

From protest to reform

A study of social movements' success



Contents

Introduction	4
About this report	7
At a glance: selected features of social movements	8
Setting the context: what triggers protest movements?	9
Armenia's Velvet Revolution (2018)	9
Pro-impeachment protests in Brazil (2015-2016)	10
The October Revolution in Lebanon (2019)	11
End SARS protests in Nigeria (2020)	12
There's no success like failure: debunking spontaneity	13
The risks and pitfalls of leaderlessness and over-reliance on strong leadership	17
Measuring success and failure	24
Conclusions	30

Foreword

From the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia to the Taksim protests in Turkey and the Maidan protests in Ukraine, social upheavals can gain strength seemingly suddenly, often around a single event, and then go on to challenge deeply entrenched power structures.

What makes these protests so powerful is activists' and movement members' willingness to risk life and liberty in their urgent desire to work against— against an oppressive regime, discriminatory legislation, or a systemic lack of justice. But after these early chaotic moments, disruptive movements too often fade away without creating the long-term changes that they sought.

Often, there is significant resistance against the aims of social movements. Governments push back, and push back hard, to quash civic dissent, and oppress protests against systemic challenges and injustices. They do so through policy, legislation, and through the use of their security apparatuses.

military coup in Myanmar, undermining civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance.

Sometimes, the threat to a protest movement's success comes from within. When movement leadership is weak, or overly rigid and centralised, movements have a hard time realising their goals. Equally, when movement structures are not built for the long haul, it becomes hard to build and sustain momentum for lasting political change.

Importantly, even when protests “succeed”, long-term reforms are not a given. Activists can lack a long-term vision for change which goes beyond immediate and short-term demands, leaving them ill-prepared for the “day after” the big disruption. It is because of this that many seemingly successful protest movements do not lead to sustainable change.

Luminate is keen to understand how those internal challenges hinder social movements from achieving continuous, lasting, positive

“Most movements fail in the victory phase.”

– Srdja Popovic, founding member of Otpor!, Serbian resistance movement

In 2020, for example, the U.S. government used heavily militarised security forces to violently respond to overwhelmingly peaceful protests challenging systemic injustice and violence against Black Americans, and especially Black men in the U.S.

But the success of social movements is not only threatened by a state's own government. Other adversaries, governmental or non-governmental, can play a significant role in distorting, shaping, and even undermining the aims and purposes of social movements.

A poignant example is the Chinese government which, in early 2021, blocked a UN Security Council statement condemning the

change. This is why we commissioned this report, as an opportunity to learn from and make a contribution to a vibrant and courageous field.

We asked a number of questions: How can movement leaders take forward the momentum that they created to build sustainable political change? How can they build the bridge from political disruption to political reform? And ultimately, how can they succeed?

This report, authored by FairSquare, provides some first answers to those questions. We are excited to continue exploring protest movements, and how they can best help achieve more just and fair societies.

Amira El-Sayed
Principal, Luminate
July 2021

Introduction

Over the past decade, mass protests have erupted in a notable range of countries. These have often involved tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of people. In December 2010, the desperate act of defiance of a young fruit vendor in Tunisia who set himself on fire to protest incessant police harassment, daily humiliation and economic hardship unleashed long-simmering anger and discontent felt by

In parallel, progressive social movements, largely sparked by austerity measures and joblessness caused by the 2007-2008 global financial crisis but also inspired by the “Arab Spring”, as it became known, started forming across the world. “Occupy” activists rushed to fill squares in major cities first in the United States, and then in European and South American countries, spreading to Asia and



Armenia's “Velvet Revolution”, 2019 (Credit: [Bert Pot](#))

Over the past decade, mass protests have often involved tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of people.

millions of Tunisians who took to the streets to demand jobs, better living conditions, and ultimately, political change. In the weeks and months that followed, huge waves of mobilizations spread across the Middle East and North Africa to oppose oppressive regimes, leading to the ousting of its most ruthless rulers. For the first time, millions of people across the region were able to imagine a different reality only to have their hopes crushed as uprisings were repressed through unlawful force, armed conflict or the return of authoritarian rule.

the Pacific region. Of these, the Spanish 15-M and the Greek Aganaktismeni (Indignant) movements stood out as some of the most powerful social movements that demanded not only greater social and economic justice but also “real” democracy.¹ The decade ended with millions of people joining youth-led global climate change marches and mass protests against the ruling elites in virtually all parts of the world – Chile, Lebanon, Iraq, Ecuador, Iran, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Sudan, Georgia and Algeria, amongst other countries – demanding basic services, social justice, civil and political

rights, an end to corruption and in some cases, a complete change of the political system.

Largely enabled by the use of digital technologies that allow them to grow rapidly, and in many cases strongly committed to participation, horizontal structures of organizing, and the rejection of formal hierarchies and leaders, these spectacular movements have been successful in attracting huge levels of global media attention, with the media and analysts characterizing them as “spontaneous”, “new” or “unprecedented.”² Many of these movements have displayed strong disruptive capacities, bringing entire neighbourhoods or cities to a halt, and interrupting all forms of economic and social life for prolonged periods. At times, they have achieved major breakthroughs leading to the

included tear gas, live or rubber bullets and raids on encampments resulting in unlawful killings and injuries. Tens of thousands of protesters and activists over the world have been arrested over the past decade – many of them arbitrarily – and were often subjected to prosecution on trumped-up charges as well as other forms of judicial harassment that continued long after the protests ended, significantly weakening these movements’ capacity to survive, grow and adopt new tactics.

There is no doubt that the authorities’ response and political context inform protesters’ choices once the initial mobilization comes to an end but is it enough to understand why some movements achieve their immediate objectives while others don’t? Why are certain movements more resilient and able not only to survive but

Many of these movements have displayed strong disruptive capacities. However, only a few were able to convert their gains into sustained mobilization and political change.

ousting of corrupt leaders and governments, or constitutional and legislative reforms. However, only a few were able to convert their gains into sustained mobilization and political change with many protest movements seemingly dying down almost as immediately as they appeared. While some have morphed into encampments, occupying symbolic public or private spaces for weeks or months, they too have often fizzled out when faced with state repression or a response that required them to take decisions or adopt new tactics.³

Indeed, the authorities’ response to these movements has been uneven, and has often shaped their trajectories and ability to survive. In some contexts, those in power appeared to be threatened enough by the strength of popular demands to adopt reforms, with protesters engaging in the process or turning their efforts to the monitoring of their implementation. In others, authorities showed an apparent willingness to negotiate only to appease popular anger, casting doubt on prospects for any meaningful political or structural change. In most cases however, they responded with intense repression that

also to translate their initial mobilization into different forms of organizing? What types of tactics are most successful and when do they start posing a threat to those in power? Can lasting change be achieved through leaderless, autonomous movements, or do movements need strong central bodies and leaders to be successful? What are the different strategies that activists adopt after protests are quashed or simply die down? What drives their choices? How important are past historic events to protest movements, and how do they inform mobilization tactics and post-protest strategies? And crucially, how can we measure a social movement’s success or failure?

Based on four case studies of recent protests that occurred in different regions across the world, this report will seek to examine some of the questions outlined above, while recognizing that there is no one-size-fits-all answer, and that protesters’ pathways differ from one context to another. The cases include Armenia’s 2018 “Velvet Revolution”, Brazil’s 2015-2016 pro-impeachment demonstrations, the 2019 “October Revolution” in Lebanon and Nigeria’s

#EndSARS protests of 2020. In all these contexts, protests attracted huge numbers of people, involved considerable mobilization efforts, sought significant political, structural and economic changes and showed a potential for great disruptive capacity, which they were able to sustain for differing periods of time, ranging from weeks to months.

In all four cases, movements were also able to capture the world's attention as protests were unfolding, with some receiving support from their own diaspora communities and national or international celebrities, highlighting their far-reaching impact. Indeed, social media played an important role not only in generating this support – with activists' constantly disseminating videos and photos from the ground – but also in mobilizing protesters and coordinating collective actions. In addition, it allowed activists to successfully

set the narrative and frame their messages to different audiences. Beyond the use of social media, these four movements adopted mobilization tactics that differed widely and ranged from horizontal, leaderless forms of organizing to a more hierarchical mobilization and communication style and a political transition led by a clearly identifiable leader that opted for highly decentralized yet disciplined collective actions. They were also associated with different political ideologies with some identifying with left-leaning, egalitarian politics and others adhering to right-wing, conservative principles. Finally, the level of state violence and repression varied hugely across these contexts, and although all movements were able to achieve a political breakthrough at some point, only in the case of Armenia and Brazil were they able to achieve their stated goals. The question of long-term political change and success, though, remains open for all.



Lebanese anti-government protesters celebrate the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri in Beirut on October 29, 2019 on the 13th day of anti-government protests. (Credit: Patrick Baz/AFP via Getty Images)

About this report

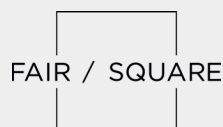
Luminate commissioned FairSquare Research to identify and scope 3-4 case studies of social movements and political disruptions and extracting trends and factors that contributed to successes and challenges; provide analysis of how social and political movements can succeed at creating profound and necessary disruption but often fall short of creating lasting, sustainable reform; offer some thoughts on approaches that work, and others that don't; and build an argument building on the above, introducing the case for more sustained work to find and employ the ingredients needed to sustain political reform. Magdalena Mughrabi led research for FairSquare.

Methodology

The analysis and findings included in this report are primarily based on a review of publicly available information on each of the case studies ranging from NGO and think tank reports to academic publications, webinars, press articles, media interviews and social media content. The report also draws on

interviews with activists and protest leaders, civil society workers, journalists and academics from each of the countries analysed as well as interviews with social movement scholars concerning general mobilization and post-protest dynamics and tactics. Some of these analytical frameworks have been incorporated into this report. In total, 24 interviews were conducted remotely between December 2020 and February 2021.

Social movements, including protest events, have been the subject of in-depth academic and investigative research, and this report's format and space constraints mean that it cannot hope to offer a comprehensive analysis of these movements over the past decade, or indeed, those highlighted in the four case studies. It does, however, identify the main dynamics and trends underpinning these movements. Similarly, although the authors have incorporated the voices of activists, including protest leaders, and experts who have researched the examples examined here, it was impossible to present all voices and views from across the different movements. It is therefore very likely that some contextual or internal dynamics will have been omitted, simplified or explained without the nuance they deserve.



About FairSquare

Based in London, FairSquare produces specialist research and advice to help prevent human rights abuse, and promote accountability and the rule of law. FairSquare Projects, a non-profit organisation, tailors rigorous research with communication and advocacy work to promote systemic change. FairSquare Research helps clients understand and evaluate human rights issues, and plan their next steps.

About the author

Magdalena Mughrabi is a FairSquare associate specialising in human rights and international humanitarian law investigations. Magdalena was Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa at Amnesty International and previously worked as a Protection Delegate for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

At a glance: selected features of social movements

		Armenia	Brazil	Lebanon	Nigeria
Overview	Shorthand term	"Velvet Revolution"	n/a	"October Revolution"	#EndSARS
	Time period	April 2018	2015 - 2016	2019 - 2020	2020
	Duration	11 days	Series of events over 18 months	Six months	Just under a month
Context to protests	Trigger	Attempt by President to extend grip on power with constitutional reform	Deepening economic crisis and corruption investigation into state-backed company	New round of taxes (including on WhatsApp calls) announced as part of broader austerity measures	Video posted on Twitter alleging the killing of a young man by SARS officers in Delta state
	Broader grievances or drivers	Endemic corruption, electoral fraud, limited political freedoms	Conservatism, nationalism, rejection of institutional politics, anger against corruption	State's failure to deliver basic services, pollution, rampant corruption, regressive tax system, unemployment	Widespread human rights violations by SARS. Demands to end gross inequality, youth unemployment, lack of basic services, endemic corruption also featured.
	Goal/s	Removal of ex-President made Prime Minister from power	Impeachment of President Rousseff	Complete overhaul of the political system	Dissolution of SARS, investigations and reforms to police
Selected movement characteristics	Background to movement, previous protests	Activists learnt lessons from protests in 1990s and 2000s, as well as major mobilizations in 2015 and 2016	Political vacuum left by a small, leftist movement in São Paulo in 2013 after it retreated from a leading role in free transportation protests that led to mass mobilization against corruption and political parties, which right-wing activists exploited and refocused on Workers Party	Lessons learnt during different waves of mobilization since 2011. In particular, 2015 "You Stink" campaign and subsequent campaigns in 2016 and 2018 laid base for broad-based movement	Movement launched in 2017, previous attempts to campaign for reform had seen only small-scale protests, lasting for a day or two
	Key groups represented in protests	Broad-based movement reaching across political spectrum, including professional NGOs, activist groups, students and ordinary people	Mainly white, middle class families with no history of activism and no ties to CSOs or political parties	Protests, led by leftist and student groups, excluded main sectarian political parties and involved participants drawn from across classes, religions and geographic regions	Young men and women from multiple states, as well as in the diaspora. Strong involvement of social justice movements, NGOs, feminist and LGBT+ groups.
	Leader/s	Opposition parliamentarian Nikol Pashinyan	Loose coalition of new right-wing groups – MBL, Vem Pra Rua, Revoltados Online - coordinated messaging and activities	Protesters rejected any form of institutionalized leadership but high level of participation of progressive leftist groups and NGOs with their own structures	Deliberately decentralized movement. Activists in each state had own structures.
	Main activities	Countrywide non-violent protests, roadblocks and other acts of civil disobedience bringing entire cities to a standstill	Static rallies with leaders giving speeches. Online messaging, shared via Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp	1/4 of population took part in street protests, blocking roads, coordinated by social media. Open strike called with an encampment erected in Beirut.	Spontaneous protests across the country, galvanised by "digital protests"
Outcomes	Short term	Resignation of Prime Minister (former President), Pashinyan won subsequent election	Dilma Rousseff's government fell after Senate voted to impeach her	PM resigned, elites remained in power. Technocratic government formed that was unable to lead change.	Agreement to demands, but new SWAT formed to replace SARS. Violent dispersal of protesters.
	What became of movement	Some activists ran for office or joined executive, others focussed on monitoring govt performance	Some of the movement's leaders ran for legislative elections, becoming successful politicians	Harrassed by police and military, lost momentum. Covid-19 ultimately ended protests. Leftist groups now focussed on political organizing.	Initial energy of the protests lost after repression, some groups stopped activities, other took up monitoring role, others continued mobilizing
	Longer term	Amid frustration at slow pace of reforms and losses in Nagorno-Karabakh war, support for Pashinyan decreased	Far-right populist Jair Bolsonaro capitalised on anti-political and anti-leftist discourse of protests	PM returned, but opposition landscape transformed, leftist groups stronger	24 inquiries into SARS violations yet to report. Groups are organizing ahead of 2023 elections.

Setting the context: what triggers protest movements?

Although they were triggered by different events ranging from a video of police brutality in Nigeria and a tax increase announcement in

parliamentary system and Sargsyan's second and final presidential term was coming to an end, he announced that he would be seeking his party's nomination as Prime Minister, having formerly assured the public that he would not be doing so, and that the constitutional reform he had initiated was not aimed at extending his rule.⁴ The following day, small activist-led protests started in Yerevan under the banner



People protest during Armenia's Velvet Revolution in April 2018 (Credit: Sona Manukyan via Flickr)

Lebanon to a planned power grab in Armenia and a political vacuum in Brazil, all protest movements highlighted in this report were an expression of years of suppressed anger and grievances against those in power.

Armenia's Velvet Revolution (2018)

In April 2018, merely 11 days of peaceful mass protests, roadblocks and sit-ins in Armenia's capital Yerevan and elsewhere in the country, brought down President Serzh Sargsyan's 10-year-long rule marred by nepotism, widespread corruption and electoral fraud. The series of events that unfolded during this period took the world completely by surprise, and their huge success seemed unbelievable even to Armenians themselves.

The Velvet Revolution, as it became known, was sparked by a deeply flawed constitutional transition from a presidential to a parliamentary system designed to extend President Serzh Sargsyan's grip on power. On 11 April 2018, as the country was moving towards a

"Reject Serzh". In parallel, a respected and charismatic, but largely marginal opposition leader and parliamentarian, Nikol Pashinyan, was leading a 120-kilometre march from Armenia's second city Gyumri. Although it was meant to generate widespread opposition against Sargsyan's move, by the time Pashinyan entered Yerevan on 13 April, he was met only by several hundred supporters, and no one expected that the campaign would soon bring the entire capital to a standstill.⁵ His initial rally was so small and apparently unthreatening to the authorities that law enforcement officers were not even deployed. It is only when Pashinyan merged forces with local activists, and began touring the city, calling for all Armenians to "Take a step, reject Serzh" through non-violent protests and acts of disobedience that the movement started growing with intensity.⁶ Once the ruling Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) approved Sargsyan's nomination as Prime Minister, Pashinyan's supporters took over the public radio headquarters demanding airtime, and protests spread to other cities across the country. A week later, hundreds of

thousands of people, angry at years of endemic corruption, electoral fraud and limited political freedoms, and empowered by a long history of activism, were mobilising every day, bringing entire cities to a standstill. Although hundreds of protesters were arrested, the authorities refrained from using force.⁷

In a televised meeting on 22 April 2018, by then sworn in as Prime Minister, Sargsyan appeared to threaten Pashinyan with the use of violence. Pashinyan was arrested shortly after, along with some of his closest supporters, in a move that generated even greater popular protests that were joined by members of an army battalion.

Pro-impeachment protests in Brazil (2015-2016)

Amidst a deepening economic crisis and against a backdrop of Operation Car Wash, a corruption investigation into a state-backed company that implicated officials of the ruling leftist Workers' Party, millions of Brazilians attended protests and marches between 2015-2016 to demand the impeachment of then President Dilma Rousseff.¹⁰ Her government finally fell down in August 2016 after the Brazilian Senate voted to impeach her for breaking budgetary laws, although many analysts saw the move as a "retaliatory

All protest movements were an expression of years of suppressed anger and grievances against those in power.

The following day, Serzh Sargsyan resigned, paving the way for a democratic transition and for Pashinyan, who by then enjoyed widespread, uncontested support, to take over as his successor. Nonetheless, protests continued well into May until Pashinyan was elected Prime Minister by an RPA-controlled parliament. After appointing a cabinet, he successfully negotiated new parliamentary elections, which his "My Step" alliance won in December 2018 with a 70% majority, allowing him to finally embark on a reform process.⁸

By then, the "revolution's" objectives were widely deemed to have been achieved, and popular mobilization dissipated. Some activists opted to engage in institutionalised politics by running for office in the parliamentary elections, or joining the executive, while others purposefully stayed away from politics and focussed on monitoring the government's actions as part of their work with civil society organisations.⁹ Three years on, weakened by significant losses in the latest round of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan in late 2020, and popular frustration at the slow pace of reforms, particularly of the judiciary, support for Pashinyan has dramatically decreased, and the gains of the Velvet Revolution are threatened.

political attack by a political rival."¹¹ During that time, President Rousseff's supporters, who were largely members of her own party, trade unionists and leftist civil society activists, staged mass counter demonstrations to prevent the impeachment, which they believed was a "coup". Their message was difficult to put across, however, as they were defending a government, which they knew was implicated in corruption – even if the president was not – and as a result were unable to convince the wider public, politicians or the media of their cause.

The pro-impeachment movement was atypical for a country accustomed to protests such as Brazil: it was supported by mainly white, middle class families with no history of activism or previous ties to civil society organisations or political parties. In fact, its supporters were united in their anger against corruption, conservatism, adherence to the national flag and a total rejection of institutional politics and all political parties. Although apparently leaderless and spontaneous at first, the pro-impeachment campaign and protests were organized by a loose coalition of newly formed right-wing organizations – Movimento Brasil Livre (MBL), Vem Pra Rua and Revoltados Online. Ironically, these organizations were born out of mass protests against the increase of

bus fares initially organized in June 2013 in São Paulo by Movimento Passe Livre (MPL), a small radical, leftist, horizontal movement demanding free transportation.¹²

The impeachment of President Rousseff had wide repercussions on Brazilian politics and society. Although the movement's initial stated aim was to oust the entirety of Brazil's corrupt political elite, regardless of where they stood on the political spectrum, protests stopped almost as soon as Dilma Rousseff was impeached and her political rival Michel Temer took over the presidency.¹³ Despite their initial

immediately following the announcement: "This was the spark, but not necessarily the reason".¹⁵ Indeed, the ground for mass discontent was fertile: the Lebanese people were increasingly angry at the state's incompetence to deliver basic services such as electricity, potable water or garbage collection; massive pollution; and rampant corruption which they believed was the cause behind a deepening economic crisis, a regressive tax system, unemployment, and deteriorating standards of living. In the lead-up to the protests, unprecedented wildfires, which ravaged much of the country, exposed state negligence even further as ordinary



Brazilians stage a demonstration against Dilma Rousseff at Paulista Avenue in São Paulo, Brazil on April 17, 2016. (Credit: Dario Oliveira/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images)

rejection of institutional politics, which was instrumental in mobilizing protesters for nearly two years, some of the movement's leaders ran for legislative elections, becoming highly visible and successful politicians. As they embarked on their political journey, they lent support to Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right populist and defender of Brazil's military rule's record who eventually won presidential elections in 2018, having successfully exploited the anti-political system discourse, anti-partisanship and anti-leftist feelings that emerged from the 2015-2016 protests.¹⁴

The October Revolution in Lebanon (2019)

In Lebanon, a new round of taxes (including on WhatsApp calls) announced by the government on 17 October as part of broader austerity measures was the straw that broke the camel's back. As explained by an activist with Li Haqqi, a progressive leftist group, which was one of the first to call for protests on social media

people rushed to provide assistance to those affected, while the government was forced to rely on volunteer firefighters and foreign help, having failed to maintain its own firefighting equipment over the past decade.¹⁶

In the evening of 17 October 2020, groups of youths took to the streets of Beirut spontaneously as calls for protests on social media grew by then and were increasingly disseminated by journalists and Lebanon's numerous activist networks. The protesters started marching and blocked major crossroads in and around the capital, coming at one point across the Minister of Education's convoy whose bodyguards fired shots in the air, only angering people further, and generating wider support for the protests. After several hours, the riot police attempted to disperse peaceful crowds with tear gas and rubber bullets, prompting some protesters to throw stones and engage in low-level violence.¹⁷ Although the government announced a reversal

of the tax measure on WhatsApp calls, it was too little too late. By then, an open strike was declared to force the Prime Minister to resign, and protests started spreading to other cities and towns, with up to a quarter of Lebanon's four million population coming out into the streets at one point.¹⁸ A powerful, apparently leaderless and decentralized movement that seemed, at least in its initial days, to transcend Lebanon's sectarian, political, ideological and class divides was formed to demand a complete overhaul of the political system. Protesters appeared to be united in their rejection of the entire political elite under the slogan: "kullon ya'ni kullon" ("all means all" in the Lebanese dialect of Arabic).¹⁹

Some civil society groups and activists set up an encampment in Beirut's exclusive downtown district, while other protesters continued blocking roads with burnt tires, mounds of dirt or garbage containers. Although Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned after less than two weeks of protests, other politicians who had dominated Lebanese public life for decades remained in power. A new, fairly unknown Prime Minister was eventually appointed in January 2020 to form a technocratic government that was unable to lead change. By then, the economic crisis was deepening even further, while the authorities' repression of the largely peaceful protests intensified, with riot police "firing large amounts of teargas at protesters, beating some severely," and conducting violent arrests.²⁰ In parallel, security and military agencies used defamation laws to harass activists and journalists,²¹ while attacks against protesters orchestrated by pro-government groups continued, often turning protests into riots. The movement eventually lost momentum, and many ordinary people returned home, with only the most committed activists staying on the streets.²² Disagreements over strategy set in, dividing the movement. Eventually, in March 2020, Lebanon declared a state of health emergency in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and protests fizzled out.

End SARS protests in Nigeria (2020)

Campaigns calling for the dismantling of Nigeria's notorious Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) have been periodically taking place across Nigeria for years, with activists publicly denouncing widespread human

rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, torture and other ill-treatment, rape and extortion by members of the unit.²³ However, they would rarely attract more than several hundred supporters, and would usually dissipate after a day or two following the government's empty promises to reform SARS. None were able to generate the sustained mass mobilization and global support seen by the latest round of EndSARS protests in late 2020.

On 3 October 2020, an activist posted a video on Twitter alleging the killing of a young man by SARS officers in Delta state. Although it generated widespread condemnation on social media, it is unlikely that it would have gone viral had it not been for an innovative online protest launched by activists and Nigerian social media influencers that quickly gained great visibility both in the country and across the world. The outrage on social media galvanised tens of thousands of young men and women who started taking to the streets spontaneously, often motivated by their personal experience of police harassment and brutality or their relatives and friends' accounts. First in Lagos and then in other states, protesters demanded that SARS be dissolved. Established civil society organizations and activist groups as well as newly formed, crowdfunded networks started coordinating actions on the ground and offered legal and medical support to those arrested or injured during protests, which were often met with excessive force including water cannons and tear gas.²⁴ Demonstrations organised in support of the movement by diaspora Nigerians took place in major cities around the world including Berlin, Toronto, London, Geneva, New York and Paris.

Grievances started growing almost as quickly as the movement itself, and on 11 October, protesters issued a 5-point demand statement, which included the release of all detained protesters; justice and adequate compensation for victims of police brutality; the setting up of independent bodies to oversee investigations into police brutality; the retraining and psychological evaluation of former SARS members; and an increase in police salaries as a way to reduce extortion. Many protesters, though, expanded their demands beyond police reform and called for broader systemic change to address gross inequality, youth unemployment and a lack of basic services due to endemic corruption.²⁵ On 13 October,

in a meeting with the National Human Rights Commission, civil society organisations, activists and celebrities, the police's Inspector General accepted all five demands made by the movement.²⁶ However, almost immediately after, the authorities announced the formation of a new unit, the Special Weapons and Tactics Team (SWAT), to replace SARS, in a move that generated wide condemnation and raised serious doubts about the authorities' willingness to engage in meaningful reforms.²⁷

Protests continued and concentrated mainly at the Lekki toll gate and Alausa in Lagos, where on 20 October, soldiers opened live fire at protesters, killing at least 12 people.²⁸ With violence breaking out following the killings, and after some people, who activists say were not

There's no success like failure: debunking spontaneity

The spectacular nature of mass protests attracts global attention whilst they are ongoing, with commentators pointing to the power of social media and other digital technologies to replace organizing structures and overcome weak ties,³¹ but interest often fades away almost as soon as people leave the streets. Success and failure are usually seen through a lens of short-term political gains, even though protests often occur in cycles, with periods of mobilizing and organizing in between. Indeed, although collective mobilization follows "a recurrent dynamic

Success and failure are usually seen through a lens of short-term political gains, even though protests often occur in cycles, with periods of mobilizing and organizing in between.

associated with the EndSARS movement, set police stations on fire and engaged in acts of looting and vandalizing,²⁹ authorities imposed curfews, while activist groups largely called for an end to protests. Since then, many have been subjected to arrests, had their bank accounts frozen or had travel bans imposed against them. Others decided to flee the country to avoid violations. Independent television stations were subjected to arbitrary fines for using social media footage in their reporting on the security forces' violent response to the protests.³⁰ Whilst judicial panels of inquiry have been set up across 24 states in Nigeria to investigate SARS violations, and have at times included activists, lawyers or civil society workers associated with the EndSARS movement, they have yet to conclude their work and present recommendations. The initial movement's momentum has largely died down, though some groups say that they keep organizing in preparation for Nigeria's 2023 general elections.

of ebb and flow",³² contemporary social movements have often been characterized as social media "revolutions", "a spontaneous coming together, a natural collective expression of indignation, or a magical connection of people on Facebook or Twitter."³³ The focus on the power of social media often hides the huge "behind the scenes organization" involved in mobilizing people, which is rarely reported on in the news, and activists often benefit "from 'spontaneity narratives' such as presenting their demands as the will of the people, or proving autonomy from the existing power structure they want to challenge".³⁴ Whilst there is no denying that activists nowadays rely heavily on social media to call for protests and organize, more often than not, online networks do not provide a sufficient explanation for the emergence and mobilization of major movements. Most such movements include both experienced activists with a long history of dissent and mobilization, and newcomers, who often become accidentally involved by merely showing up at a protest, driven by curiosity or specific grievances. Any powerful

movement therefore includes elements of continuity and change, with activists learning from past struggles and earlier movements.³⁵ A social movement scholar explained this dynamic in relation to recent autonomous social movements:

“The key difference between the movements of the squares that survived and the ones that didn’t was actually the presence of pre-existing networks in the locations in which they erupted... Social media can be mobilised and used as a way to channel unrest, indignation, outrage, demands, which can also escalate very quickly into a mass presence on the streets [...] But what distinguishes [movements] that evaporate afterwards into not much [...] versus really building and re-fertilizing and revitalizing social movement communities is actually pre-existing networks of experienced activists and some kind of infrastructure. By that I don’t mean institutions and organizations, but I mean a community that has an organizational infrastructure and a reciprocal alliance and identity with each other.”³⁶

Indeed, in all the cases examined in this report, activists’ narratives focussed on learning processes, and an accumulation of experiences from previous waves of mobilization that in some cases went back decades. In **Lebanon** for example, activists and researchers point out that the origins of the 2019 October Revolution date back to the mobilization of 2011 when up to several thousand protesters went out into the streets of Beirut to demand the end of political sectarianism, echoing the same call repeated in demonstrations across the region at the time: “the people want the fall of the regime”. It was then that the slogan “all means all”, which became so successful in creating a collective identity in the first weeks of the October Revolution, first appeared. However, the ground for making such radical demands was not ready, and the call was largely seen as imported from Arab Spring protests.³⁷ Indeed, the protests were dominated by a strong presence of political parties, dividing participants along sectarian and ideological lines. This was particularly problematic since the majority of protesters were meeting for the

first time, and as a result, had yet to establish the networks and trust that are so essential in any social movement building, but even more so in a polarized environment.³⁸ Even though the campaign did not manage to spread beyond Beirut, or attract mass participation, it was largely seen as the beginning of organizing, and the formation of new ties.³⁹ These informal networks consolidated during the 2015 “You Stink” campaign and wave of protests launched in response to Beirut’s garbage crisis that exposed state corruption and mismanagement. However, yet again, the protests did not grow beyond downtown Beirut. Seen primarily as a cause pioneered by “the liberal middle class”, they did not manage to galvanise grassroots support.⁴⁰ Further lessons were learnt from organizing attempts during the 2016 municipal and 2018 general elections, as well as smaller campaigns “led by feminists, migrant workers, public sector employees, [and] the families of the disappeared” in addition to periodic waves of mobilization around refugee and housing rights, corruption, and environmental, social and economic justice.⁴¹ According to research by Lebanon Support, a local NGO, the October 2019 protests were preceded by some 472 collective actions, including protests, strikes, roadblocks and solidarity events, organized in support of these causes since 2017.⁴²

The effects of this gradual accumulation of knowledge, which people were able to draw upon during the October Revolution, is perhaps best expressed by a Lebanese activist with over 20 years’ experience: “If there’s something that I’ve learnt during these past 10 years, it is that every act we make, every meeting we attend, every demonstration, every protest we go to, every blog we write, every article we publish – this is all part of a long movement, a 10-year-long movement after which you start seeing real change.”⁴³

Although Lebanon’s October Revolution did not immediately produce the change that people wanted to see, and merely within a year of resigning, Saad Hariri was again appointed as prime minister in a bid to gain international support and avoid a complete economic collapse, the opposition landscape was dramatically transformed during that time, with some leftist groups emerging stronger following the wave of mobilization and currently expanding efforts towards community-building and political organizing.⁴⁴



Graffiti and street art, Beirut, October 2019 (Credit: [Freimut Bahlo](#))

Armenia is another case where continuity between movements that had formed over decades played a major role, and largely contributed to the peaceful political transition of the Velvet Revolution. As explained by an Armenian political analyst, “[To] those unacquainted with the realities of Armenian politics, it seemed that the huge protests came out of nowhere to attract hundreds of thousands of people and engulf the whole country. To those familiar with Armenian realities, the fact of the protests themselves was not surprising, but what seemed unlikely was that the protests could ever succeed, since the numerous political and civic protest movements that had taken place in Armenia in preceding years had mostly ended in vain... [But] it was precisely the legacy of those ‘failed’ protests that had prepared the success of 2018.”⁴⁵

Indeed, civic activism and protests have been a feature of Armenia’s political culture since 1988 when a movement had mobilized on and off for about three years to demand a transfer of the Nagorno-Karabakh region from Soviet Azerbaijan to Armenia⁴⁶ and to provide assistance to Armenian refugees fleeing Azerbaijan as well as victims of a devastating earthquake. The activism and volunteerism of that period was not only instrumental in shaping Armenia’s post-Soviet identity but also made people realise that better support and organisation structures were needed in light of the state’s failure to lead an effective relief effort.⁴⁷ However, most lessons learnt by Velvet

Revolution activists stem from protests against election fraud, which started in 1996, and smaller civic initiatives of the 2000s. With the exception of protests which took place following the 2008 presidential elections – lasted 10 days, were violently suppressed and resulted in the killing of 10 protesters as well as mass arrests and prosecutions – these demonstrations usually failed to sustain large-scale mobilization for any length of time, enabling the authorities to ignore them until they would dissipate by themselves. However, even if they did not threaten the authorities sufficiently to disperse them with force or enter into negotiations, they “prevented Armenia from becoming a full-fledged autocracy”, and “created networks of activism that enabled mass mobilization in 2018.”⁴⁸

In addition, many small-scale civic initiatives emerged out of the 2008 protests, which were attended by large numbers of youths, including students, who purposefully distanced themselves from political parties, claiming to be non-partisan and non-political. In the years that followed, they mainly focussed on social and environmental causes such as preventing the demolition of an open-air theatre in Yerevan or a harmful education or pension reform. They adopted “horizontal structures, spontaneity, flexibility [and a] narrow focus” while also aiming for “relatively rapid outcomes”.⁴⁹ Because of their apolitical nature, and the protesters’ strategy to enter into negotiations with the government, rather than calling for its overthrow, they were largely

seen as unthreatening and tolerated by the authorities. In 2018, these groups brought their accumulated knowledge, forms of organizing and tested tactics to the protests successfully revolutionising their character from the onset.

A protest leader explained how this learning process was put to use during the Velvet Revolution: “Yes, there are new people. For example, a couple of people [in organising roles] were very new, but there are also people from previous movements. I think that all the previous movements [...] have led up and contributed to this movement. They have formed the foundation of this movement. We have learned a lot. For example, the positivity of this movement was taken from the No Pasaran mobilisation, where we saw that it worked and brought results.”⁵⁰

Of all these movements, two waves of mobilization had probably the biggest impact on the Velvet Revolution: the 2015 Electric Yerevan protests against a rise in electricity prices, when between 10,000 to 20,000 people took to the streets, and huge demonstrations in 2016 in favour of a peaceful resolution of an armed takeover of a police station by former fighters of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict and some opposition activists. In the first, activists demonstrated their great disruptive capacity by blocking the capital's major roads, and even though they lost momentum after the government managed to convince some of them to move the protests to Yerevan's Freedom Square, where they no longer threatened daily life, and eventually dissipated after some limited concessions, the movement showed “the potential for a youth-based innovative peaceful protest”.⁵¹ However, it also demonstrated the limits of a relatively inexperienced, leaderless movement when faced with a government's response that required it to adapt its tactics. As explained by an Armenian political analyst: this experience “helped Armenian activists of various stripes to put aside their ideological differences and concerns about ‘politicization’ and ‘partisanship’ and consolidate around Pashinyan and his Civil Contract party during the April 2018 events”.⁵² The second movement exposed the ineffectiveness of violent actions, and gave the authorities an excuse to use repression against activists and conduct scores of arrests citing security concerns.⁵³ By doing so, it helped reinforce the insistence on non-violence by protest leaders in 2018.

While there is no doubt that social media allow movements to mobilize and grow dramatically within hours, without the involvement of formal organizations, collective decisions or established leaders, the sole reliance on the internet can in many cases lead to failure. As explained by a sociologist whose academic research focuses on movements, privacy and data, “[O]lder movements had to build their organizing capacity first, working over long periods and expending much effort. The infrastructure for logistics they created, using the less developed technology that was available to them at the time, also helped develop their capacity for the inevitable next steps that movements face after their initial events [be it a march, a protest, or an occupation] is over. Modern networked movements can scale up quickly and take care of all sorts of logistical tasks without building any substantial organizational capacity before the first protest or march.”⁵⁴

The EndSARS protests in **Nigeria** appear to be a case where the internal capacity, cohesion and identity of the movement had not been sufficiently developed before the protests started growing and gained mass national and international visibility. Indeed, although the initial EndSARS campaign, which called for a dissolution of SARS and a police reform, was first launched in late 2017 by a group of human rights defenders and organizations that had been raising awareness on the unit's violations through advocacy, “rallies and marches”, public talks and social media actions,⁵⁵ the October 2020 digital protests were started by a separate group of tech-savvy activists, media strategists and entrepreneurs. The power of social media allowed anyone to lend their support and eventually the movement was made up of different NGO and activist communities with different agendas and no established networks between each other. New groups such as the LGBTQ network Safe House or the Feminist Coalition, founded only three months before the protests, emerged as some of the protest leaders online by successfully using their huge following on social media to raise funds for the movement.⁵⁶ Although they were able to use their social media following to greatly amplify the movement's cause internationally, and even though they organized assistance to protesters on the ground by coordinating legal or medical aid, food, water and other supplies, they were relatively unknown amongst Nigeria's civil society



A Nigerian youth holds a protests card during a march against police brutality on October 16, 2020, in Lagos, Nigeria. (Credit: Ajibola Fasola via Shutterstock)

organizations and leftist social justice groups such as Revolution Now that were coordinating protests on the ground, and had a long history of activism. They had no shared history of collective action or pre-existing networks from previous protest cycles to rely on when disagreements over the aims of the movement erupted, including with the original coordinator of the 2017 EndSARS campaign, who distanced himself from the protests claiming that they had been “hijacked” by others.⁵⁷

The lack of established ties and networks between the different groups that started the protests online was also a major weakness after the violent dispersal of protesters at Lekki in Lagos, as there did not appear to be a unified strategy on how to sustain the mobilization, and with many participants fearing further repression, the initial energy of the protests was lost. Some groups stopped their activities and called on protesters to go back home; others, such as Citizens’ Gavel, who had been providing legal aid to protesters, building on their experience and networks prior to the protests, started engaging with the monitoring of the work of the judicial panels set up to investigate violations by SARS. Others still, such as the social justice movement Revolution Now, who were active in coordinating protests on the ground, opted to continue the mobilization through community and political organizing.⁵⁸

The risks and pitfalls of leaderlessness and over-reliance on strong leadership

Born out of protesters’ frustration with delegating power to others, a desire to have their voices heard, and “a belief that all leaders will inevitably be corrupted or co-opted”, leaderless movements have been a real feature of the past decade.⁵⁹ Although on the surface activists often categorically reject any formal leadership, in practice, however, movements are rarely completely leaderless. They are often made up of different networks and groups with their own internal structures and hierarchies, and the question of leadership usually arises when the “need for leadership functions, such as coordination and public representation”, appears.⁶⁰

On the one hand, participatory methods are hugely empowering for individuals, and contribute to a sense of collective belonging and shared identity, which is essential in any collective action or community-building process. Leaderlessness is also a deliberate strategy for some movements to avoid state repression, or as mentioned above, corruption and co-optation. On the other hand, the

absence of an institutionalized leadership or mechanism to elect or appoint one can create a political vacuum and constitute a significant weakness for many movements, reducing their own negotiating power or capacity to adopt new tactics, particularly when authorities are changing their own response strategies.⁶¹ The October Revolution in Lebanon and the EndSARS movement in Nigeria both fall into this latter category, while the pro-impeachment protests in Brazil are an example of how a movement can successfully take advantage of leaderlessness to advance its goals. By contrast, Armenia's experience shows the advantages of strong leadership in a decentralized movement but is also a warning of the risks of co-optation it may present, if left unchecked.

Researchers and activists have yet to fully understand how a small, progressive, horizontal and non-political left-leaning movement gave rise to right-wing, conservative politics in a country like Brazil and eventually paved the way for Jair Bolsonaro's election.

But one thing is bitterly clear: the success of the pro-impeachment movement goes back to a wave of hopeful leftist protests, organized in São Paulo in 2013 by MPL, a group calling for free public transport, and the political vacuum they created by MPL's reluctance to lead protesters in continuing their fight for real political and socio-economic change, once the campaign's short-term goals were achieved. Indeed, within a few days in June 2013, MPL's protests against a hike in bus fare prices were able to mobilize two million people into the streets, having been able to galvanise only several thousands a week earlier.⁶² This unexpected success for a radical group that up until then attracted only leftist activists and anarchists, was mainly triggered by images of police violence against protesters, which were widely reported in mainstream media. Ordinary people, including many families, with no history of activism or established political identities started joining the protests, attracted by their non-political, leaderless and non-partisan nature. The lack of any hierarchy and the insistence on collective action and participation meant that people were able to express their long-standing grievances and anger against the establishment freely, with opinion polls suggesting that 89% of Brazilians were supporting their cause by the

end of June.⁶³ However, after the mayor of São Paulo accepted MPL's original demands and reversed the proposed bus fare increase, the group was keen to end the protests and retreated from a leading role. Demonstrators, though, wanted more: they stayed in the streets to demand better public services, healthcare, education, and above all an end to rampant state corruption. By then the protests were truly leaderless.

A public policy expert who researched the 2013 protests explained this process: "It was an upheaval, people were very angry and there was no legitimate political party to lead them and the only organization that people trusted – MPL – did not want to lead."⁶⁴ Despite its enormous success, MPL was strongly committed to its horizontal structure and avoided institutionalized politics, particularly after its aims were co-opted by a larger group affiliated with the Communist party during a previous wave of mobilization in Salvador in 2005: "They did not want to become a political party, and were founded precisely to avoid politics; this is why they retreated in 2013," he added.⁶⁵ Soon after, the protests, which lasted several months and spread across the country, became a conglomeration of different groups with different agendas, including progressive, autonomous groups, trade unions, and members of the ruling Workers' Party but also white, middle class families espousing traditional and conservative beliefs (in a country where the majority of people identify as black or of mixed ethnicity). Although some leftist groups tried to form coalitions in cities such as Recife or Belo Horizonte, there was no coordination with other networks across the country and no obvious leaders. In addition, as mentioned above, the Workers' Party was going through an internal legitimacy crisis, prompted by a corruption investigation, which also affected the ability of trade unions to transform the protests' momentum into a progressive movement for change. Crucially, though, these leftist groups failed to take up corruption, which was one of the protesters' key demands, and as a result created a political void. In the absence of on-the-ground leaders, people went online to find answers or express their anger, where the space was being filled by emerging right-wing conservative groups such as MBL, Vem Pra Rua and Revoltados Online (see section 6) – much to the horror of the original activists who started the protests in 2013.

The fact that millions of people were effectively led by these three tiny organizations, each started by less than a handful of unexperienced, young activists in their late teens or early twenties, is still difficult to comprehend. A political scientist explained this shift: “There were huge waves of anger and when you have this many people on the streets with such anger, you have the perfect moment for manipulation. What was left [of the 2013 protests] was these traditional white families dressed in [Brazil’s national colours] yellow and green, screaming against the state and corruption [...] it was quite easy for MBL to transform the anger of these groups into

Two years later, the angry, apolitical protesters who took to the streets to denounce corruption in June 2013 were the backbone of the mass pro-impeachment demonstrations against President Dilma Rousseff. By then, they had adopted a clearly right-wing agenda, seeing the Workers’ Party as their main enemy. The protest culture had also changed. The movement abandoned participative methods and protests lost their fluidity; they started looking like static rallies with only a pre-selected, limited number of people making speeches on top of trucks. The communication style also became much more hierarchical as MBL and the other right-wing groups started producing content for



An anti-Dilma protest in Guarulhos on April 11, 2015. (Credit: Renato Gizzi/Brazil Photo Press via Flickr)

an anger against the system, politicians as a category, and ultimately an anger against the Workers’ Party.”⁶⁶ Whilst MPL’s retreat allowed right-wing groups to advance their own political agenda, the media who needed spokespersons to represent the protesters also strengthened their position, by giving them a voice. A Brazilian journalist describes what happened: “There’s no such thing as a political vacuum. Someone always steps in to take over, and that’s what happened after the MPL declined to direct the protests in any way. The media wanted leaders, someone who could ‘speak for the protesters,’ and the MBL youth provided them with just that.”⁶⁷

online sharing. As explained by a public policy expert: “The movement was led by these three organizations who have their own leadership and are very visible. At first, they tried to hide their right-wing agenda because people were apolitical and rejected political identities but one of the efforts of this campaign was to make right-wing politics acceptable through online messaging. Communication was very hierarchical, developed to be shared via Facebook and then WhatsApp. They wanted people to applaud them and share their content but not engage.”⁶⁸ Because they were targeting an older demographic, which was comfortable with a hierarchical structure, the strategy was effective.

By contrast, in **Nigeria**, the absence of an established leadership was an intentional strategy adopted by EndSARS protesters to avoid government repression on the one hand, and co-optation, on the other. This insistence on decentralized actions and the leaderless nature of the protests is based on the experience of Nigeria's past social movements, whereby the authorities would invite protest leaders apparently for negotiations, but in reality, to buy them off or intimidate them⁶⁹ – a practice which has been used by governments around the world. This is why protesters insisted on communicating their demands via social or traditional media and avoided, at first, in-person meetings with the authorities.⁷⁰

However, this does not mean that the protests were entirely leaderless. While there was no centralized form of leadership at a federal level, activists in each state had their own structure and strategy on how and where to organize, retaining some control over how events would unfold. There was also some level of coordination between different groups leading and providing assistance to protesters on the ground. An activist involved in the protests in

strength: “It was difficult for the government to single out leaders and arrest them because everyone was a leader.”⁷² At the same time, it represented a weakness when the federal government stated its willingness to negotiate with the protesters. The authorities attempted to use the fact that there was no established leadership, or mechanism to appoint one, to divide the protesters: “The government was saying ‘if the movement is unable to agree on who represents them, then it suggests a level of disunity.’ The demands were out in the public, on social media so no one wanted to meet with the government. This was only a semi-successful strategy. In the short-term, it was a good thing but if they had met, we could have maybe ended up with a better outcome, a more detailed implementation plan. But the fundamental question is whether [the government] was acting in good faith.”⁷³ Eventually, the Nigerian government agreed to the protesters' demands in a meeting co-organized by the Office of the Inspector General of Police and the National Human Rights Commission, which was attended by representatives of Nigerian and international development and human rights

An insistence on leaderlessness does not stop a de facto leadership from appearing.

Lagos explains: “This was a community effort, with many people involved. Lawyers provided legal services, others were bringing drinks or were sweeping the streets after the protests. People were using their own cars to transport protesters. Everything was done by volunteers. This is why the government couldn't target a specific leader. There were no visible leaders but each of the organisations that took part in the protests had their coordinators.”⁷¹

Those coordinating activities on the ground had also the freedom to adopt strategies that would push EndSARS demands and gain most visibility in their own state, as opposed to focussing on the federal government. The director of a Nigerian NGO that is monitoring the work of judicial panels of inquiry into police brutality explained that the decentralized nature of the protests, without any central control at the federal level, was its great

NGOs, academics, singers, the convenor of the original EndSARS campaign and other civil society representatives involved in police reform.⁷⁴ Other actors who had been coordinating protests on the ground, however, were absent, and as a result their voices were unheard. More importantly, the talks failed to establish public trust in the government's commitment to reforms and avoid a violent repression against protesters.⁷⁵

Indeed, social movement scholars point out that an insistence on leaderlessness does not stop a de facto leadership from appearing, which “is often composed of those with the most time, tenacity, energy, extroversion, preexisting social status, and even plain aggressiveness.”⁷⁶ The reliance on social media by movements to increase their reach and visibility but also by journalists and analysts to find representative voices online as they cover

protests adds another layer of complication. While de facto leaders attract much needed attention by successfully disseminating their movements' goals and messaging online, they often lack internal legitimacy in the absence of a "formal recognition of their role as de facto spokespersons", leading to tensions among activists.⁷⁷ Crucially, though, in the long-term, the absence of an established leadership weakens movements' capacity to effect change as no one has the power, or the legitimacy, to adopt new tactics when the initial momentum of the protests fizzles out. The October Revolution in Lebanon is one such example.

"I am the leader of the revolution", "I am the founder of the revolution" and "I am the negotiator of the revolution" were some of the slogans that emerged during the 2019 wave of protests in **Lebanon** pointing to activists' insistence on the movement's leaderless character.⁷⁸ In a similar fashion to Nigeria's EndSARS protests, this was a deliberate strategy based on Lebanese activists' bitter experience of the 2015 "You Stink" campaign designed to expose the state's neglect in dealing with Beirut's garbage crisis. At the time, state-affiliated media and political parties successfully delegitimized the movement by targeting activists with smear campaigns. While they portrayed protesters in general as "delinquents, foreign agents, potential terrorists or any combination thereof", they also carried out vicious personal attacks against the movement's leaders.⁷⁹ In one such example, OTV, a station affiliated with the Free Patriotic Movement,⁸⁰ accused one of the campaign's leaders As'ad Thibyan of being "an atheist who missed no chance to insult religion".⁸¹ By focussing on the leadership, politicians also managed to split the movement when protests descended into violence, and the campaign's spokespersons started distancing themselves from those involved in clashes with the police, calling them "infiltrators" and "thugs".⁸² Having learnt from these experiences, in October 2019, protesters rejected any form of institutionalized leadership, even when President Michel Aoun and the Secretary General of Hezbollah both called for the movement to create a body able to negotiate with the government. The move was largely seen with suspicion, as yet another attempt to discredit protesters. However, as mentioned above, and just like in the other contexts examined in this report, the lack of an established leadership did not mean a lack of organizing, which took different forms

depending on the involvement of specific groups and their own internal structures and strategies. It did nonetheless reduce the movement's disruptive capacity to adopt new tactics when the initial energy faded.

A journalist and researcher who observed the protests explained: "At first, people were very emotional. It was touching to see how people were expressing themselves and overcoming differences but then the question of 'what next?' appeared, and protest fatigue set in. And then you can't protest without a very specific goal or ability to elaborate specific demands. People were from different class backgrounds and [had] different interests and priorities. They needed a clear vision."⁸³

Although researchers suggest that there were a number of external factors that contributed to the demobilization of protesters even before the Covid-19 pandemic made large gatherings impossible – including the prolonged economic crisis, the use of excessive and unlawful force against protesters, co-optation of the discourse on change by political parties or cold and rainy weather – ultimately, the lack of sufficient political organization was the main reason why collective actions faded. This manifested itself through an absence of a shared political vision amongst the different organizations and people active in the protests, an absence of a mobilization strategy, and the prolonged leaderlessness of the movement.⁸⁴

As explained by a Lebanese historian, the absence of an established leadership "is a double-edged sword, being advantageous at first as an oppositional tactic but disadvantageous in the longer run when there is a desire and expectation to take power."⁸⁵ As time went on, disagreements over strategy and political lines became more apparent. With the economic crisis deepening further, activists were split over the continuation of roadblocks, with some seeing this tactic as too costly for ordinary people, who needed to get to work. Others opted for more targeted activism by attempting to occupy or disrupt the activities of symbolic places of political and economic power such as the parliament building, the state-owned electricity company or the central bank. However, these tactics also became contentious and tensions erupted between activists once political parties took sides and praised some of their actions and condemned others, depending on what fitted their political

agenda.⁸⁶ Once again, the movement was being faced with attempts to co-opt it.

The question of a potential shift off street politics into institutionalized politics was another source of major tensions as was the debate on how best to coordinate between the various groups involved – informally or through an umbrella structure. However, in those discussions, there was no agreement as to whether a formalized leadership should even be put forward. A scholar who attended the protests as an observer explained: “The informal won and so people went back to coordinating around small issues such as banking, the environment [...] The hesitancy or the inability to create an overall structure of coordination had an impact in addition to the fact that state violence had repelled a number of people who had previously been joining [...] People were calling for [the government’s] resignation and for the fall of the regime but very few people were actually saying what should replace it. It was clear that you needed a crisis government, but people couldn’t rally behind the idea, and if they did, they needed to also rally behind some mechanism to come up with a set of names. But there was a big fear also that these names could then be subject immediately to smear campaigns or would be co-opted [...] The absence of a near-consensus that names should be put forward, and the absence of an understanding of how this should happen made people reluctant to put names forward. Because there was no agreement, no one wanted to be seen as the person trying to take advantage of the situation to advance themselves or to advance their friends or colleagues.”⁸⁷

Even though a de facto leadership emerged during the protests, the lack of a democratic appointment or election mechanism meant that these people were wary of accepting the responsibility to lead, largely “constrained by an expectation of shared governance” with the political elite. According to an activist who took part in the protest, “A big problem was the talk of us being a leaderless movement [...] If there’s a rhetoric of no leaders, no one assumes responsibility for their actions”, and ultimately no one was empowered enough to take tactical decisions on the movement’s behalf. Equally, no one could be held accountable for any mistakes or inaction. As a result, the status quo remained, and eventually the movement failed to influence any political changes in the short-term.

By contrast, **Armenia’s** Velvet Revolution stands out as somewhat an exception not only among the cases studied in this report, but also among recent social movements. Its successful transition from a semi-authoritarian system towards democracy was led by a charismatic leader, Nikol Pashinyan, who enjoyed uncontested support from the entire protest movement including professional NGOs, activist groups, students and ordinary people. Importantly though, he was not only an opposition activist, but a parliamentarian as well, and therefore was able to lead Armenia’s transition by working within the bounds of the state and the constitution.⁸⁸ He had gained popular legitimacy following his arrest in 2009 for his role in organizing protests against electoral fraud a year earlier, and was sentenced to seven years in prison, although he was released after serving 23 months. His credibility was further reinforced through his calls for justice for victims of the 2008 repression, and his advocacy on behalf of people detained for their activism. Importantly, he was the first to openly criticise President Serzh Sargsyan ahead of the planned power grab and had no history of collusion with the oligarchs.⁸⁹

A researcher focussed on social movements and digital media explained how Pashinyan’s grassroots activism and direct communication style contributed to his emergence as a natural leader: “There was never any question as to who the leader would be. Pashinyan had a good reputation: he was the only MP who was visiting activists in detention. He was communicating through Facebook [...] and there was a radical transparency in the ways in which he came to power. By contrast, Serzh [Sargsyan]’s communication was through public TV but as the protests were happening people turned to Facebook because the public TV did not cover them. There was no other such figure, Pashinyan was uniquely placed to take up that role.”⁹⁰ In addition, the weakness of the political opposition, including Pashinyan’s own Civic Contract party – which had obtained only 7.8% of votes in the 2017 parliamentary elections – meant that there was no other viable democratic alternative.⁹¹

Although there were some disagreements over strategy and tactics during the April-May 2018 mobilization wave, the overall political vision and objectives were clear: Serzh Sargsyan was to resign, while Nikol Pashinyan was to become Prime Minister and lead the country



Armenian opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan waves to supporters after being elected as prime minister in Yerevan's Republic Square on May 8, 2018. [Credit: Sergei Gapon/AFP via Getty Images]

towards free general elections with a view to eventually change the “corrupt system”. Although the movement was decentralized, a central “revolutionary committee” that included Pashinyan and a group of 15-20 activists from the “Reject Serzh” initiative and broader civil society, were meeting every evening to discuss and decide on the specific civil disobedience actions for the following day. These would range from roadblocks and disrupting the banking system to storming the public radio building or calling for protests outside Armenian embassies around the world. Pashinyan and other activists would then communicate these broad lines of action to the protesters via social media (including Facebook Live streams) or speeches, asking everyone to practice civil disobedience. There was no central coordination of these actions at a local level, leaving each group to implement them as they wished. Even though there was no democratic process through which members of the revolutionary committee were appointed, its legitimacy and credibility were widely accepted.

A former foreign policy advisor to Nikol Pashinyan and member of the committee explained: “I’m not sure who gave this mandate to the committee. It was all very organic [...] The committee included people who had a history of civic activism. It was a home grown, natural group that was accepted. You would come to those meetings because you had legitimacy”.⁹² Once Pashinyan became Prime Minister, the support continued, initially because people felt euphoric, having achieved the impossible, and

then increasingly, to protect the gains of the “revolution” which felt very fragile as members of the RPA were still dominating parliament. As mobilization subsided however, activists chose different pathways with some joining the executive branch in advisory or other roles appointed by Pashinyan. Others successfully stood for parliamentary elections, while a considerable number of activists returned back to their professional activities in NGOs or civic activism.⁹³ Even after the elections, people associated with the former regime controlled the media, and for the first year of the “revolution” there was very much a fear that the “old guard” could come back. As a result, support for Pashinyan continued even after it became apparent that people were dissatisfied with the slow pace of the reform of the judiciary. A social movements researcher explained: “It always felt that the revolution was fragile and vulnerable during the first year. A lot of NGO people were self-censoring [...] because they were scared of the old guard who were still there, and they did not want to undermine the government but as a result, the culture of critique subsided.”⁹⁴ During that time, only small progressive groups of feminist or environment rights activists remained openly critical of the government mainly due to their dissatisfaction with the narrowly focussed transition, which did not challenge established societal norms or the political system itself.

Today, many believe that the gains of the revolution are threatened, with some attributing it to the uncontested support

placed behind Pashinyan from the early days of the mass mobilization. A former advisor to Nikol Pashinyan, who was one of the main protest leaders in 2018, explained the challenges that this is causing today: “Since the regime change, there have been a lot of disagreements; the incoming government got used to the one man show. The reform agenda was very small, and it still is a one man show [...] We had to manage his [Nikol Pashinyan’s] fame and popularity, which was very difficult to control [...] There was too much power given to one person during the revolution and he inherited a constitution that gives too much power to one person.”⁹⁵

Measuring success and failure

While the recent movements for change seen in Lebanon, Nigeria, Brazil and Armenia included mass protest events, protests are in fact only one of the many tactics available in a social movement’s toolkit. Others include marches, rallies and petitions mainly used to show the power of numbers as well as strikes, boycotts and roadblocks, which are often chosen for their disruptive capacity.⁹⁶

like their voices are being heard.⁹⁷ This is why such movements see particularly high levels of volunteerism, with people providing supplies for protesters, organizing logistics and cleaning protest sites, or setting up libraries and kitchens in the middle of encampments.⁹⁸ In addition, the vast majority of movements nowadays integrate offline actions with online tactics such as digital campaigns or the targeted use of social media to disseminate a movement’s messages and demands. Each of these can serve a separate objective at different times.

Experts agree that movements are most successful when they are able to constantly innovate and adapt their tactics to the evolving context, and respond effectively to competing demands from political authorities, potential supporters, their own activist base and the media, which often has its own agenda.⁹⁹ They must therefore be sufficiently threatening or disruptive not to be dismissed by the authorities, but equally not pose too much of a threat to be heavily repressed. In addition, they must remain credible and true to their original ideals in the eyes of their own supporters and members but also flexible and open to new tactics to attract newcomers. Above all, they must adopt radical or innovative tactics to remain newsworthy.

While the recent movements for change seen in Lebanon, Nigeria, Brazil and Armenia included mass protest events, protests are in fact only one of the many tactics available in a social movement’s toolkit.

By contrast, encampments where protesters pitch tents and occupy symbolic public spaces or assemblies – which consist of discussions in small groups using horizontal techniques – are often used to create a shared identity and collective sense of belonging. At times, protests also play that role, and are an end in themselves, not just the means to achieve impact – their main concern being in such cases building support for the movement. This is particularly true of horizontal, autonomous movements, where people often participate only as a way to express themselves and feel

While there is no doubt that mass mobilization generates greater visibility and media coverage, numbers do not always achieve a movement’s intended objectives. Indeed, analysts often point to the 2002-2003 anti-war movement, which drew the participation of millions of people across hundreds of cities in the world but was unable to stop the invasion of Iraq. Similarly, millions of people marched in the 2017 Women’s March, the day following President Trump’s inauguration, to support gender equality and human rights at a time when significant gains were at risk. Although

this was widely considered the largest protest in the United States' history,¹⁰⁰ people went home without immediately achieving anything. Following this logic, does it matter that one quarter of Lebanon's population showed up on the streets in October 2019 to demand an end to sectarianism? And does this mean that a regression in protesters' numbers over time and a return of Saad Hariri's government a year later was a sign of failure? Similarly, did the violent repression and sudden end to the anti-SARS protests in Nigeria signify that the movement had failed? In any social movement, mass mobilization "has a specific momentum that can

Thinking of social movements in terms of their narrative, disruptive and institutional or electoral capacities brings another set of questions. Were the movements in Nigeria, Brazil, Lebanon and Armenia able to frame their stories and spread their worldview successfully? Did they manage to convince both the public and their own activist base that their demands and tactics are legitimate? Did the security forces stand by their side? How did they reinforce their narratives? Were they successful in disrupting daily life, and made it impossible for the authorities to continue like "it's business as usual"? When faced with

Defining success and failure is nuanced. While movements demand long-term changes, activists want to see immediate results.

hardly be sustained over long periods of time" regardless of the specific context, strategies or authorities' response.¹⁰¹ Numbers alone are therefore rarely a reliable indicator of success, even though the media and commentators often rush to offer an appraisal of a movement as soon as protests fade, before losing interest and moving on to the next big story.

In reality, defining success and failure is much more nuanced as social movements are made up of different groups with competing objectives. Additionally, while movements demand long-term changes, activists want to see immediate results. The protest cycle usually generates only gradual reforms, and only a partial acceptance of a movement's messaging by the public, which needs to be distilled before it can become part of the mainstream discourse.¹⁰² Processes of change are slow, taking decades if not longer, and require deep societal and cultural shifts in addition to political change. Therefore, experts suggest that focussing on activists' capacities demonstrated before, during and after waves of mobilization, rather than immediate outcomes, is a more useful approach to measuring success: "Strength of social movements lie in their capacities: to set the narrative, to effect electoral or institutional changes, and to disrupt the status quo."¹⁰³

backlash and repression, were they resilient enough to survive? And finally, were they able to force changes through elections or internal institutional strategies?

A close look at these movements offers a mixed picture. Overall, all showed a great narrative capacity, even though they used different tactics to achieve their aims. Their ability to disrupt the status quo varied depending on the level of state repression in each of the contexts. In the short-term, only the pro-impeachment movement in Brazil and Armenia's Velvet Revolution were able to effect electoral or institutional change.

Armenia's Velvet Revolution's widely hailed success is perhaps best explained by the fact that it was a "deeply 'institutional' revolution', one which "worked within the existing institutional parameters of the state".¹⁰⁴

By doing so, it had a great capacity to effect both institutional and electoral change. The movement had a very narrowly and clearly defined goal from the outset: to remove the incumbent president who was trying to extend his hold on power through constitutional changes. As explained by an Armenian political scientist, "It was very much

a constitutional uprising. People came to the streets and specifically called out this attempt of constitutional engineering on the side of the government [...] Even though everyone uses the word 'revolution', the key strategy as to why it succeeded is precisely because it was not a revolution in terms of that it did not attack the state. It worked within a flawed but formal constitutional order of the state, meaning that Nikol Pashinyan was a movement leader by day and a politician, parliamentarian by night. He would go to parliament to negotiate with the incumbent leaders who controlled parliament [...] This was a dual track transition and that really helped to seal the gains and do it also peacefully."¹⁰⁵ However, despite the fact that he was a parliamentarian, as a member of the opposition in a semi-authoritarian regime, Pashinyan's position was weak, and he would not have achieved this negotiation power had it not been for the movement's great disruptive and narrative capacity, which posed a significant threat to the authorities.

Indeed, the positive framing adopted by the movement in the initial days of the protests played a huge role in encouraging people to join spontaneously. Following a first speech at a rally he held immediately after entering Yerevan on 13 April 2018, which failed to attract crowds beyond several hundred middle aged men, Pashinyan drastically changed his narrative. He abandoned the old discourse of "oppressed Armenian people" and a "fascist regime", which until then had been routinely used at demonstrations, and instead spoke of "proud Armenian citizens" and a "revolution of love and harmony."¹⁰⁶ In parallel, he adopted tactics used by young activists of Armenia's many civic initiatives, and instead of pitching tents in the square, as was usual practice for opposition movements until then, he started touring the capital's schools and universities, calling on everyone to practice civil disobedience in their own cities, villages and towns. The novelty of the discourse and tactics was hugely successful in attracting huge numbers of youths, including students. Once other parts of the population, including the elderly, saw this initial mobilization, they overcame their fears and started joining the protests spontaneously.¹⁰⁷ For the first time, women constituted a large proportion of protesters, and were able to express themselves in a patriarchal society and space traditionally reserved for men.

As roadblocks were one of the main tactics of the movement, people used whatever means they had to create disruption, constantly innovating, and organizing themselves through social media. Teenagers would play football in the streets, while office workers would block roads by working on their laptops in the middle of major crossroads.¹⁰⁸ Roads were being blocked by classical musicians playing concerts, puppeteers holding puppet shows and women standing with their prams at intersections. As explained by a political scientist, "Overall, the energy was overwhelming and the empowerment that comes from this level of organizing was great."¹⁰⁹ In addition to creating an internal sense of belonging and legitimacy amongst the movement's supporters, these actions were very fluid, emerging in one place, disappearing before the arrival of the police to re-emerge elsewhere, bringing entire cities to a halt and completely overwhelming law enforcement forces. At the same time, the leadership, aided by NGO workers who participated in the protests in large numbers and had experience dealing with security forces, kept insisting on non-violence, referring to the police as "friends" even in situations of arrests.

While the Velvet Revolution was hugely successful in achieving its short-term goals and demonstrated great narrative, disruptive and electoral capacity, it is yet unclear whether it will succeed in translating its gains into a formalized process of institutional and political change. This can only be assessed in the long-term.¹¹⁰

The pro-impeachment protests in Brazil are another example of a movement that achieved its stated goals,

and although it developed a strong narrative, disruptive and electoral capacity, the specific political and economic context at the time played perhaps a more significant role in shaping its success than in the other cases studied in this report. It created a clear opportunity for a successful adoption of a right-wing agenda by a previously apolitical public, and the rise of right-wing politicians into institutionalized politics. A political scientist explained: "There was a political crisis within the Workers' Party, an economic crisis with the middle class losing its income and purchasing power and then a social crisis. So this was the perfect storm [...] For an impeachment you

need to have three components: people who want to go to the streets, a political crisis [which manifested itself with] parties abandoning Dilma Rousseff, and low popularity rates of the president. Dilma Rousseff did not know how to answer the protests in 2013. She had no strategy [...] and all of this was happening against the backdrop of Operation Car Wash – the symbol of a fight against corruption. This is what made the impeachment process possible”¹¹¹

MBL and the other right-wing activist groups took advantage of this unique context to mobilise huge numbers of protesters by creating a compelling, relatable narrative, and communicating it effectively via social media. Their messaging was based on the idea of a clear antagonist, which they identified as the Workers’ Party, an antipolitical system discourse and a focus on corruption as the cause of all of Brazil’s crises. However, as explained by another political scientist who studied these organizations’ online strategies, “The anti-system discourse was very much directed against the [political] left, which was very new in Brazil [...] and although they talked about all politicians being corrupt, the discourse was more about the left being corrupt”¹¹² She explained further that even though the organizations behind these online campaigns were very heterogeneous, they were unified in their messaging, which was simplified for the purpose of social media. This created a semblance of internal cohesion within the movement. In addition, they had a clear strategy of engagement and dissemination online, attracting a wide range of followers and both online and offline networks that allowed them to gain greater visibility beyond their initial activist base – something, which the Workers’ Party and left-leaning organizations failed to achieve, and as a result continued preaching to the converted.¹¹³ In the two years leading up to Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment, pro-impeachment messages on Twitter had far more retweets, likes and engagements through comments.

In addition, the movement was able to successfully integrate its online campaign with offline activities: “They would call for protests and at the same time diffuse a very clear message online. During the protests, they were filming and [streaming them live] as well showing how large the protests were. They had a very clear strategy to add their own spin of what the protest represented, and how

successful it was, with images, with videos. And afterwards, they continued to add that spin, using it to mobilize for the next wave of protests.”¹¹⁴ As a result, within a space of several months, the movement grew from a small, apparently irrelevant demonstration in São Paulo in November 2014 to a mass protest event in March 2015 that attracted a million people. Whilst the strategy clearly worked, some researchers also point to the role that Brazilian mass media played in supporting the pro-impeachment movement by giving its activities and positions far more coverage.¹¹⁵

Following Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment, the movement continued organizing, and some of the most recognizable campaign and protest leaders, such as Kim Kataguirí, joined political parties, founded new ones or ran for office, even though they built their support base on an antipolitical system and antiparty discourse. There too, they demonstrated a great capacity to set the narrative by using protesters’ “mistrust, anger, and frustration in their favor, channeling these feelings into successful electoral campaigns that emphasized their personal agendas and actually downplayed the role of political parties.”¹¹⁶

With no changes to the sectarian system, the return of Saad Hariri as Prime Minister, a deepening economic crisis and the devastating destruction of a mass explosion in Beirut caused by state negligence,

on the surface, it is hard to see how Lebanon’s October 2019 Revolution has achieved anything positive. Yet, even if there were no obvious, immediate outcomes, the movement was very successful in shifting the political narrative and planting the seeds for future political organizing.

Indeed, in the space of just a year since the protests, anti-sectarianism has become part of the mainstream discourse. As explained by an activist: “In 2011, when we used to say ‘kullon ya’ni kullon’ [‘all means all’], we were alienated, but now this is mainstream. This is a major success.”¹¹⁷ By successfully using the slogan both during the protests and on social media as well as organizing countless debates and open public forums in protest tents set up in a private parking lot in downtown Beirut, each run by a different progressive activist group or leftist party, the October 2019 Revolution managed to create a

new sense of belonging and a hunger for political activism, especially among the youths, attracted by the energy and horizontalism of the protests and a festival-like atmosphere.

Expensive, luxury shops were shut down, traffic was disrupted and the space was reclaimed by intellectually stimulating discussions. It was not just the occupation of a symbolic space that was hugely empowering but the openness of the debates, in which everyone's voice seemed to be valued and heard. Discussions focussed on tactics – such as the recurrent debates around roadblocks or school boycotts that would allow children to join protests – as well as long-term economic and political outlooks, “media ownership, water shortages, failed government projects [and] environmental destruction,” amongst other issues of concern to ordinary people.¹¹⁸ What was unprecedented was not only the fact that such discussions were happening, but that they were unmediated by political parties and were taking place outside the established system and its entrenched divisions. According to a journalist covering the protests, “It felt like a true agora of democracy, people finally taking power into their own hands after so many years of oppression and dysfunction.”¹¹⁹ The novelty of the tactics and people's excitement prompted some TV stations to host “unprecedented, hours-long open mic shows where individuals can speak freely and put forward demands, reveal problems and propose ideas for reform,”¹²⁰ giving the movement great visibility and allowing it to spread its views and positions successfully to broader public.

Another new feature of the protests was the widespread cursing of politicians, often caught on camera and disseminated via social media. As explained by a journalist who covered the protests, “Ordinary Lebanese [...] have always cursed the elite classes privately, but never to their faces. There is a new boldness in Lebanon. It has built up not just over the last few days, but over the last several years of protests and worsening economic conditions [...] For outsiders, this may appear crude and inappropriate. But for anyone who has endured the everyday suffering most of Lebanon's population face, it also feels empowering.”¹²¹

All of these tactics have contributed to generating “new conversations across social groups”, “a recognition of corruption”, the “de-sanctification of political figures” and

radicalization of the majority of the population against the political elites. Perhaps most importantly, they also raised greater awareness amongst protesters of the need for political and social organizing.¹²² In that sense, the October 2019 Revolution was a major achievement. While it might have failed to fully capitalise on its initial disruptive capacity, particularly when faced with state repression, it strengthened progressive leftist groups and parties such as Li Haqqi, Citizens in a State, Beirut Madinati or the National Bloc, as well as student movements, which embarked on a process of grassroots, community organizing and movement-building. The protests also saw the emergence of labour organisations through the formation of new, independent syndicates of lawyers, engineers, artists, academics and others. Lebanon's “revolution” is very much an unfinished affair, a process that is yet to fully unfold, but that is likely to continue suffering internally from a lack of vision “without the advancement of a theoretical and political project.”¹²³

Nigeria's EndSARS protests are another example of a movement with great narrative capacity, which was unable to bear the costs of the successful disruption it created, when faced with harsh repression.

Just like in Lebanon, some activist groups, which emerged re-energized from the protests and were able to attract a new support base, are now turning their efforts towards internal political organizing. For some, this means preparing for the 2023 general elections.

As explained above, the innovative use of social media gave the movement huge visibility and outside support. By doing so, it gave it legitimacy and strengthened its bargaining and persuasion power vis-a-vis the authorities. The protests were initially launched online by a group of tech-savvy activists, who started tagging local journalists on Twitter and shaming them for failing to cover people's outrage at SARS brutality. They then went on to successfully target both Nigerian and international celebrities, including musicians, football players and actors, at times equating the EndSARS movement to Black Lives Matter protests, and asking them to express their support on Twitter. By responding positively, these figures greatly amplified the movement's voices and attracted global attention to SARS



EndSARS protestors in Lagos in October 2020 (Credit: Jerry Jallo via Flickr)

brutality. By 9 October 2020, the hashtag #EndSars was trending worldwide, prompting Twitter's CEO to express his solidarity with protesters and retweet a crowdfunding initiative by the Feminist Coalition that became hugely successful. A week later, it was being used in some 3.3 million tweets.¹²⁴

Importantly, the online buzz empowered ordinary Nigerians to recount their experiences of harassment and police brutality on Twitter and other platforms, prompting thousands to join a mass digital campaign to ban Nigerian government officials from international travel. People signed petitions and created online email templates for supporters to sign and send to international organizations.¹²⁵ Ultimately, the movement was successful in integrating online tactics with offline collective actions, as explained by an activist who attended protests in Lagos: "The drive on social media especially on Twitter helped galvanise people on the streets."¹²⁶

The sense of belonging created by the retelling of a shared experience empowered also marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ people, who are subjected to pervasive discrimination as well as homophobic crimes by both the police and non-state actors, to join online and offline protests under the slogan "Queer lives matter". This led to the emergence of new groups such as Safe Hquse, who successfully raised money on social media to support LGBTQ EndSARS protesters through legal and medical and by providing transportation,¹²⁷

although they also faced harassment and rejection by some protesters and activists, including the initial founder of the 2017 EndSARS campaign. In general though, the first days of the protests were characterized by solidarity, kinship and new friendships. Cooks offered food to the protesters on the ground, and businesses offered new opportunities to some Nigerians when they stated on social media that they had lost their jobs.¹²⁸

Following the killings of protesters at Lekki, which the authorities continue to deny, despite widespread video evidence of army involvement and an in-depth CNN investigation,¹²⁹ the movement's disruptive capacity was effectively destroyed. Many protesters went into hiding or fled the country out of fear of arrest, or as mentioned above were subjected to travel bans and other forms of harassment. Since then, civil society organizations and activist groups have been placing their efforts in using the political awakening created by the protests, particularly amongst young people, to raise awareness about the power of active political participation and organizing. In a country where more than 60% of the population is under 25, the protests have sparked conversations about the need for youths to get involved in politics, register to vote, join political movements or parties and ultimately, run for office.¹³⁰ Some NGOs have been providing training on political institution-building, mobilizing and campaigning in preparation for the 2023 general elections.¹³¹

Regardless of the nature of demands, meaningful political change always involves long-term processes and institution-building.

Conclusions

The movements in Lebanon, Nigeria, Brazil and Armenia examined in this report show that regardless of the nature of demands, meaningful political change always involves long-term processes and institution-building. Whilst a movement's choice of certain tactics can be hugely effective in gaining legitimacy, disrupting the status quo or affecting institutionalized politics in one context, these same tactics may not lead to any tangible change in another. The fact that roadblocks as a civil disobedience strategy worked during the Velvet Revolution in Armenia does not necessarily mean that they would work in all protest movements for change, and indeed, Lebanon's 2019 experience proves that. Similarly, while a persistent digital campaign in Brazil contributed to pro-impeachment protesters achieving their stated goals, in Nigeria, EndSARS demonstrations were violently repressed despite activists' very effective and innovative use of social media and online protest.

Social movements can of course learn a great deal from each other, but their success is largely informed by their own trajectories and history. Placing too much importance on "revolutionary" or protest events and short-term gains at the expense of processes, which by definition are slow and yield results only in the long-term, often leads to thinking about movements only in binary terms – either as a success or as a failure. Importantly, this does not allow for a more nuanced analysis. As one expert commentator puts it, "Protests sometimes look like failures in the short term, but much of the power of protests is in their long-term effects, on both the protesters

themselves and the rest of society."¹³²

Meaningful political change cannot take place without deep cultural and societal shifts, which all take time, and cannot happen without ideas that at first may seem radical gaining wide public acceptance. In some cases, the mere participation in a protest or another form of collective action can be enough to empower a new generation of activists and plant the seeds for movements to come, regardless of immediate outcome. Indeed, many see failures as important learning processes, and an opportunity for activists to invest in organizing and movement-building.

Ten years since the Arab Spring, which started a decade where mass protests became a feature of global politics, there is still no consensus as to whether it was a success or failure. With the return to repression even more extreme than under Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, armed conflicts in Syria, Libya and Yemen, and peaceful activists behind bars in Bahrain, Tunisia is generally hailed as the only "success story". But there too, many human rights organisations warn that successive governments failed to prioritize accountability and human rights over security concerns, engaging in repressive tactics often reminiscent of the past.¹³³ The exhilaration that people felt in 2011 as rulers were toppled one by one is long gone, but the uprisings' profound effects on politics, the level of political and social debate, and people's awareness of their own rights are still visible today. It would be an error to conclude that because the aspirations of those protesters were in many cases not realized in the short term, that they have not left a powerful legacy that others can build on. In some contexts they already are. The hope for change remains.

Endnotes

- 1 Cristina Flesher Fominaya, "Democracy Reloaded: Inside Spain's Political Laboratory from 15-M to Podemos", [2020]: 4; Zeynep Tufekci, "Twitter and Tear Gas, the Power and Fragility of Networked Protest", (Yale University Press, 2017): 81
- 2 Cristina Flesher Fominaya, "Democracy Reloaded: Inside Spain's Political Laboratory from 15-M to Podemos", [2020]: 4
- 3 Zeynep Tufekci, "Twitter and Tear Gas, the Power and Fragility of Networked Protest", (Yale University Press, 2017): XVII
- 4 Laurence Broers, "In Armenia, a Constitutional Power Grab Backfires", Chatham House, [24 April 2018], available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2018/04/armenia-constitutional-power-grab-backfires>
- 5 Olesya Vartanyan, "'Velvet Revolution' Takes Armenia into the Unknown", International Crisis Group, [26 April 2018], available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/armenia/velvet-revolution-takes-armenia-unknown>
- 6 Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan, Associate Professor of the Political Science and International Affairs Program leading a research project on Armenian civil society, American University of Armenia, 11 January 2021, interview
- 7 Laurence Broers, "Introduction" in Armenia's Velvet Revolution, Authoritarian Decline and Civil Resistance in a Multipolar World, ed. L. Broers and A. Ohanyan, (I.B. Tauris, 2020): 4
- 8 Ibidem: 6
- 9 Armine Ishkanian and Sona Manuyan, "The Postprotest Context in Armenia: Divergent Pathways for Civic Actors" in After Protests: Pathways Beyond Mass Mobilization, ed. R. Youngs, (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019): 19
- 10 Marisa von Bülow, "Pathways after Protests: The Case of Brazil" in After Protests: Pathways Beyond Mass Mobilization, ed. R. Youngs, (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019): 69
- 11 Vincent Bevins, "The Brazilian Spring That Never Arrived", The Atlantic, [20 June 2018], available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/brazil-protest-june-2013-rousseff-lula-bolsonaro-election-workers-party-temer/563165/>
- 12 Esther Solano, Adjunct Professor at the Federal University of São Paulo in International Relations, 20 January 2021, interview
- 13 Marisa von Bülow, "What Happened to Brazil's Civic Activism?", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, [19 December 2017], available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/12/19/what-happened-to-brazil-s-civic-activism-pub-75068>
- 14 Esther Solano, "'It's All Corrupt', The Roots of Bolsanarism in Brazil" in The Emergence of Illiberalism Understanding a Global Phenomenon, ed. B. Vormann and M. D. Weinman, (Routledge, 2020) v. 1, p. 210-223
- 15 Adham Hassaniyeh, activist with Li Haqqi, 22 January 2021, interview
- 16 Kareem Chehayeb, "Opinion: Lebanon's protests and wildfires tell the same grim story", Washington Post, [18 October 2019], available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/10/18/lebanons-protests-wildfires-tell-same-grim-story/>
- 17 Timour Azhari, "Protests over taxes threaten Lebanon's political establishment", Al Jazeera, [18 October 2019], available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2019/10/18/protests-over-taxes-threaten-lebanons-political-establishment>
- 18 Vivian Yee, "Lebanon Protests Unite Sects in Demanding New Government", The New York Times, [23 October 2020], available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/23/world/middleeast/lebanon-protests.html>
- 19 International Crisis Group, "Pulling Lebanon out of the Pit", Middle East Report N°214, (June 2020)
- 20 Human Rights Watch, "Lebanon: Police Violence against Protesters", [17 January 2020], available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/01/17/lebanon-police-violence-against-protesters>
- 21 Amnesty International, Lebanon: Punishing the October Protest Movement, [6 July 2020], available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1826282020ENGLISH.PDF>
- 22 Ziad Abu-Rish, Visiting Associate Professor of Human Rights, Bard College, 19 January 2021, interview
- 23 Amnesty International, "Nigeria: Time to end impunity: Torture and other violations by Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS)", [2019]: 3
- 24 OHCHR, "UN human rights experts demand Nigeria investigate shooting of peaceful protesters by soldiers", [3 November 2020], available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26468&LangID=E>
- 25 Al Jazeera, "SARS: Why are tens of thousands of Nigerians protesting?", [21 October 2020], available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/21/endsars-protests-why-are-nigerians-protesting>; Interviews with four Nigerian activists who took part in EndSARS protests in Abuja and Lagos, January 2021
- 26 BBC News, "SARS: Presidential panel on police reforms okay 5-point demand of End Sars Nigerian protesters", [13 October 2020], available at: <https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/tori-54528118>
- 27 BBC News, "End Swat, Nigerians reject police unit replacing hated Sars", [14 October 2020], available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-54531449>
- 28 Amnesty International, "Nigeria: Denials and cover up mark 100 days since Lekki shooting", [28 January 2020], available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/01/nigeria-denials-and-cover-up-mark-100-days-since-lekki-shooting/>
- 29 Alexis Kwaygyiram, "'Perfect storm': How Nigeria's peaceful police protests turned violent", Reuters, [27 October 2020], available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-protests-activists-idUSKBN27C13D>
- 30 Human Rights Watch, "Nigeria: Punitive Financial Moves Against Protesters", [13 November 2020], available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/13/nigeria-punitive-financial-moves-against-protesters>
- 31 Cristina Flesher Fominaya, "Democracy Reloaded: Inside Spain's Political Laboratory from 15-M to Podemos", [2020]: 43
- 32 Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, "Social Movements, an Introduction", Second Edition (Blackwell, 1999, 2006): 189
- 33 Cristina Flesher Fominaya, "Democracy Reloaded: Inside Spain's Political Laboratory from 15-M to Podemos", [2020]: 70
- 34 Ibidem: 52
- 35 Ibidem: 70
- 36 Cristina Flesher Fominaya, Editor in Chief of Social Movement Studies Journal and Excellence 100 Reader in Social Politics and Media at Loughborough University, 8 January 2021, interview
- 37 Adham Hassaniyeh, activist with Li Haqqi, 22 January 2021, interview
- 38 At the time of the protests, Lebanon was politically divided between the pro-Syrian "8 March" and the US and Saudi-backed "14 March" coalitions. The presence of some parties aligned with the "8 March" alliance alienated some protesters who were otherwise supportive of the call to "overthrow the regime".
- 39 Fares Halabi, "From 'Overthrowing the regime' to 'All Means All': An Analysis of the Lebanonisation of Arab Spring Rhetoric", Arab Reform Initiative, [18 December 2019], available at: <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/from-overthrowing-the-regime-to-all-means-all-an-analysis-of-the-lebanonisation-of-arab-spring-rhetoric/>
- 40 Lara Bitar, Miriam Younes, "New Ways of Relating to Each Other", Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung, [12 November 2019], available at: <https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/41305/new-ways-of-relating-to-each-other>
- 41 Ibidem
- 42 Lebanon Support, "What mobilizes Lebanon? A look into collective actions from 2017 leading up to October 2019", available at: <https://civilsociety-centre.org/content/what-mobilises-lebanon-look-collective-actions-2017-leading-october-2019-ما-الذي-يحرك-لبنان>
- 43 Nadine Moawad, Lebanese activist. See video interview published in Fares Halabi, "From 'Overthrowing the regime' to 'All Means All': An Analysis of the Lebanonisation of Arab Spring Rhetoric", Arab Reform Initiative, [18 December 2019], available at: <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/from-overthrowing-the-regime-to-all-means-all-an-analysis-of-the-lebanonisation-of-arab-spring-rhetoric/>
- 44 Ziad Abu-Rish, Visiting Associate Professor of Human Rights, Bard College, 19 January 2021, interview
- 45 Mikayel Zolyan, "Thirty years of protest, How Armenia's legacy of political and civic protests prepared the Velvet Revolution" in Armenia's Velvet Revolution, Authoritarian Decline and Civil Resistance in a Multipolar World, ed. L. Broers and A. Ohanyan, (I.B. Tauris, 2020): 51
- 46 Recognized as part of Azerbaijan, the Nagorno-Karabakh region is inhabited by ethnic Armenians and is controlled by separatist Armenians, who receive backing from the Armenian authorities.
- 47 Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan, "Armenian civil society, Growing pains, honing skills and possible pitfalls" in Armenia's Velvet Revolution, Authoritarian Decline and Civil Resistance in a Multipolar World, ed. L. Broers and A. Ohanyan, (I.B. Tauris, 2020): 104
- 48 Mikayel Zolyan, "Thirty years of protest, How Armenia's legacy of political and civic protests prepared the Velvet Revolution" in Armenia's Velvet Revolution, Authoritarian Decline and Civil Resistance in a Multipolar World, ed. L. Broers and A. Ohanyan, (I.B. Tauris, 2020): 59
- 49 Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan, "Armenian civil society, Growing pains, honing skills and possible pitfalls" in Armenia's Velvet Revolution, Authoritarian Decline and Civil Resistance in a Multipolar World, ed. L. Broers and A. Ohanyan, (I.B. Tauris, 2020): 107
- 50 Armen Grigoryan, protest leader in Karena Avedissian, "A real revolution? Protest leader Armen Grigoryan on what's happening in Armenia", Open Democracy, [30 April 2018], available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/real-revolution-protest-leader-armen-grigoryan-on-what-s-happening-in-ar/>
- 51 Mikayel Zolyan, "Thirty years of protest, How Armenia's legacy of political and civic protests prepared the Velvet Revolution" in Armenia's Velvet Revolution, Authoritarian Decline and Civil Resistance in a Multipolar World, ed. L. Broers and A. Ohanyan, (I.B. Tauris, 2020): 65
- 52 Ibidem
- 53 Following the attack on the police station, during which a police officer was killed, and several others were taken hostage, the Sasna Tsrer group demanded the resignation of then President Serzh Sargsyan and called on Armenians to take to the streets and start an uprising. Immediately after, the Armenian authorities started arresting activists to prevent demonstrations from taking place. Despite the repression, protests grew, and the police used excessive and disproportionate force against peaceful crowds in addition to physically assaulting journalists. See Human Rights Watch, "Armenia: Excessive Police Force at Protest", [1 August 2016], available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/08/01/armenia-excessive-police-force-protest>
- 54 Zeynep Tufekci, "Twitter and Tear Gas, the Power and Fragility of Networked Protest", (Yale University Press, 2017): 70
- 55 Nijdeka Agbo, "Nigerian Presidency has Received The #EndSars Petition- Segun Awosanya", [11 August 2018], available at: <https://guardian.ng/life/nigerian-presidency-has-received-the-endsars-petition-segun-awosanya/>
- 56 Akindare Okunola, "Young, Bold, Feminist: How Is Nigeria's Damilola Odufuwa Creating Space for Africa's Women?", Global Citizen, [22 January 2021], available at: <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/feminist-coalition-damilola-odufuwa-nigeria-women/>
- 57 National Daily Newspaper, "Politicians, others have hijacked #EndSARS protest - Segalink", [17 October 2020], available at: <https://nationaldailyng.com/politicians-others-have-hijacked-endsars-protest-segalink/>; See also: Punch, "An EndSARS protest has been hijacked, says Segalink", [14 October 2020], available at: <https://punchng.com/endsars-protest-has-been-hijacked-says-segalink/>
- 58 Damian Ugwu, researcher, Amnesty International Nigeria, 11 January 2021, interview
- 59 Zeynep Tufekci, "Twitter and Tear Gas, the Power and Fragility of Networked Protest", (Yale University Press, 2017): 99
- 60 Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, "Social Movements, an Introduction", Second Edition (Blackwell, 1999, 2006): 142
- 61 Zeynep Tufekci, "Twitter and Tear Gas, the Power and Fragility of Networked Protest", (Yale University Press, 2017): 71
- 62 Vincent Bevins, "The Brazilian Spring That Never Arrived", The Atlantic, [20 June 2018], available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/brazil-protest-june-2013-rousseff-lula-bolsonaro-election-workers-party-temer/563165/>
- 63 Termômetro paulistano - Manifestações PO813712, 25/10/2013, available at: <http://media.folha.uol.com.br/datafolha/2013/10/28/manifestacoes-2013-10-27.pdf>
- 64 Pablo Ortellado, Public Policy Management professor at the University of São Paulo and columnist for the newspaper O Globo, 27 January 2021, interview
- 65 Ibidem
- 66 Esther Solano, Adjunct Professor at the Federal University of São Paulo in International Relations, 20 January 2021, interview

- 67 Piero Locatelli, a journalist who was arrested at one of the June 2013 protests in Vincent Bevin, "The Brazilian Spring That Never Arrived", *The Atlantic*, (20 June 2018), available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/06/brazil-protest-june-2013-rousseff-lula-bolsonaro-election-workers-party-temer/563165/>
- 68 Pablo Ortellado, Public Policy Management professor at the University of São Paulo and columnist for the newspaper O Globo, 27 January 2021, interview
- 69 Abiodun Sanusi, activist with Revolution Now, 14 January 2021, interview
- 70 Zeynep Tufekci, "Twitter and Tear Gas, the Power and Fragility of Networked Protest", (Yale University Press, 2017): 78
- 71 Uzor Ngdadi, participant in EndSars protests and Revolution Now! activist, 13 January 2021, interview
- 72 Samson Itodo, Executive Director, Yiaga Africa, 27 January 2021, interview
- 73 Ibidem
- 74 BBC News, "SARS: Presidential panel on police reforms okay 5-point demand of End Sars Nigerian protesters", (13 October 2020), available at: <https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/tori-54528118>
- 75 Samson Itodo, Executive Director, Yiaga Africa, 27 January 2021, interview
- 76 Zeynep Tufekci, "Twitter and Tear Gas, the Power and Fragility of Networked Protest", (Yale University Press, 2017): 78
- 77 Ibidem: 79
- 78 Lara Bitar, Miriam Younes, "New Ways of Relating to Each Other", Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung, (12 November 2019), available at: <https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/41305/new-ways-of-relating-to-each-other>
- 79 Ziad Abu-Rish, "Garbage Politics", Jadaliyya, (1 July 2016), available at: <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/33377>
- 80 The Free Patriotic Movement is a political party founded by Michel Aoun, a Maronite former general, who became Lebanon's president in 2016.
- 81 Ziad Abu-Rish, "Garbage Politics", Jadaliyya, (1 July 2016), available at: <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/33377>
- 82 Lara Bitar, Miriam Younes, "New Ways of Relating to Each Other", Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung, (12 November 2019), available at: <https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/41305/new-ways-of-relating-to-each-other>; See also Richard Hall, "Lebanon's got 99 problems and trash is just one", *Global Post*, 24 August 2015, available at: <https://www.gp.org/stories/2015-08-24/lebanons-got-99-problems-and-trash-just-one>
- 83 Lebanese journalist and researcher, 4 February 2021, interview
- 84 Sana Tannoury-Karam, "Setting the agenda: Why Did the October 17 Revolution Witness a Regression in Numbers", *The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies*, (31 October 2020), available at: <https://www.lcps-lebanon.org/agendaArticle.php?id=199>
- 85 Ibidem
- 86 Ziad Abu-Rish, Visiting Associate Professor of Human Rights, Bard College, 19 January 2021, interview
- 87 Ibidem
- 88 Anna Ohanyan, Richard B. Finnegan distinguished professor of political science and international relations at Stonehill College, 19 January 2021, interview
- 89 Laure Delcour, Associate Professor in International Relations and EU Studies, 19 January 2021, interview
- 90 Karena Avedissian, researcher focussed on social movements, civil society and new media/communications in the former Soviet Union, 28 January 2021, interview
- 91 Laurence Broers, "In Armenia, a Constitutional Power Grab Backfires", *Chatham House*, (24 April 2018), available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2018/04/armenia-constitutional-power-grab-backfires>
- 92 Arsen Kharatyan, former foreign policy advisor to Nikol Pashinyan after he became Prime Minister, 27 January 2021, interview
- 93 Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan, Associate Professor of the Political Science and International Affairs Program leading a research project on Armenian civil society, American University of Armenia, 11 January 2021, interview
- 94 Karena Avedissian, researcher focussed on social movements, civil society and new media/communications in the former Soviet Union, 28 January 2021, interview
- 95 Arsen Kharatyan, former foreign policy advisor to Nikol Pashinyan after he became Prime Minister, 27 January 2021, interview
- 96 Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, "Social Movements, an Introduction", Second Edition (Blackwell, 1999, 2006): 168 & 169
- 97 Zeynep Tufekci, "Twitter and Tear Gas, the Power and Fragility of Networked Protest", (Yale University Press, 2017): 95
- 98 Ibidem: 85
- 99 Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, "Social Movements, an Introduction", Second Edition (Blackwell, 1999, 2006): 179 & 181
- 100 Kaveh Waddell, "The Exhausting Work of Tallying America's Largest Protests", *The Atlantic*, (23 January 2021), available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/01/womens-march-protest-count/514166/>
- 101 Lina Comaty, development studies specialist, and active member of the National Bloc in Lebanon, "Setting the agenda: Why did the October 17 Revolution Witness a Regression in numbers", *The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies*, (31 October 2020), available at: <https://www.lcps-lebanon.org/agendaArticle.php?id=199>
- 102 Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, "Social Movements, an Introduction", Second Edition (Blackwell, 1999, 2006): 229
- 103 Zeynep Tufekci, "Twitter and Tear Gas, the Power and Fragility of Networked Protest", (Yale University Press, 2017): 191
- 104 Anna Ohanyan, "Velvet is Not a Colour, Armenia's Democratic Transition in a Global Context", in *Armenia's Velvet Revolution, Authoritarian Decline and Civil Resistance in a Multipolar World*, ed. L. Broers and A. Ohanyan, (I.B. Tauris, 2020): 29
- 105 Anna Ohanyan, Richard B. Finnegan distinguished professor of political science and international relations at Stonehill College, 19 January 2021, interview
- 106 Yevgenya Jenny Paturyan, "Armenian civil society, Growing pains, honing skills and possible pitfalls" in *Armenia's Velvet Revolution, Authoritarian Decline and Civil Resistance in a Multipolar World*, ed. L. Broers and A. Ohanyan, (I.B. Tauris, 2020): 109 & 110
- 107 Ibidem
- 108 Ibidem
- 109 Anna Ohanyan, Richard B. Finnegan distinguished professor of political science and international relations at Stonehill College, 19 January 2021, interview
- 110 Ibidem
- 111 Esther Solano, Adjunct Professor at the Federal University of São Paulo in International Relations, 20 January 2021, interview
- 112 Marisa von Bülow, 15 January 2021, interview
- 113 Marisa von Bülow, Tayrine Dias, "O ativismo de hashtags contra e a favor do impeachment de Dilma Rousseff", *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 120, (December 2019): 5-32
- 114 Marisa von Bülow, 15 January 2021, interview
- 115 Esther Solano, Adjunct Professor at the Federal University of São Paulo in International Relations, 20 January 2021, interview
- 116 Marisa von Bülow, "Pathways after Protests: The Case of Brazil" in *After Protests: Pathways Beyond Mass Mobilization*, ed. R. Youngs, (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019): 72
- 117 Adham Hassaniyeh, activist with Li Haqqi, 22 January 2021, interview
- 118 Habib Battah, "A new politics is rising in Lebanon", *Al Jazeera*, (15 November 2019), available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/11/15/a-new-politics-is-rising-in-lebanon>
- 119 Habib Battah, "What happened to the protests in Lebanon", *Beirut Report*, (27 May 2020), available at: <http://www.beirutreport.com/2020/05/what-happened-to-the-protests-in-lebanon.html>
- 120 Ibidem
- 121 Habib Battah, "An open mic revolution in Lebanon", *Al Jazeera*, (25 October 2019), available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/10/25/an-open-mic-revolution-in-lebanon>
- 122 The Lebanese Studies Center, "Setting the Agenda - Has the October 17 Revolution Achieved Anything at All?", (17 October 2020), available at: <https://lcps-lebanon.org/agendaArticle.php?id=197>
- 123 Rima Majed, "Lebanon's unfinished revolution: Where next?", *The Middle East Eye*, (19 October 2020), available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/one-year-lebanon-marks-unfinished-revolution>
- 124 BBC News, "End Sars: How Nigeria's anti-police brutality protests went global", (16 October 2020), available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-54575219>, Alicia Keys, Greta Thunberg, Rihanna, Naomi Klein and Angela Davis were amongst some of the figures who expressed their support for the EndSARS protesters' demands.
- 125 Mariam Sule, "Different agendas, one goal: How Nigerians united to #EndSARS", *Al Jazeera*, (18 November 2020), available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/11/18/different-agendas-one-goal-how-activists-united-to>
- 126 Abiodun Sanusi, journalist and activist with Revolution Now, 14 January 2021, interview
- 127 Bernard Dayo, "How safe hquse uplifted queer Nigerian youth", *i-D*, (24 November 2020), available at: https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/z3v43j/safe-hquse-for-nigerian-lgbt-youth
- 128 Mariam Sule, "Different agendas, one goal: How Nigerians united to #EndSARS", *Al Jazeera*, (18 November 2020), available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/11/18/different-agendas-one-goal-how-activists-united-to>
- 129 CNN, "CNN Investigation sheds new light on anti-brutality protests", (17 November 2020), available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2020/11/17/lekki-toll-gate-shooting-army-police-lon-orig-mkd.cnn/video/playlists/mobile-digital-features/>
- 130 James Ladi Williams, "#EndSARS: A new youth party isn't the right next step. Here's what is", *African Arguments*, (15 December 2020), available at: <https://africanarguments.org/2020/12/endsars-a-new-youth-party-isnt-the-right-next-step-heres-what-is/>
- 131 Samson Itodo, Executive Director, Yiaga Africa, 27 January 2021, interview
- 132 Zeynep Tufekci, "Do Protests Even Work? It sometimes takes decades to find out", *The Atlantic*, (24 June 2020), available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/06/why-protests-work/613420/>
- 133 Amnesty International, "Tunisia: Struggle for justice and reparation continues for victims 10 years after the revolution", (14 January 2021), available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/01/tunisia-struggle-for-justice-and-reparation-continues-for-victims-10-years-after-the-revolution/>