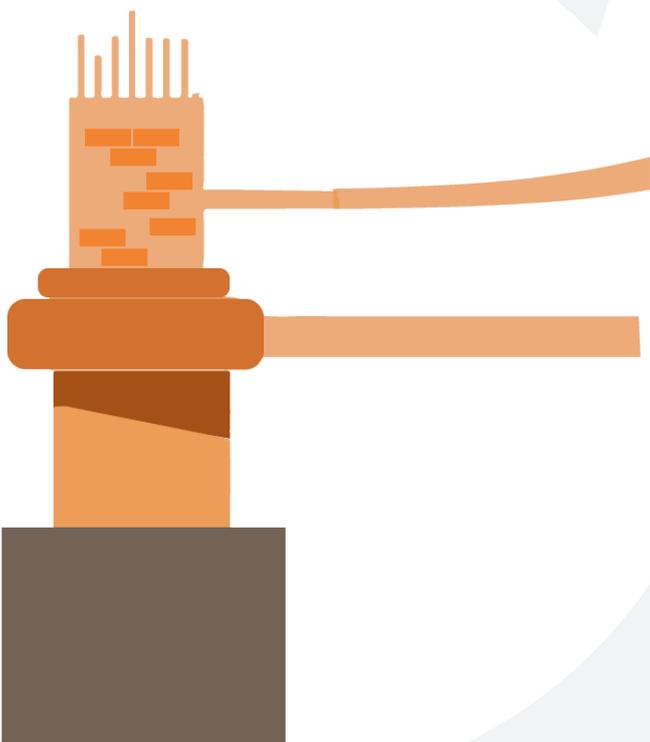
ANNEX: REVIEW OF RESEARCH INTO PUBLIC ATTITUDES ON CSOS AND THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE TRUST TOWARDS THEM

This annex contains a review of the research on the factors that influence attitudes towards CSOs, and what affects trust, in particular. To assist the reader, it has been structured so that each sub-section makes a discrete point and begins with a takeaway to summarise the findings under that sub-section.

As noted earlier in Chapter II (What influences public attitudes towards CSO?), the key connection that CSOs need to cultivate with their audience is trust, because people who trust CSOs are more likely to engage in behaviours like donating, volunteering and repeating CSOs' messages.

Research on attitudes towards CSOs is patchwork. Some surveys look at attitudes towards 'CSOs' in general, which ignores the fact that opinions of CSOs are likely to differ depending on what topic they work on. Some pieces of research look at specific sectors in particular countries, but we know that levels of trust vary according to country, so it may be difficult to generalise from these studies.

Although existing research gives us some insights into attitudes towards CSOs, for the most part, the research just reveals the factors that influence trust. Put otherwise, we don't know a lot about what people think of progressive CSOs, but we do know what factors influence whether people trust them.

Trust is largely based on shared values

Takeaway: Trust is built on shared values. CSOs should focus their messaging on the values that they promote and connect these to things their target audience can relate to. Trying to stimulate trust by focusing your messaging on how responsibly you manage your funds is less important and may backfire. In situations where CSOs are smeared with allegations of corruption, waste or mismanagement, campaigners may be tempted to concentrate their messaging on rebutting these allegations. Instead, campaigners should maintain the focus of their communications on the values behind their work. Campaigners can address lies by exposing the malign intent of their opponents through a

'truth sandwich' formula, explained in the guide.

In detail: The drivers of trust have been examined by various academic disciplines. Although each discipline has developed its own criteria and models, they share common elements. This can be distilled into three factors.[31]

First, when an individual believes that an organisation shares their values, they are more likely to trust that organisation.[32] Some researchers suggest that shared values are the single most important driver of trust.[33] This is supported by research from other disciplines, which shows that those who support progressive causes in general,[34] those who are more likely to trust CSOs and those who show most support for CSOs are people who place greater emphasis on the values that underpin progressive attitudes; that is, universalism, benevolence and self-direction.[35]

The second factor that contributes to trust is closely linked to the first: individuals who believe that an organisation can put those shared values into effect are more likely to trust that person or organisation. This is sometimes referred to as 'competence'.[36] Arguably, this isn't really a separate factor, because the best way for a CSO to communicate its shared values and make them relevant to their audience is to explain the tangible impact of its work.

Research shows that there is a third factor that has an impact on trust. If an individual believes that a CSO is misusing or wasting their resources, this can make them less likely to trust them. However, this does not mean that CSOs should focus their communications on accountability and transparency. Where individuals believe that the CSO shares their values, they're likely to trust the CSO without needing extra information proving that the organisation is well-run. Put otherwise, where there is no apparent reason to question a CSO's integrity (such as a smear campaign or organisational failure), emphasising that the organisation complies with standards of accountability and transparency does not function as an additional guarantee of trustworthiness. Instead, it probably causes people to become suspicious that the CSO cannot be trusted, because otherwise there would be no need for such safeguards in the first place.[37]

In countries where the integrity of CSOs is under attack, it makes sense to make information about transparency and accountability safeguards publicly available so people who wish to find out more can do so. But CSOs should not focus their messaging on transparency and accountability, even in situations where they are attacked for being wasteful or badly managed.

There are several reasons for this. First, research shows that the more individuals identify with the CSO's shared

values, the less importance they attach to the integrity factor. So shared values remain the most important factor in building trust. Second, contradicting accusations of untrustworthiness by arguing that CSOs are transparent and accountable is likely to backfire and reinforce negative messaging from your opponents that CSOs are not trustworthy.[38] Third, transparency and accountability messaging is primarily about money and this can trigger values and worldviews that underpin the wrong kinds of attitudes, like increased selfishness and less interest in helping others.[39]

Levels of trust towards CSOs in the EU differs by country

Takeaway: Levels of trust in CSOs vary from country to country, so campaigners should try to find data on their own country.

In detail: The level of trust towards CSOs varies from country to country. The Edelman Trust Barometer looks at public trust towards different institutions in a number of countries around the world, including a number of (ex) EU countries: France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and the UK. In 2021 among these countries, the proportion of people who said that they 'trust' CSOs to 'do what is right' ranged from 48% to 55% of the population.[40] In Italy, Germany and the Netherlands, business, the government and the media were all more trusted than CSOs. In

Ireland, Spain and the UK, CSOs are more trusted than government and the media, and trusted around the same amount as business. In France trust in NGOs was higher than trust in media, government and business.[41]

Other research in Hungary shows that CSOs are more trusted than most other institutions tested (40%) or seen as making a bigger contribution to solving problems (48%) than most other institutions, such as the media, business, and government.[42] In Poland trust in CSOs (56%) was higher than all other institutions measured, except for small businesses.[43] Research in 2018 in Bulgaria shows that NGOs are more trusted than the government, but less trusted than most other institutions.[44] Research from 2020 on Bulgaria does show that trust in NGOs rose significantly from 2018 but that particular survey does not compare levels of trust in other institutions, and trust in NGOs remains relatively disappointing at 31.3%.[45]

People are more likely think that CSOs promote shared values, but less likely to think they're effective, compared to other institutions

Takeaway: The public are more likely to think that CSOs are a force for good compared to other institutions in society. However, in the (ex) EU countries surveyed, people seem less certain that CSOs can put their values into effect in practice. This means that campaigners face comparatively less of a challenge

persuading people that they're promoting shared values but need to explain better how their activities put these values into effect.

In detail: Even if CSOs don't always enjoy higher levels of public trust than other institutions, it looks like people generally do see them as relatively more likely to be a force for good by promoting things they value.[46] The Edelman Trust Barometer 2020 measured the degree to which CSOs were perceived as 'ethical' based on public perceptions of their honesty, whether they drive positive change, whether they promote a vision respondents believe in and whether they serve the interests of everyone fairly. CSOs scored close to the dividing line between positive and negative on the ethical scale in Italy, the UK, Ireland, Germany and the Netherlands. In other words, the positive and negative scores people gave CSOs on ethics more or less cancelled each other out. This could mean that the number of people who think CSOs are and are not ethical is similar.

The other institutions measured - the media, government and business - tended to score further down the negative end of the scale. These institutions were perceived as less ethical than CSOs in all the above-mentioned countries except the Netherlands, where business and the media were seen as more ethical, but government was seen as less ethical. While this may sound disappointing, this tells us that CSOs are likely to be considered more benevolent and principled than other institutions in society.

The same research also measured perceived competence, by asking respondents if they thought that CSOs are 'good at' what they do. In none of the (ex) EU countries surveyed (Italy, UK, Ireland, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Spain) did CSOs score on the positive side of the scale in competence. Having said this, governments appeared even lower on the negative side of the scale than NGOs in all these countries, while business was perceived as more competent than NGOs. The media was perceived as even less competent than CSOs in Italy, UK, Ireland, France and Spain, but more competent than CSOs in Germany and the Netherlands.

Campaigners should take into account that these survey results indicate views on CSOs as they average out across society. This hides the fact that public opinion on CSOs is likely to split at least three ways: supporters, opponents and those in the middle who are swayable in either direction. This is backed up by surveys. The Edelman Trust Barometer finds that there is a section of society that tends to have higher levels of trust towards institutions, including CSOs; namely, those with higher levels of education, income and engagement in public policy and business news tend to be more trusting than the average for the general population.[47] Similarly, a Eurobarometer survey from 2018 finds that those with

higher levels of education, those who consider themselves to be 'upper middle class', those who consider themselves to be on the left of the political spectrum and those with a positive opinion of the EU and those in the 40-54 age group were more likely than others to think that civil society has an important role to play in protecting democracy.[48] In countries where levels of trust are low, campaigners should recognise that this does not mean that they don't have support. Rather it means that their opponents are doing well at swaying parts of the moveable middle.

Public opinion of CSOs is tied to the public's appreciation of what CSOs do

Takeaway: It's probably difficult for most people to easily appreciate that a CSO promotes shared values if they engage in activities that don't have an obvious direct impact on their daily lives. Activities like advocacy, litigation or delivering services to marginalised groups probably seem far removed from the lives of most people. So campaigners will need to communicate shared values more explicitly and in addition explain how they put them into effect more tangibly. Examples of this are given in Chapter II.

In detail: How should readers understand these seemingly disappointing levels of public trust, and ethics and competence scores towards CSOs? Campaigners should consider that all the institutions surveyed in (ex) EU countries seem to perform relatively poorly and often worse than CSOs. Which means that low levels of satisfaction towards CSOs probably have something to do with a broader sense of dissatisfaction with institutions in these countries.

Another explanation for these figures can be found by comparing levels of trust, competence and ethics in other countries outside the EU included in the Edelman Trust Barometer. According to the 2020 report, CSOs are also perceived as not competent in Japan, Russia, Hong Kong, Australia,

Canada, USA, Brazil and South Korea. However, CSOs are regarded as competent in: Saudi Arabia, Colombia, Argentina, UAE, Kenya, Mexico, India, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia. In all these countries CSOs also had levels of trust above 60% in 2020 or 2021. This suggests that public perceptions of whether CSOs are trustworthy, competent and ethical is somehow related to a country's affluence. Of the 15 countries in the survey where CSOs are perceived as not competent, 13 are 'high income' countries (according to World Bank classification). And of the 10 countries where CSOs are perceived as competent and highly trusted, 7 are not 'high income' countries. Put otherwise, in affluent countries CSOs are not as appreciated or trusted as in less affluent countries.

A likely explanation is that levels of trust, perceived competence and ethics are affected in part by whether the public understands the tangible benefits of CSOs. High income countries tend to dedicate much more of their GDP to social protection than middle- and low-income countries.[49] Research also suggests that CSOs in developing countries are heavily involved in delivering social services, sometimes more so than the state and that CSOs are often the main channel for implementing development aid programmes.[50] This could mean that part of the reason that CSOs are perceived as less competent, ethical and trustworthy in higher income countries is because their work is harder to

see and appreciate in everyday life. In a country where CSOs are identified with public services, it's much easier for the public to see the value of CSOs' work. Whereas in high-income countries where CSOs aren't as involved in providing mainstream services for the majority population, their contributions (such as services for marginalised groups and advocacy) are less obvious to the public. This hypothesis has some support in a Eurobarometer survey which asked respondents which institutions they would turn to if they considered that their rights under the Charter of Fundamental Rights have been violated. CSOs appear at the bottom of peoples' choices with 13% answering that they would turn to a CSO. This compares to the courts (43%), an ombudsperson (37%), an EU institution (38%), the police (37%) and the government (24%).[51] The fact that CSOs appear at the bottom of the list might suggest that much of the public is unaware of the work CSOs do to protect human rights.

This is not to say that CSOs can only increase public trust by moving to service provision. Rather, it is to say that CSOs are less likely to enjoy public trust if they aren't making the public aware of the values they promote and how they implement these. And, in the absence of communications dedicated to explaining how advocacy and service delivery for marginalised groups connects to shared values, it is more difficult for the public to appreciate them.

This interpretation of the data is echoed by researchers examining public attitudes towards CSOs in Bulgaria who saw a jump in support for CSOs between 2018 and 2020. The study's authors believe that this change in attitudes was largely due to CSOs becoming more known to the public by publicising their activities and by relating these to the tangible needs of citizens, particularly during the pandemic.[52] Similarly, in Poland, a survey on attitudes towards CSOs breaks them down according to the cause they promote (e.g. animal rights or gender equality). It seems that the better-known a given CSO sector is, the more likely the public are to think that CSOs in that sector are making an important contribution to that issue.[53]

Most people seem to understand that CSOs are connected to democracy

Takeaway: It's likely that your target audience already has some idea that CSOs play a role in helping democracy work properly, and that governments sometimes want to stop them. These are ways of thinking that campaigners should build on in their communications.

A 2018 EU Barometer survey asked respondents how important they considered the 'role of civil society (associations, NGOs) in promoting and protecting democracy and common values, including in terms of fostering a well-informed and pluralistic democratic debate'. 32% of people across the EU answered 'very important' while 44% answered 'somewhat important'. The proportions vary between EU countries, with those saying that CSOs were very or somewhat important being 57% in Greece and 95% in Sweden.[54] This means that your audience probably already has a basic frame of CSOs as facilitators of democracy. Another survey carried out by Pew suggests that in most (ex) EU countries, a majority of the population thinks it is important that CSOs such as human right groups should be able to operate freely. However, respondents in a lot of the EU countries surveyed rated other institutions as more important, such as an independent judiciary, regular elections, free speech, free media and free internet. This suggests that although the public may see a connection between CSOs and democracy, they don't necessarily understand the importance of their role in making democracy work for ordinary people.[55]

A 2020 survey published by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights also suggests that the public recognise that governments sometimes intimidate CSOs and prevent them from doing their work.[56] An EU average of 12% thought that CSOs experienced intimidation all the time, 25% said most of the time, 34% said some of the time and 21% said rarely or never. These figures varied from country to country. However, the survey doesn't tell us whether people agreed that government interference was a good thing or not, which means it's not possible to

understand whether the figures suggest support for or opposition to CSOs. This means that your audience already has some understanding that governments attack CSOs, but not necessarily that attacks on CSOs are part of a deliberate strategy to prevent governments listening to citizens' concerns.

The media and public figures influence whether the public perceive of CSOs as trustworthy

Takeaway: Positive media coverage can improve trust in CSOs and smear campaigns can damage it. Sometimes these shifts in levels of trust can be over 10 percent, though the jumps are usually smaller.

In detail: It is well established that media reporting can influence public perceptions and attitudes positively or negatively.[57] It is possible to see this effect in relation to attitudes towards CSOs by looking at media reporting on migration in the EU between 2015 and 2017 and comparing this to the results of public opinion research. Several studies show that the portrayal of people migrating to Europe in the European media was initially more empathetic and positive (or neutral) in 2015 until turning more hostile from the winter.[58] This seems to be mirrored in levels of public trust towards CSOs from 2015 to 2016 which rose all (ex) EU countries surveyed: France (55% to 56%), Germany (40% to 45%), Italy (53% to 58%), Ireland (37% to 49%), Spain (52% to 60%), the Netherlands

(46% to 49%) and the UK (46% to 50%) towards CSOs in general.[59] Other researchers have also found temporary spikes in people taking action to support development NGOs in Germany and the UK during a similar period.[60] Then we see falling levels of trust in most of those countries from 2016: in Italy trust fell from 59% in 2017 to 46% in 2018; in Germany trust fell from 45% in 2016 to 37% in 2018; in France trust fell from 56% in 2016 to 52% in 2018; in Spain trust fell from 61% in 2018 to 53% in 2019;[61] in the Netherlands trust fell from 49% in 2016 to 45% in 2018; in Ireland trust fell from 49% in 2016 to 43% in 2017; in the UK trust fell from 50% in 2016 to 46% in 2017.[62] This is in line with more hostile media coverage on migration. Research carried out on Italy specifically shows that this rise and fall is in line with the tenor of media coverage particularly clearly.[63]

Other researchers have examined levels of public engagement with development CSOs across several European countries. They found a consistent fall in the number of people making donations since 2013.[64] They attribute this fall to two factors. First, to the sector's own messaging. Development CSOs have tended to message mostly about the 'harms and horrors' they are trying to alleviate (i.e. the problem rather than the solution). The second factor they point to is right-wing media outlets. The latter have exploited the perceived hopelessness of development aid to serve a narrative that this work

is pointless because CSOs can show no progress.[65]

Polling in the UK has also revealed that if the public perceives a CSO to have engaged in serious misconduct, this will also damage trust. Interviewees reported to pollsters that they were less likely to donate to humanitarian charities in general in reaction to revelations of sexual exploitation by the development CSO Oxfam.[66] While this example relates to real events, well-executed smear campaigns in the media could have a similar impact.

Smear campaigns can shift persuadables against CSOs but the base will remain loyal and the damage is reversible

Takeaway: Smear campaigns can damage trust in and support for CSOs. But trust recovers over time as attention moves on to other issues or if CSOs campaign in a way that restores trust. Smear campaigns energise your opposition and shift people in the moveable middle. But CSOs hang on to support from a base in society who is predisposed to support progressive causes.

In detail: Although smear campaigns can damage trust in CSOs, campaigners should not overestimate the impact of negative publicity. For example, several researchers suggest that any fall in trust towards development organisations in the UK following scandals were temporary.[67] Surveys on the level of trust towards CSOs in the countries

noted above show that in most cases levels of trust creep back up over time.[68] This is probably due to several reasons.

First, 'issue salience'.[69] Simply put, once politicians and the media shift their attention onto other subjects, public attention also shifts and attitudes drift back to what they were. Second, trust in CSOs is linked to shared values. Which means that there is a 'base' of people who are pre-disposed to holding progressive views who are likely to remain supportive of CSOs promoting progressive causes. Rather, it's just the moveable middle who are swayed by positive or negative messaging CSOs. Thus, even during powerful smear campaigns, CSOs can still count on trust from their societal base.

For example, research on public attitudes towards development CSOs across several countries, shows that strong supporters and strong opponents of development CSOs don't move out of these groups, and only those who are in the middle tend to move (either more positively or negatively).[70] Similarly, several surveys show that even in countries where CSOs have come under attack, public support does not entirely dissolve. For example, in a 2019 survey, 63% of Hungarian, 57% of Bulgarian, and 57% of Polish respondents agreed it was 'very important' for human rights organisations to operate without government interference.[71] In another poll from 2017, respondents were asked whether they thought certain institutions in

Hungary contributed positively or not to solving the country's problems and the extent to which they trusted these institutions to uphold democratic standards. On both questions CSOs scored third highest, ahead of the media, the courts, the Church, political parties, and Prime Minister Orban.[72] Other research on attitudes in Hungary shows that a core of around 29% of people support the right of critical CSOs to engage with the government and consider this to be more important than ensuring economic growth or political stability. Around a further third of respondents said that they were of equal importance.[73]

Similarly, in Poland, a survey shows that CSOs are more trusted than the state broadcaster, the Church and government.[74] In Bulgaria, a survey asked whether it should be left to the state to solve issues on the public agenda or if CSOs and citizens should also get involved. More than one third of respondents replied that citizens and CSOs should be involved in finding solutions because the state is not capable of doing so alone, and almost one third answered that CSOs should not only get involved but also fight for people's rights because the state can easily abuse them.[75] This same research on Bulgaria also shows how CSOs can move public opinion in their favour relatively quickly. For example, between 2018 and 2020 the proportion of respondents answering that CSOs made a positive contribution to society rose (44.5% yes to 44.7% no in 2018;

49.7% yes to 38.8% no in 2020). Levels of trust also rose (from 24.7% to 31.3%) and the number of policy areas where the majority of people think CSOs should be involved rose from two out of fifteen to eleven out of fifteen.

Even when an audience agrees with your cause, they could be put off by a negative image of activists

Takeaway: Campaigners may want to look at how activists are portrayed in media stories as this influences how the public sees them. Be aware that the public may view campaigners negatively and that hostile media outlets will try to feed negative stereotypes that activists are militant, uncompromising, dictatorial, eccentric, and generally not very nice. Campaigners should take this into account in the messengers they choose and the tone that they communicate in. Some CSOs may strategically choose to take a more radical position in their movement because this nudges the public to be more receptive to other CSOs in the movement who they regard as more moderate. CSOs who do not want take a radical position in the movement should be aware that while it's OK to be passionate, coming across as judgmental can alienate potential supporters outside the base.

In detail: Research on how the public views activists suggests they're not always viewed favourably. A study from the USA examined how non-activists viewed environmental activists and feminist activists. Respondents were

asked to think of a 'typical' activist and note whether they felt positively or negatively about them. 'Typical' activists were viewed negatively, for example as militant, extreme, self-righteous, angry, less personable and eccentric. Put otherwise, people had a negative stereotype of activists.[76] In another study in the USA, researchers looked at how non-activists feel about environmental activists. Again, activists who engaged in protests or other kinds of public campaigning activities were viewed negatively as aggressive, dictatorial, extreme and arrogant.[77] A third study examining public attitudes towards those taking part in climate marches in 2017 in the USA again confirms the common perception of activists as arrogant, aggressive and dictatorial.[78] One study from the Netherlands and France found that non-activist students thought positively of students who attended a protest.[79] It's not clear why this study comes to a different result. It could suggest that students have more favourable views about fellow students engaged in activism, compared to the general population.

How the public regards activists is important because it has an impact on whether they are willing to support their campaigns. Respondents in the abovementioned research who were asked to describe 'typical' activists, were also asked about their willingness to support the latter. Participants were reluctant to affiliate with or carry out actions if they were advocated by someone they viewed as a 'typical' activist.

However, respondents said they would not be reluctant to affiliate with or carry out actions advocated by an 'atypical' activist.[80] Public willingness to support protestors is also affected by whether people perceive protests to be peaceful or not. People are less likely to support protestors if they are perceived to be violent. [81]

Two studies, one looking at the 2017 US climate marches and another looking at the impact of the 2019 Sarajevo Pride, found that mass events can have a positive impact on how people perceive activists. Researchers on the Sarajevo Pride found that the positive impact was only felt among the local population (not nationally). They concluded that improved perceptions of activists were due to positive first-hand experiences between them and the public. This personal encounter with activists served to dissolve negative stereotyping. Researchers suggested that the positive impact on attitudes did not extend far beyond Sarajevo in part because the national media didn't give much coverage to the pride event and that coverage in national media remained largely negative.[82] Researchers looking at the 2017 US climate marches did not offer a suggestion as to why negative perceptions towards activists softened after the marches.[83] However, other commentators have pointed out that the 'People's Climate March' drew support from many different sections of the population and were not led by environmental NGOs such as Greenpeace.[84] This could have

led to media reporting that did not emphasise negative activist stereotypes that seem to put non-activists off.

This latter study also found that people who learnt about the climate marches through conservative media outlets had more negative impressions of marchers than those who learnt about the marches through liberal media outlets.[85] The researchers suggest that this is probably because conservative news outlets portrayed marchers more negatively. The fact that right-wing media tends to portray progressive activists negatively, and that this has an impact on viewers, is corroborated by other research. Ipsos and Reuters examined public attitudes in the USA towards people taking part in protests in 2020 following the murder of George Floyd. As one might expect, the study found that public perceptions of protestors were influenced by one's own political opinions. Just over half of Republicans thought that protestors were violent and just over half of Democrats thought protestors were peaceful. But researchers also found that for Republicans who watch Fox News, the perception that protestors were violent rose to 67% and for Democrats who watch MSNBC this rose to 65%.[86] Experimental research also confirms that public perceptions are influenced by how the media frame protestors. Experimenters showed participants different collections of news stories about a Ku Klux Klan rally. One set of stories framed the issue as one of free speech while the other focused on the risk of violence between supporters and protestors. Participants who saw news stories framing the rally as a question of free speech showed more tolerance for the hate group than those who saw news stories about the potential for violence.[87]

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