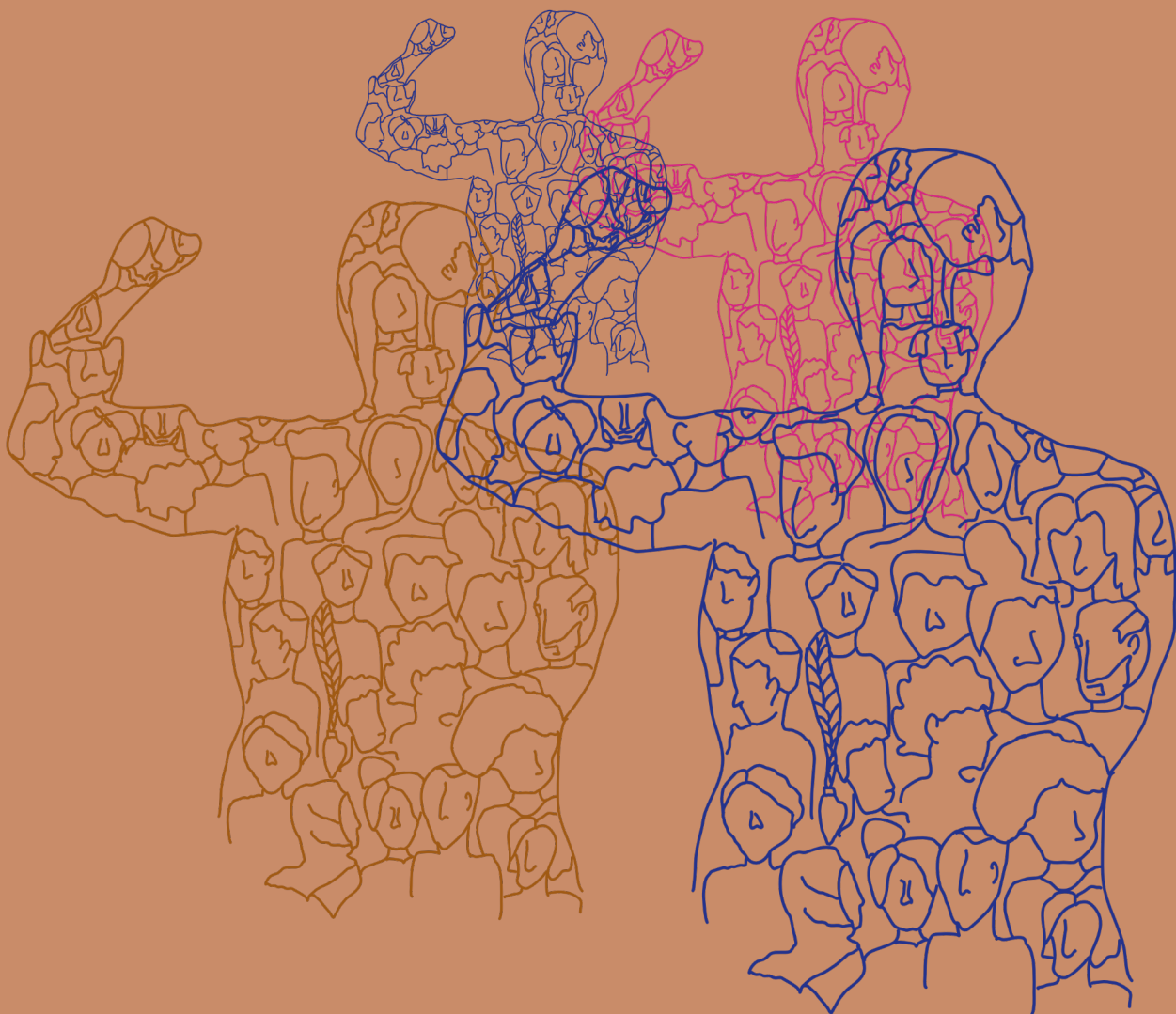


POLITICAL STRATEGY IN CLOSED AND CLOSING SPACES

A PLAYBOOK FOR POLITICAL PARTIES



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National Democratic Institute

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ABOUT THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

NDI is a non-profit, non-partisan, non-governmental organization that works in partnership around the world to strengthen and safeguard democratic institutions, processes, norms and values to secure a better quality of life for all. NDI envisions a world where democracy and freedom prevail, with dignity for all. NDI works with political parties, civic groups, parliaments, and other organizations and individuals in more than 60 countries to strengthen democratic institutions, safeguard elections, advance citizen engagement, and promote open and accountable government. We establish trusted relationships with our partners and these relationships set us apart from other groups and give us a key, competitive advantage. NDI operates in the belief that a more democratic world is a more peaceful and prosperous place.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AROUND THE WORLD, emerging authoritarian threats have put democratic institutions at risk of backsliding and nascent democracies in danger of losing critical progress made towards fair and inclusive democratic systems. Political parties can play a critical role in combating authoritarian forces but need to be aware of the risks that come along with operating in a closing or closed democratic space. Without the proper techniques and skills, parties risk endangering themselves as institutions and also their members and supporters. Democratic institutions, processes, norms, and values are facing escalating threats from authoritarian forces worldwide making it more critical than ever that political parties have the resources laid out in this playbook to combat closing civic spaces. Advocates for democracy and political experts around the world have raised concerns about the global erosion of political rights and civil liberties and the potential dominance of autocracy as the prevailing governance model to guide international standards of behavior.

These challenges extend beyond authoritarian and totalitarian states and encompass both emerging and established democracies. Historically marginalized and excluded groups, including women, young people, racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, as well as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) community, continue to encounter obstacles in their pursuit of equal participation. Amidst these circumstances, proponents of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law find themselves engaged in a competition of ideas with illiberal and anti-democratic forces regarding the organization of political power.

This playbook is a timely resource for political party leaders and members navigating the challenges of operating in closed and closing spaces. As democratic actors face escalating threats from illiberal and authoritarian forces and regimes worldwide, this comprehensive guide equips political parties to strategically plan and organize their work while upholding democratic and inclusive principles. The playbook covers essential areas for successful operations in closed and closing spaces, providing guidance on developing political strategies, managing risks, organizing effectively, building coalitions, engaging allies, employing strategic communications, and preparing for democratic transitions.

With practical tools and step-by-step guidance, this playbook empowers political parties to advance democratic change and facilitate the transition towards inclusive and accountable systems of government. By navigating the challenges imposed by operating in closed and closing spaces strategically, political parties can pave the way towards a freer and more democratic future for their countries and the people they serve. While the strategies employed to address these challenges may vary depending on a party's resources and mission, this publication offers valuable guidance applicable to a wide range of political contexts. The purpose of this guide is to empower parties to plan and organize their work strategically and to equip them to navigate obstacles and facilitate the transition towards democratic systems of government.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS A CLOSING SPACE?

A closing space refers to a situation where restrictions, both formal and informal, are imposed on electoral procedures, civil liberties, and public accountability. This often occurs as a result of actions taken by anti-democratic forces, which can range from ruling authoritarian political parties to dictatorial regimes. The goal of these forces is to suppress democratic opponents and stifle any challenges to their rule.

Key characteristics of a closed and closing space include governments:


- Labeling democratic parties, movements, and their allies as enemies of the state, foreign agents, or a threat to national security and using this label as justification to restrict their ability to communicate, organize, and campaign effectively.
- Creating a narrative that justifies harassment, violence, or other repressive measures against democratic political parties, making it difficult for them to operate freely.
- Compromising institutions that play a crucial role in ensuring a fair democratic process through executive and legislative powers, such as exerting pressure on electoral authorities.
- Using the judiciary for politically motivated prosecutions against leaders and activists from democratic parties.
- Implementing cumbersome registration processes, restrictive laws, and financial regulations to closely monitor and control political opposition and civil society organizations (CSOs), thereby limiting their participation in elections.

The cumulative effect of these measures can result in a sudden and dramatic closure of democratic spaces. In some cases, incumbents may refuse to accept election results and may respond with crackdowns to maintain power. In other situations, democratic space is gradually eroded over time, making it increasingly challenging for opposition parties and civil society allies to organize effectively and advocate for democratic principles.

HOW CAN DEMOCRATS RESPOND?

If you find yourself turning to this playbook, chances are your political entity may encounter challenges in registering as a formal party, participating in elections, safely recruiting inclusive and diverse candidates, communicating policy proposals, or engaging in inclusive citizen outreach. The playbook aims to assist party leaders in developing practical strategies to promote democracy in closed and closing political spaces.

Although the playbook is primarily tailored for democratic political parties, its lessons and tools hold relevance for a broader range of democratic movements and actors, particularly in systems where establishing political parties is restricted or prohibited.



While a clear route to a democratic transition may not always be evident, this guide will aid you in achieving this goal through enhanced internal democracy and inclusion, all while staying true to your core values, vision, and mission. This goal is especially key, as internal democracy and inclusion for resilience are foundational parts of strategy to resist the impacts of closing space.

PLAYBOOK OVERVIEW

The playbook offers step-by-step guidance for developing strategic approaches to operate effectively in closed or closing political environments, with a focus on six key areas. The playbook can be read from start to finish, but the resource is designed to be modular so that parties can identify and skip to the sections that fit their particular context. Parties will find that much of the playbook's guidance remains relevant even after a democratic transition.

CHAPTER 1: DEVELOPING A POLITICAL STRATEGY

For political parties operating in closed or closing spaces, it is essential to create a well-defined pathway towards achieving democratic change. Chapter 1 provides valuable guidance to help you in the following ways:

- **Setting Clear Objectives:** Develop strategies that establish clear and achievable objectives to promote democratic change despite the constraints of the closed space. Clearly define the desired outcomes and milestones for the party's vision.
- **Resource Assessment:** Assess the resources at your disposal. Identify the resources that are lacking and necessary for promoting democratic change.

CHAPTER 2: MANAGING RISK

Organizing a political party in closed or closing spaces comes with significant risks. To effectively navigate these challenges, Chapter 2 offers valuable advice on the following:

- **Systematic Risk Assessment:** Conduct a thorough assessment of the risks faced by your political party. Identify potential threats, vulnerabilities, and areas of concern in the repressive environment.
- **Prioritization of Risks:** Prioritize the identified risks based on their potential impact and likelihood of occurrence. Focus on addressing and mitigating the most critical risks that could severely hinder party activities.
- **Safe Organizing Practices:** Implement measures to organize safely and protect party members from harm. This includes providing security training, establishing secure communication channels, and adopting protocols to respond to potential threats.

CHAPTER 3: ORGANIZING YOUR PARTY

Chapter 3 focuses on assisting you in effectively organizing your party. The chapter offers valuable guidance in two key areas:

- **Structuring for Resilience:** Organize your party's structure in a way that enhances resilience against attacks from anti-democratic and illiberal actors.
- **Inclusivity and Participation:** Ensure the active involvement of historically marginalized and excluded groups in society within your party. Encourage the full participation of women, young people, racial, ethnic, and religious communities, the LGBTQI+ community, and persons with disabilities. Embrace diversity and provide a platform for underrepresented voices to be heard and valued.

CHAPTER 4: IDENTIFYING AND ENGAGING YOUR ALLIES

This chapter emphasizes the importance of building strong relationships with democratic actors. It focuses on mobilizing and recruiting potential allies through the following strategies:

- **Building Coalitions:** Form alliances and coalitions with like-minded political parties that share common democratic values.
- **Engaging CSOs:** Work closely with CSOs that are dedicated to fostering open, democratic and inclusive political change.
- **Involving Diaspora Communities:** Engage with diaspora communities that are committed to promoting democratic governance in the home country.
- **Collaborating with International Allies:** Establish partnerships with international actors and organizations that are willing to advocate for democracy in closed or closing political spaces.

CHAPTER 5: ELEVATING YOUR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

This chapter focuses on elevating strategic communications to effectively convey the party's vision and values, providing guidance on the following key aspects:

- **Developing Core Messages:** Create clear and impactful core messages that align with the party's vision and values, resonate with the target audience and communicate a commitment to democratic values.
- **Framing the Political Debate:** Strategically frame political debates to your advantage.

- **Managing Crisis Communications:** Respond effectively to attacks or adverse events in a way that minimizes negative impacts and reinforces the party's commitment to democratic values.
- **Countering Information Manipulation:** Be vigilant in countering information manipulation aimed at undermining the party's credibility and agenda.

CHAPTER 6: PREPARING FOR DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS

The last chapter focuses on preparing for a transition to democratic rule by providing guidance on two essential aspects:

- **Developing Transition Plans:** Create comprehensive transition plans that outline the party's vision. Define the steps and actions required to smoothly transition from the closed environment to a democratic system of government.
- **Managing the Practical Transition Process:** Effectively manage the practical aspects of the transition, ensuring that the party follows through on its election promises.

The playbook's six chapters can be used individually, in combination, or collectively, empowering political parties to navigate the challenges of closed or closing political spaces when promoting democratic change.

I. DEVELOPING A POLITICAL STRATEGY

POLITICAL PARTIES often face a paradox; their ultimate goal is to govern states, yet they can struggle with their own governance. This challenge is especially pronounced for parties operating in closed or closing political spaces, as they frequently deal with government repression, short-term crises, and resource constraints, which divert attention from long-term strategy development and internal organizational improvement. Despite these obstacles, parties must not be discouraged, as effective strategizing allows them to shift their focus from the limitations imposed by operating in challenging environments to the possibilities that come with democratic change.

In the context of political parties operating in closed or closing spaces, a strategy can be defined as the systematic process of leveraging available resources to achieve transformative democratic change. A successful strategy should be specific enough to facilitate strategic planning, yet remain flexible enough to adapt to unforeseen circumstances. The following framework provides a guide for the strategizing process.

1.1 TIMING AND APPROACHES TO STRATEGY SESSIONS

An initial step of strategic planning involves evaluating whether current actions contribute to the overarching goal of democratic change, considering both immediate concerns and long-term objectives. A key tool to achieve these objectives is to make regular strategy sessions a standard practice. These sessions should be customized to suit the different roles within the party, ranging from leadership to planning committees and party members:

- **Annual Strategic Reviews:** These sessions involve party leadership and aim to evaluate the organization's overall actions, their underlying rationale, and their effectiveness on an annual basis. By conducting these reviews, the party can recalibrate long-term strategies and ensure its vision remains aligned with the goal of promoting democratic change.
- **Weekly Operational Strategy Sessions:** Designed primarily for operational teams, these weekly sessions focus on day-to-day party operations. They serve as a valuable tool to ensure continuous alignment of short-term actions with the party's ultimate goals.
- **Regular Strategy Meetings (as needed):** Intended for all party members, these meetings provide a platform for reflection on progress, celebrating achievements, and discussing emerging challenges. They play a pivotal role in fostering an inclusive party culture where all members' opinions are valued and taken into consideration.

Regardless of the organizational structure of parties operating in closed and closing spaces, these strategy sessions, customized to the specific roles within the party, play a crucial role in ensuring efficient operations and advancing towards overarching democratic objectives.

1.2 TACTICS FOR STRATEGIZING

The following tips should assist you when organizing and conducting strategy sessions:

EFFICIENT PLANNING

- **Prepare all strategy sessions** in advance by sharing the agenda and assigning facilitators to ensure adherence to time and scope.
- For meetings with a broader scope, **engage key individuals beforehand** to discuss the intended questions and encourage pre-session thinking. Emphasize the importance of creative thinking while avoiding aimless discussions.
- Whenever possible and considering **security measures**, conduct strategy sessions in a different location than regular office spaces. Ensure that these **spaces are accessible** to people with disabilities and that these sessions occur at times that are convenient for women party members (as women often have domestic and/or caregiving responsibilities at certain times of the day, and in particular, in the evening).

RUNNING THE SESSION

- Foster an **environment of honest and constructive feedback** and assessment, acknowledging past and present mistakes.
- Include **participants with diverse experiences and expertise** to evaluate the current landscape, challenge assumptions, and question the status quo. It is important to include participants from marginalized groups, as they often have a different and unique perspective that can help party leaders develop strategies that serve the diversity of the party's membership.
- Consider having an **elder party member** who is not part of the current leadership chair the session to provide institutional memory and fresh insights.
- Create a **safe space for open discussions**, allowing for fresh perspectives while ensuring all participants have undergone proper vetting. Ensure that women and men who are part of the session are being selected to speak for an equal amount of time.
- Ensure **clear agreement and communication** of strategies among party members. Maintain accurate real-time recordkeeping and appropriate publication practices, always prioritizing the safety and security of all information and party members by implementing relevant security measures.

FACILITATE INCLUSIVE INPUT

- Facilitate **input from underrepresented voices**, such as women and minorities.
- Consider **separate preparatory meetings** with representatives from historically marginalized groups and communities to ensure their comfort in expressing their opinions.
- **Consult with CSOs** aligned with your party's goals, especially those representing underrepresented voices, to gain valuable insights for a more inclusive approach.
- Ensure that input from these groups is **actively integrated** into any decisions or final documents produced during the session.

1.3 ASSESSING YOUR RESOURCES

In closed and closing spaces, like in any other political environment, every strategy may face opposition and obstacles. It's crucial to proactively assess these challenges. A common method to identify these strategic issues is by conducting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis.

- **Strengths:** In restrictive environments, it can be challenging for parties to recognize their strengths due to setbacks and attacks from anti-democratic forces. Identifying strengths focuses on what your party can do rather than what it cannot. Consider the advantages your party possesses, at what it excels, the resources it can access, the aspects of the party that citizens and supporters appreciate, and the relationships it has with civil society and relevant stakeholders to promote democratic change.
- **Weaknesses:** This category encompasses internal vulnerabilities. Party members should honestly assess areas that are not functioning optimally, whether due to government repression or the party's organizational structure and internal culture. Identify the aspects with which your party struggles and areas for improvement.
- **Opportunities:** List factors that present potential advantages to achieve your objectives, such as opportunities to attract new members, build coalitions, disseminate your message effectively, or support party members facing detention. Refer back to the identified strengths, as they can help party members think about how to leverage these strengths for opportunities. Consider upcoming events, emerging trends, or voter concerns that might create favorable conditions for your party and democratic change.
- **Threats:** Finally, consider the factors that may hinder you from achieving your goals. Review the weaknesses identified earlier and consider whether any of these could be exploited by adversaries to undermine your party.

Conducting a thorough SWOT analysis will provide valuable insights into your party's internal and external dynamics, enabling you to make informed strategic decisions and respond effectively to challenges.

SWOT Matrix Example:

STRENGTHS

- We have a respected leader
- A significant group of people in big cities support democratic change.
- Our opponent's violence and corruption turn people against them.
- We have substantial international support.
- We have strong support amongst the most educated segments of society.
- We employ creative campaign methods.

WEAKNESSES

- Our membership is too small.
- People are scared to join or participate.
- We rely too much on our leader and are seen as a one-man party.
- We do not have enough women and young leaders.
- We lack support among marginalized groups.
- We lack support among rural voters.
- We don't have enough information to make decisions.
- Our party's files are outdated and disorganized.

OPPORTUNITIES

- The head of the regime is old and will have to transfer power to an unknown leader in the next few years.
- The regime has promised free local government elections next year.
- We have many young members but need to activate them.
- We could make better CSO coalitions with those who share our vision.

THREATS

- Violence against our leaders, candidates, and members during local elections might occur.
- Elections are canceled.
- New parties have emerged, using new ways of campaigning.
- We are seen as not having enough of a leadership team in comparison to other parties.
- We can't prepare a policy platform in time for the elections.
- Media disinformation can influence voters.

1.4 STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

TOOL 1A: WORKSHOPPING STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

In addition to conducting a SWOT analysis, it is essential to envision the future by drawing insights from the past. The Forwards/Backwards Inwards/Outwards grid provided below is designed to guide your team's strategic discussions:

- **Forwards (Future-oriented):** Deliberate on future trends, developments, and potential scenarios that may impact your party. Consider the following questions:
 - What are the emerging political, social, and economic trends that may shape the future political landscape?
 - What are the anticipated challenges and opportunities that your party may encounter in the coming years?
 - How can your party adapt and position itself to effectively navigate the evolving political environment despite the repression faced in closed or closing spaces?
- **Backwards (Past-oriented):** Reflect on the lessons learned from the past and historical experiences that can inform your party's strategy. Address the following inquiries:
 - What were the successful strategies employed by your party in previous elections or advocacy campaigns?
 - What were the key factors that contributed to past failures or setbacks?
 - How has the political landscape evolved over time, and what insights can be derived from those changes?
 - Are there any historical patterns or recurring challenges of which your party should be aware and address?
- **Inwards (Internal Focus):** Examine internal aspects of your party that may influence strategic decision-making. Consider the following aspects:
 - What are the strengths and weaknesses of your party's internal structure, resources, and capabilities?
 - How can your party leverage its strengths to capitalize on opportunities and mitigate weaknesses?
 - Are there any internal barriers or limitations that may hinder effective implementation of strategies?
 - What organizational changes or improvements can be made to enhance the party's overall effectiveness?

- **Outwards (External Focus):** Evaluate external factors and stakeholders that can impact your party's strategy. Explore the following aspects:
 - Who are the key political players, interest groups, or potential allies that can influence your party's success in promoting democratic change?
 - What are the expectations, needs, and concerns of your party's target audience or constituents?
 - How can your party build effective coalitions to broaden its support base and influence?
 - Which regulatory, legal, or other constraints and repressive measures does your party need to navigate and for which it needs to account in its strategy?

By utilizing the Forwards/Backwards Inwards/Outwards grid, your team can engage in comprehensive discussions and integrate strategic foresight into your party's decision-making processes.

[Strategic Foresight Worksheet: Annex 1A](#)

1.5 TACTICS: TURNING STRATEGY INTO MANAGEABLE STEPS

After analyzing your starting point and assessing the strategic landscape, it's time to break down your strategy into manageable steps or tactics. In closed environments, political parties often face challenges in achieving a democratic transition with limited resources. The key is to divide the overall objective into smaller parts. Considering the challenges in closed spaces, the following tactics may prove effective:

- **Set Clear Goals:**
 - Outline clear and specific objectives for your party with the aim of promoting democratic change.
 - Establish realistic goals with clear timelines, encompassing short-term, medium-term, and long-term targets that build upon prior accomplishments.
- **Set (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-Based) SMART Goals:**
 - Utilize the SMART framework to assess the implementation of your tactics:
 - Specific: Clear and precise, answering what, who, and how
 - Measurable: Quantifiable for easy progress tracking

- Achievable: Realistic and attainable by your team
- Relevant: Aligns with the overall purpose
- Time-bound: Set a clear time frame for completion

- **Build from Small Victories:**

- Break down the path to a democratic transition into smaller, achievable successes.
- Identify easy wins that can keep supporters motivated, even if they appear unrelated to your larger goals.
- Explore non-political issues that can mobilize the general public politically and contribute to your movement.

- **Change the Balance of Power:**

- Undermine the authoritarian regime's hold on power by challenging its legitimacy and public support.
- Demonstrate that the regime lacks public backing and democratic legitimacy, contrasting its claims.
- Highlight the regime's actions that contradict the nation's collective values and fundamental ideals.

- **Strength in Numbers and Diversity:**

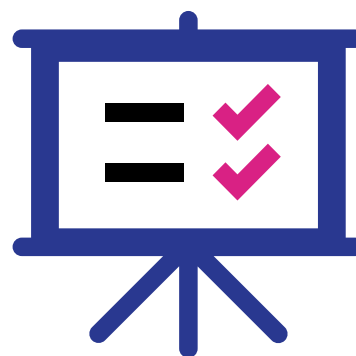
- Encourage collective action to mitigate individual risks associated with opposing an authoritarian regime.
- Emphasize the size and growth of your movement to demonstrate widespread support.
- Engage traditionally excluded groups, such as women, youth, and underrepresented communities, to strengthen your movement and promote inclusivity. When engaging these groups, it is important to ensure that you are not only using their numbers for support, but you are also integrating their perspectives and priorities into your work.

By implementing these tactics, your party can make strategic progress within the limitations of closed environments, gradually building momentum and increasing the potential for democratic change.



1.6 COMMUNICATING THE OVERALL STRATEGY




Communicating the overall strategy of the party is crucial for creating an engaged and motivated membership base. While it is important to prioritize the safety of leaders and members by not disclosing all details publicly, providing a basic understanding of the party's strategy and the roles of individuals in implementing it is essential. These tips can help you assist you in these efforts:



- Clearly define and articulate the overall strategy using concise language that is easily understood by party members.
- Develop a communication plan to cascade the strategy from top leadership to grassroots levels, utilizing various channels for information dissemination.
- Foster inclusivity by involving party members from diverse backgrounds in the strategic planning process, seeking input, and valuing and integrating diverse perspectives.
- Communicate the specific roles and responsibilities of party members within the strategy to align their actions with the party's goals.
- Recognize and appreciate the efforts and achievements of party members, celebrating milestones and successful initiatives publicly.

TOOL 1B: TEMPLATE FOR SIMPLIFYING STRATEGY COMMUNICATION

Using this template, you can formulate your party's strategy into a concise and easily communicable message. Break down the content into smaller pieces while retaining the core essence of the strategy. This approach helps ensure that party members understand the purpose and importance of their actions in achieving the overall goal.

IF WE DO THIS ACTION...  What do we do?	...THEN WE WILL WIN THIS GOAL...  Why do we do it?	...BECAUSE...  How does the What advance us to the Why?
If we mobilize youth voters...	...then we will win the election...	...because youth represent a significant voting block that can sway the outcome.

[Strategy Communication Worksheet: Annex 1B](#)

2. MANAGING RISK

2.1 WHY MANAGE RISK?

Dealing with risk is an inherent part of working for democracy within closed or closing spaces. Political parties have a duty of care towards their members, activists, and leaders, which necessitates conducting a risk assessment before implementing a political strategy (refer to the template in Annex 1). When calling upon individuals to join in strategic action, they have the right to be informed about the potential risks involved.

Beyond the responsibility of protecting members and supporters, assessing risk serves as a countermeasure against the fear upon which anti-democratic governments rely to impede your party's organizing efforts. Risk assessment allows you to reclaim power from forces that seek to hinder your role in achieving democratic change. This chapter provides you with tools to assess the risks faced by your political party, prioritize those posing the greatest threat, and allocate resources to either avoid, mitigate, or accept these risks at both the individual and organizational levels.

2.2 CARRYING OUT A RISK ASSESSMENT

Your strategic risk assessment begins by considering the broader context and understanding the larger picture. However, it also requires continuous readiness to identify and adapt to emerging and escalating risk situations and threats. In strategizing, it is essential to plan actions while anticipating the government's potential reactions, particularly in closed and closing spaces.

Risk assessment, like any strategic process, is most effective when conducted regularly and proactively. It should not be a one-time exercise but rather an ongoing practice that informs decision-making and helps your party stay ahead of potential risks and challenges. By regularly assessing and reassessing risks, your party can proactively address them, make necessary adjustments to its strategies, and ensure its ongoing ability to navigate and operate within challenging political environments.

2.3 RISKS FACED IN ANTI-DEMOCRATIC REGIMES

Political parties and democratic movements operating in anti-democratic regimes commonly face various risks, including:



Administrative Risks: State bureaucracy targets the party through administrative means, making it difficult to operate legally by imposing burdensome requirements and restrictions.



Economic Risks: Party members, activists, or leaders may face job loss, expulsion from education, asset seizure, or targeting of their businesses.



Identity-Based Risks:

- Leaders and activists from traditionally marginalized and underrepresented groups, such as women, racial, ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, Indigenous people, LGBTQI+ individuals, and persons with disabilities, face threats based on stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.
- Women, girls, and LGBTQI+ individuals may experience an increased risk of sexual harassment, violence, and abuse.



Judicial Risks: Detention, arrest, and imprisonment on false charges are common, often accompanied by the risk of ill treatment and torture while in custody.



Political Risks:

- Authoritarian governments may stigmatize your party's reputation, labeling it as an enemy of the state and a political and security risk.
- Harmful gender tropes and stereotypes may be used to discredit and undermine the party's legitimacy.



Property Risks: Houses, offices, and vehicles associated with the party, including personal property of leaders or members, may be targeted for vandalism or arson.



Informational Risks: Your party's confidential information—such as communications, lists of supporters, party strategies, the design of organizing efforts, and even physical location and movements—is likely a frequent target. The theft or leak of such information can lead to physical risks for party members and supporters as well as contribute to reputational risks and impact your party's strategic success.



Digital Risks:

- The digital systems with which your party maintains and interacts—such as communication applications, databases, online accounts, mobile devices and computers, the internet and social media—often facilitate and enhance other categories of risk. Harassment on social media can have a variety of negative impacts on party members and supporters. This harassment can impact party members' mental health, and digital

surveillance of communications and internet activity can contribute to risks to their physical safety. In addition, social profiles and party members' digital footprints can be leveraged to facilitate judicial action, and the hacking of party accounts and data systems can result in political and reputational consequences tied to the leak of sensitive information, which, in turn, can fuel damaging information manipulation campaigns.

- Communications and movements can be monitored, bugged, or hacked.
- Party leaders, members, activists, and supporters may face technology-facilitated attacks, including online hate speech, harassment, violence, and abuse. This risk disproportionately affects women, LGBTQI+ individuals, and other marginalized identities.



Mental Health Risks:

Leaders, activists, and members may experience mental health challenges, potentially leading to neglect of personal safety or disillusionment.



Risk of Violence:

Members, activists, and individuals associated with the party, including family members and personal friends, may be targeted, harassed, and attacked to intimidate the regime's intended targets.

This violence can range from online attacks and abuse to excessive use of force by security forces, physical assaults, or even murder.

Women, in particular, may face unique forms of violence and differentiated impacts of that violence, ranging from domestic violence in the home to sexual violence, impacting their individual and collective readiness to engage in politics.



Risk During Foreign Travel:

A handful of regimes have the power, tools, and resources to track, surveil, and hurt political opponents outside their own borders with and without awareness/cooperation of other state actors.

Recognizing and assessing these risks is essential for developing strategies to mitigate and address them, ensuring the safety and well-being of party members, activists, and leaders, as well as the overall success of the democratic movement.

2.4 MITIGATING RISK

Once your party has completed a risk assessment to identify organization-specific threats and vulnerabilities, it is essential to formulate strategies to mitigate these risks. Below are common organizational, personal, and tech security risks, along with tips on actions that can be taken to mitigate them.

2.4.1 ORGANIZATIONAL

DISTRIBUTE LEADERSHIP: Relying solely on a single leader can create vulnerabilities in closed and closing spaces where the loss of leadership is a common risk due to factors like harassment, violence, arrest, or exile.

- Establish a **distributed leadership model** where decision-making and responsibilities are shared among multiple trusted individuals at different levels of the party.
- Develop a **contingency plan** for the temporary or permanent absence of a leader, ensuring that there is a clear succession plan and that others can step into leadership roles if necessary.
- Create a **party structure that is resilient** to the loss of leadership, promoting collective decision-making and fostering a culture of shared responsibility.

GUARD AGAINST INFILTRATION: In restricted environments, the risk of infiltration by government agents, security forces, or hostile groups is a constant concern.

- Establish **clear policies and procedures for recruiting** staff and volunteers, including the requirement of references from trusted party activists or conducting thorough background checks.
- Implement measures to **classify knowledge** and control access to information within the party, ensuring that members understand what information is appropriate to share with whom.
- Foster a **culture of trust** while maintaining vigilance, ensuring that new volunteers are consistently vetted without creating a culture of distrust or alienating potential supporters.
- Develop **protocols for addressing suspected infiltrations** or instances where trusted individuals become disgruntled or defect, limiting potential damage and protecting the party's integrity. This should include considering what information and digital systems to which they may have access and removing such access promptly.

ORGANIZE SAFETY FOR PUBLIC EVENTS:

- **Form small groups** of four or five demonstrators to ensure mutual support and safety during public activities.
- Establish a **clear protocol for reporting** any incidents or arrests within the group.
- Designate **group members responsible for reporting** arrests or missing individuals to party officials for appropriate response.
- Avoid concentration of key staff and leaders in a single demonstration to **minimize the impact of arrests** on party organization. It is also important to consider what sensitive information—including that stored on mobile phones or other devices—could be compromised in the case of arrest or device confiscation at a rally, protest, or other public event.
- Establish **secure and trusted communication channels** with trusted external partners.
- **Collaborate with CSOs** to include leaders or observers in public activities for increased protection against violent disruptions.
- Coordinate and **share information with trusted movements** or organizations, including those operating outside the country as diaspora communities, only if the full security of information and members can be safeguarded and guaranteed.
- Consider the participation of respected leaders, religious figures, intellectuals, or foreign ambassadors in demonstrations to **deter repressive measures**.
- **Film colleagues being arrested** and engage with the police, if relevant, to prevent the arrest from taking place.

PROS AND CONS OF CONFRONTING AUTHORITIES

When political party representatives contemplate confronting authorities in closed and closing spaces, they must carefully consider potential advantages and disadvantages. Engaging in confrontation may offer visibility, symbolic resistance, mobilization, and pressure on authorities. However, it also risks repression, escalation of tensions, internal divisions, and security risks. It's crucial to conduct security and risk assessments and explore alternative strategies to ensure the safety of party members and supporters. Decision-making should be comprehensive, considering the specific context and potential consequences.

SAFEGUARD MENTAL HEALTH:

- Foster a party culture that **prioritizes and respects mental health**.
- **Recognize the stress** and strain experienced by activists, members, and leaders in a restrictive environment.
- Establish a system that **provides mental health counseling** and peer-to-peer support for activists facing repressive measures or arrests, extending support to their impacted family members.
- Promote a **distributed leadership structure** to encourage collective responsibility and support.
- Ensure that **every party member has a strategic role** to enhance resilience.
- Maintain **internal communications with a strategic focus** to reduce unnecessary stress.
- Ensure proper budgeting and forward-thinking financial planning to **support adequate staffing and workload distribution**.
- Empower individuals to decline less strategic tasks to **avoid overwhelming workloads**.
- Implement a **regular cycle of planning and evaluation** to assess the relevance and effectiveness of work.
- Maintain a **clear focus on the party's mission** and **celebrate achievements**.
- Express **gratitude to activists** and create opportunities for shared responsibility within the party.
- Recognize that **safeguarding mental health might look different to different groups**, and give those groups space to protect their mental health in their own ways.
- Provide guidance for places that party members who are struggling with mental health can seek **resources**.

2.4.2 PERSONAL SECURITY

In addition to the party's plan to protect the security of the organization, there are additional steps you can take to protect the personal security of yourself and your members. Developing and maintaining a safety plan is very important by taking the following measures:

AVOID BECOMING AN EASY TARGET:

- **Follow the law carefully** to avoid giving your opponents an excuse to target you.

- **Adhere to traffic laws** and **regulations on drugs and alcohol**, and ensure **tax payments** are in order.
- **Avoid predictable routines** that can be monitored by those observing you.
- **Change the timing or location of meetings** and consider moving meetings online for added security.
- **Vary your travel patterns** by changing vehicles or routes to make surveillance more difficult.
- **Limit the number of people with access to your calendar information**, both within and outside the party.
- Always **use secure communication channels**, such as Signal or Wire, when communicating sensitive party or personal information.
- Consider **limiting what is shared in written correspondence that is not over encrypted channels**, and make use of “disappearing messages” in secure apps like Signal to limit the sensitive content that’s present on your device at any given time. In scenarios where encrypted communication options are not accessible (e.g., an internet shutdown or blackout), consider developing code words.
- **Prioritize safety when selecting meeting locations**, taking into account the number of exits and the overall level of public visibility.

ASSESS VULNERABILITIES AT HOME:

- **Conduct a risk assessment at home** and identify areas where vulnerabilities exist.
- Implement measures to reduce or eliminate risks, such as **establishing emergency procedures with your family** and emphasizing the importance of locking doors and windows.
- Set a **strong password** for your home WiFi.
- Seek the **assistance of trusted neighbors** who can help monitor your home and notify you of any suspicious activity or incidents in the neighborhood.
- **Avoid bringing sensitive information home** or transferring data to insecure home computers or mobile devices.
- Consider **installing appropriate security technology**, such as alarms or cameras, at both your home and office. Be mindful, however, that visible security measures can attract unwanted attention as well.
- **Ensure that all family members are aware of the identified risks** and understand how to mitigate them. Approach the conversation from a perspective of promoting safety rather than instilling fear.

PREPARE FOR THE WORST:

- Prioritize **contacting a lawyer** before any potential arrest occurs. Find a lawyer you trust and familiarize yourself with your legal rights. Memorize your lawyer's phone number and refrain from answering questions from authorities without legal representation present. If detained, assert your rights firmly and politely.
- **Carry essential medication with you at all times** in case of unexpected detention.
- Ensure that **trusted party colleagues have a plan in place in the event of your detention**, including what to do about your digital accounts and devices. Consider, for example, if these accounts should be deleted remotely, or if that would cause additional risks. This plan should involve seeking support from domestic and international coalition partners to advocate for your release.
- **Keep your passport and travel documents up to date**, including necessary visas for potential destinations in the event that you need to flee. Make copies of all important documents and store them with a trusted contact.

2.4.3 INVEST IN DIGITAL SECURITY

Any political party operating in closed and closing spaces needs to make tech security a priority and a core part of its risk assessment since one weak link in this context can jeopardize the safety and operations of the whole organization.

For parties facing a hostile environment, ensuring the security of computers, accounts, databases, websites, digital communications, and mobile devices is even more important. In a repressive system, a data breach, infection of a device with advanced spyware, or social media account hacking can embarrass a party and place supporters and members in danger of serious harm.

Specific best practices and recommendations will differ based upon your parties' context, and it is strongly recommended that you engage with a digital security expert to help you craft a tailored security plan. With that said, there are some universal basics that nearly all parties should put in place to strengthen their security posture. While the actions listed below are critical, parties can find additional guidance and insight by searching for additional cybersecurity handbooks for political parties that are available publicly online. When searching, parties should ensure any relevant cybersecurity guidance comes from trusted sources or organizations.

TAKE THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS TO MITIGATE THESE RISKS:

- **Conduct regular security training** within your party. When training and supporting staff, establish and maintain a culture of information security awareness and risk reduction.
- **Be alert to phishing messages**, messages that trick users into giving up confidential information by pretending to be from trusted sources, on email, social media, and communications apps, and have a reporting system.

- **Require strong passwords** and implement a password manager across the party.
- **Require two-factor authentication wherever possible**—ideally with physical security keys, a small device that can be used for verification when signing into secure accounts including in your office suite, any other email or storage services, and your social media accounts.
- **Ensure all staff devices and software are kept up-to-date**, and, if possible, invest in advanced endpoint management and security tools to assist with keeping devices free from malware.
- **Use secure cloud storage** to limit the amount of sensitive information that is stored on physical computers, hard drives, and other devices that can be physically compromised or stolen. Choose cloud services that have been vetted for security, as they may offer higher levels of protection compared to do-it-yourself security measures.
- Establish and maintain a **culture of information security awareness** and risk reduction through training and support for staff and volunteers.
- Regularly **monitor and update firewalls** and other digital security measures to protect essential information.
- Regularly **change passwords**, especially when prompted to do so.
- **Be cautious of individuals claiming to be tech support staff** who call your party office and request password information.
- Consider **engaging specialized and vetted security firms** that can assist with troubleshooting, responding to security breaches, or providing proactive measures to prevent technological security breaches.
- Understand your **legal obligations regarding tech security**, and be prepared to communicate rapidly internally and externally in the event of a crisis situation.

TOOL 2A: RISK REGISTER

Use the Risk Register and Risk Priority Matrix sample below with included examples filled in to identify the risks you face when operating in closed and closing spaces; consider your vulnerabilities for each risk; review steps taken to mitigate the risks; and plan additional needed mitigations. Rank the likelihood and impact of each risk, using the ranking scales below.

	RISK	
	Abduction by pro-government militia	Online harassment
VULNERABILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journey from office to home on a rural road with no lighting • Car pauses outside the house for gate to open 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government-linked websites and social media accounts
MITIGATIONS IN PLACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully charged mobile telephone • Scheduled check-ins with trusted individuals • Car locked at all times • Change route regularly • Safe houses identified for times of significant risk, e.g., pre-election 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily monitoring of relevant social media and web channels
MITIGATIONS NEEDED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closed-circuit television (CCTV) camera at gate to house • Never travel by car alone • Brief friendly neighbors on whom to contact if they witness an incident at home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a comprehensive mitigation strategy and appoint a coordinator within the party
PROBABILITY (1-5)	3	4
IMPACT (1-5)	5	4

Once you have completed listing and analyzing each risk, begin your priority assessment. Give each a ranking between 1 and 5 for the likelihood of its occurring or continuing.



PROBABILITY RANKING				
1	2	3	4	5
Possible but very unlikely	Possible but unlikely	Less likely but still worth monitoring	Likely to happen but depends on a change in circumstances	Already experienced, or judged to be certain to occur

Next, rank risks by how big an impact their occurrence would have or already has had on your ability to function.

IMPACT RANKING				
1	2	3	4	5
Would have minimal impact on party members and operations	Would be irritating or distracting but not critical to your operations	Would remove your party's ability to function normally but still allow you to function	Would severely disrupt your party and would risk the safety of your supporters	Would make it impossible for your party to function Serious risks to the lives and liberty of leaders or supporters

Risk Register Worksheet: Annex 2A

TOOL 2B: RISK PRIORITY MATRIX

Use your impact and probability rankings to prioritize key risks to address.

IMPACT 	5 VERY HIGH	Murder	Abduction	Assault by militia		Arrest Deregistration as a party
	4 HIGH		Government deregisters your candidates	Vandalism of offices	Hacking of IT systems Infiltration of your party by regime agents	
	3 MEDIUM					False reports in state media
	2 LOW		Media and businesses refuse your party's patronage		Harassment of supporters/ voters on election day	
	1 VERY LOW					
		1 VERY LOW	2 LOW	3 MEDIUM	4 HIGH	5 VERY HIGH
		PROBABILITY 				

[Risk Priority Matrix Worksheet: Annex 2B](#)

3. ORGANIZING YOUR PARTY

3.1 POLITICAL PARTY ORGANIZING

To remain relevant to people's social, economic, and political realities in closed and closing spaces, political parties must adapt their organizational structure and create a resilient framework with interconnected teams capable of withstanding attacks from authoritarian and illiberal forces. It is crucial to mainstream the participation of traditionally underrepresented and excluded groups, including women and minorities, in party activities.

However, the ability to engage in these activities will vary significantly across the spectrum from open to closed societies. In open societies, political parties aim to organize various interests, compete for office to represent those interests, and fulfill their promises to supporters. Conversely, parties operating in closed societies often face restrictions on their roles and activities. They may be limited to advocating for specific issues, operating in specific regions, or focusing on local government.

In the most repressive societies, political parties may be unable to operate safely and freely. In such cases, parties may need to maintain connections with their members and supporters through communication channels while operating from exile, without putting supporters who remain in the country at risk.


This chapter provides valuable tools for operating in closed and closing spaces, focusing on effectively managing your party in the face of attacks, leveraging available resources, and promoting resilience. It also emphasizes the importance of including traditionally excluded groups and implementing safe grassroots campaigns to maximize the impact of your party's efforts.

3.2 ORGANIZE A RESILIENT PARTY

As mentioned earlier, a significant challenge for parties operating in restrictive environments is establishing an organizational structure that promotes resilience against anti-democratic forces. This applies not only to leadership but also at the local level, where activists must overcome fear induced by repressive regimes.

One crucial aspect to address is managing interpersonal conflicts within the party. It's essential to recognize that such conflicts can be exploited by authoritarian regimes to divide opposition groups. While there may not be a foolproof solution, including conflict resolution and management strategies within the party's organizational framework is advisable. By proactively addressing conflicts, parties can minimize their negative impact and maintain unity.

Adhering to the do-no-harm principle is also crucial. Regular assessments should be conducted to ensure that the party's organizational methods do not unnecessarily endanger its members or officials. While operating in restrictive environments inherently involves some risk, it is vital to minimize these risks through thoughtful party organization and risk management strategies. When evaluating these risks, it is essential to consider the risks to the diversity of party members engaging in risky activities. Women and people from other marginalized groups may face disproportionate or different risks and therefore need different risk mitigation strategies.



Another key principle to foster resilience against anti-democratic forces is to enhance internal democracy and promote inclusion within political party structures. This means actively involving members - including those from marginalized groups - in decision-making processes, promoting transparency, and ensuring that diverse voices and perspectives are valued and heard. Embracing internal democracy and inclusivity strengthens party cohesion and resilience against external pressures.

3.2.1 RETHINKING TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTY ORGANIZATION

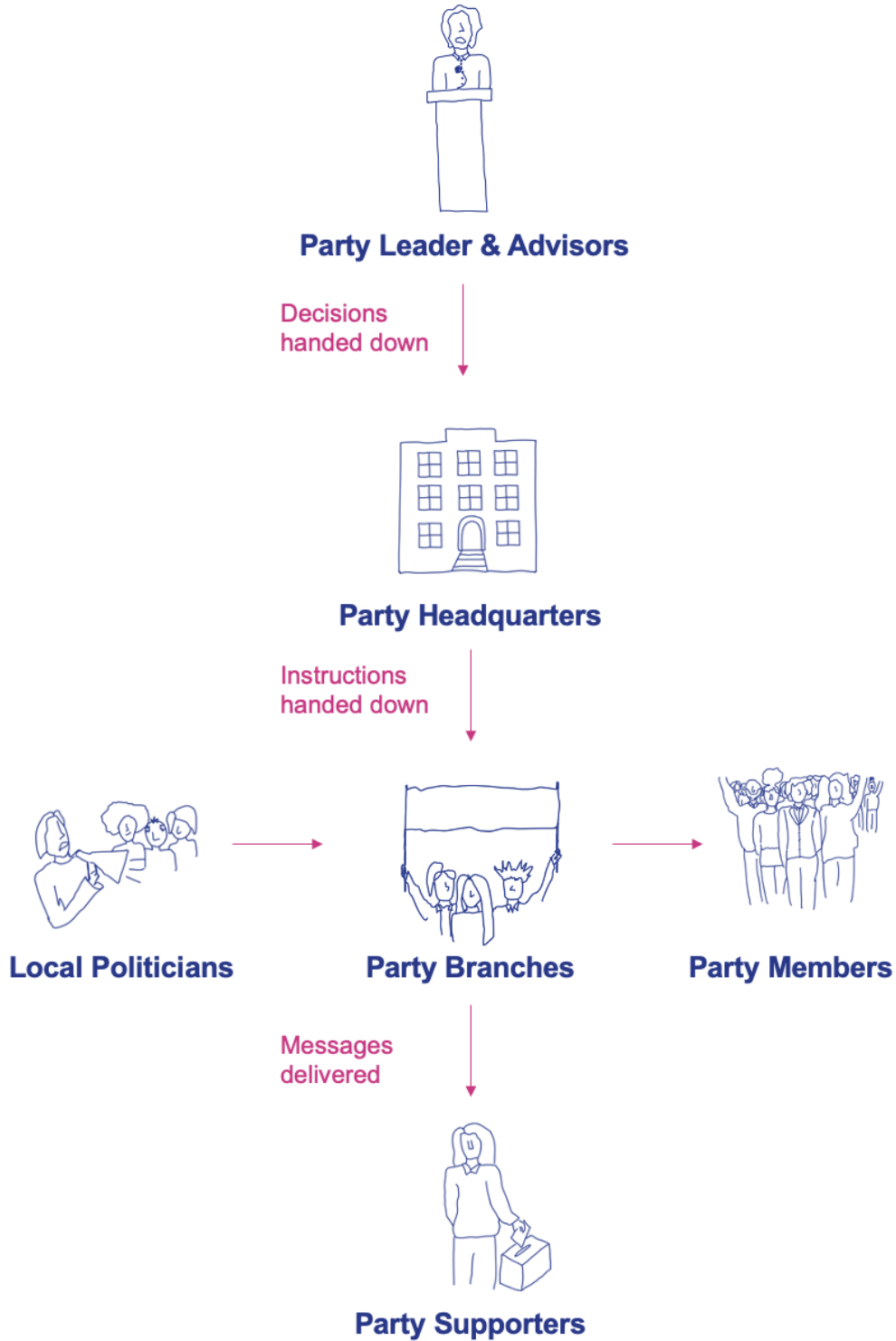
In addition to the mentioned measures, it's crucial to rethink the party's organizational structure. Many political parties adopt a hierarchical model, with a senior team led by the leader overseeing strategy and communication with regional or local party branches, activists, and the broader membership. At times, these parties also incorporate a bottom-up democratic structure, where activists elect delegates to a party congress or a national executive committee. While this hierarchical management structure is prevalent, it's essential to acknowledge the challenges associated with this model:

- **Information sharing vulnerabilities:** The hierarchical party structure may further hinder effective communication between the leadership and grassroots levels. In repressive environments, gaps or breakdowns in the communication chain become more critical, preventing the strategic vision of the leadership from reaching the grassroots and vice versa.
- **Disempowerment of members and supporters:** Activists and party members operating in restrictive environments yearn for a sense of ownership and meaningful engagement for democratic change. However, a hierarchical model often delegates tasks without granting individuals true responsibility or decision-making power, exacerbating the challenges faced in closed spaces.
- **Lack of internal democracy:** For political parties to be a genuine reflection of the society and vision they aim to serve, internal democracy becomes even more crucial in restrictive environments. This includes fostering an environment that encourages inclusive debates, respects differing viewpoints, and finds constructive ways to address disagreements, while also preserving party unity and cohesion amidst challenges from authoritarian forces.
- **Vulnerability to disruption by anti-democratic forces:** Hierarchical party structures face heightened vulnerability in closed and closing spaces and under authoritarian rule. Authoritarian regimes can effortlessly disrupt such structures by targeting key members, forcing them into exile, or subjecting them to intimidation, further hindering the party's effectiveness in pursuing its goals in challenging environments.

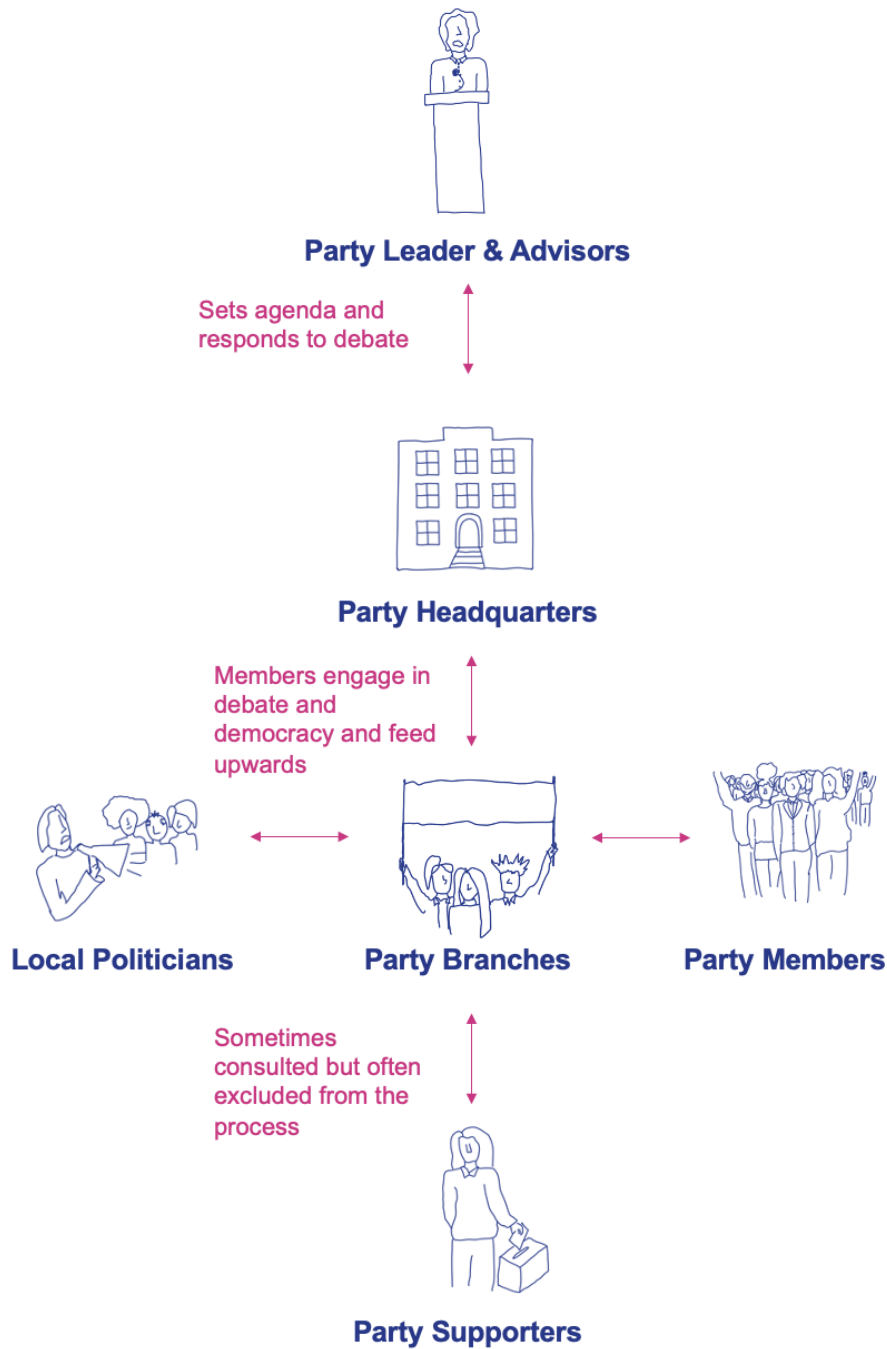
To address these challenges, political parties operating in closed and closing spaces should consider reimagining their organizational structures to empower members, enhance information sharing, foster internal democracy, and build resilience against external disruptions. Embracing more inclusive and participatory models can strengthen the party's ability to navigate challenging environments and uphold democratic principles. Creating a system and culture of inclusivity can greatly improve parties'

FIGURE 1: POLITICAL PARTY ORGANIZATION

TRADITIONAL PARTY ORGANIZATION: HIERARCHICAL MODEL



REIMAGINED PARTY ORGANIZATION: STRUCTURING FOR RESILIENCE



3.2.2 CREATE A RESILIENT PARTY STRUCTURE

As discussed throughout this playbook, operating in a closed or closing environment presents challenges, as party members in critical roles may become targets of ongoing attacks by opponents, posing a disruption risk to the party's operations. To counteract this vulnerability, one option is to restructure the party following the snowflake model, which can greatly enhance resilience.

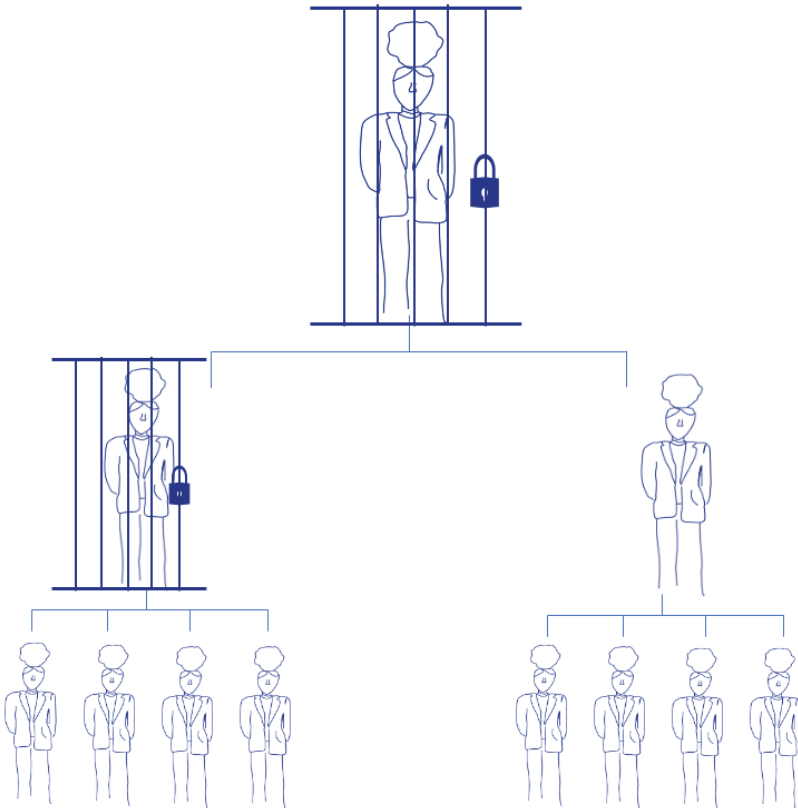
This organizational model advocates for a flatter party structure, deviating from the traditional hierarchical approach discussed above. Instead of cascading tasks down through the party hierarchy, all party levels are organized into teams. This model of organization promotes numerous lines of communication, making it harder for authoritarian forces to disrupt the party structure and increasing its resilience against external pressures.

In addition to adopting the snowflake model, fostering an open debate culture within the party further enhances resilience. By cultivating an environment where all members feel that their contributions are valued and influential in shaping the party's development, a sense of ownership and commitment is fostered.

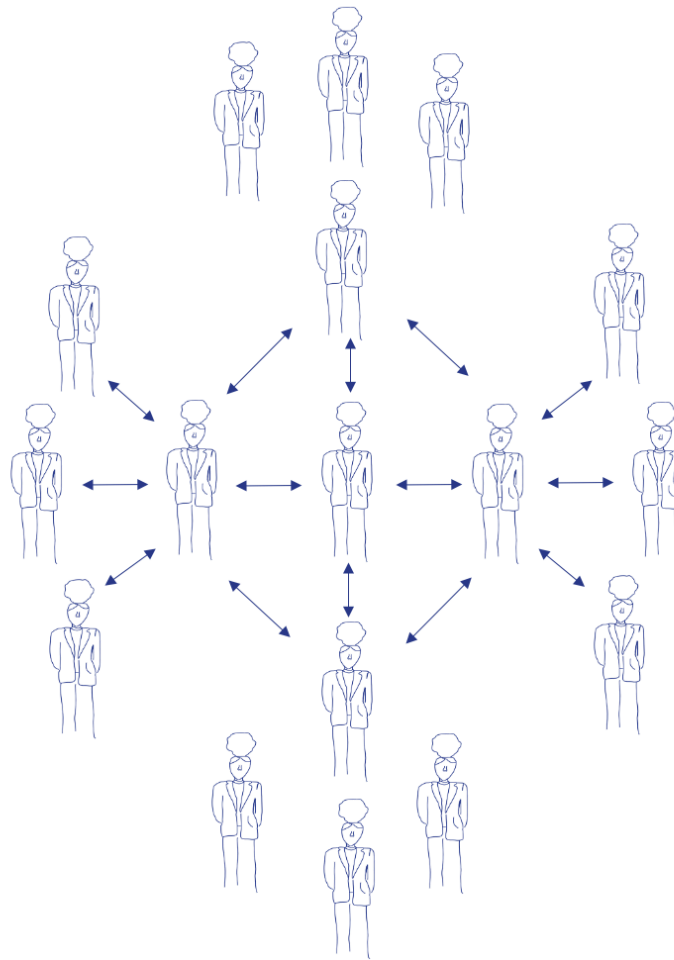
In this context, CSOs, particularly those led by and representing marginalized groups, often possess significant expertise in navigating closed and closing spaces while ensuring the safety of their members. Establishing partnerships with these groups not only enhances the party's resilience but also opens up opportunities to incorporate new and innovative ideas.

FIGURE 2: CREATING A RESILIENT PARTY STRUCTURE

TRADITIONAL HIERARCHICAL MODEL



SNOWFLAKE MODEL



In the snowflake model, teams collaborate on shared tasks, ensuring that everyone is aware of the activities of those around them. If a member is removed from the organization—for example, through arrest or imprisonment by an authoritarian regime—others can continue carrying out tasks until a replacement is found. This structure doesn't mean that everyone is involved in all activities but rather that all teams are interconnected. Shared purpose and calls to action are communicated throughout the network by all members, minimizing the risks of disrupting the flow of information within the party.

In environments where there is a constant risk of government crackdowns, parties can distribute leadership not only across teams within the country but also ensure that leadership positions within each team are located overseas as a means of safeguarding the organization. Below we provide further advice on how to establish this flatter, more resilient party structure.

TOOL 3A: PARTY STRUCTURE AUDIT

To assess vulnerabilities in your party structure and effectively restructure your organization using the snowflake model, it is crucial to conduct a thorough audit of your current party structure. This audit should focus on analyzing the party structure as it currently exists, rather than how you envision it to be. Consider addressing the areas outlined below during the audit.

ROLES	Analyze party roles at the national, regional and local level, evaluating those permanent roles that are often permanent and are required for party organization and daily work. Start with the leadership and work your way down.
PROJECTS	Think about projects that the party has to deliver, such as: implementing tactics arising from strategy work or furthering existing projects like establishing a membership system, planning for municipal elections, or recruiting more women candidates.
DECISION-MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION	Map who makes decisions at each party level and who is responsible for implementation of those decisions.
VULNERABILITIES	Assess if there are individuals with sole responsibility for critical tasks.
COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS AND COMMUNICATION FLOW	Analyze how the party communicates between the various levels and individuals in the organization. Identify weak points in the communication system. Identify key channels for communication and how they can be better secured. Assess the technology used for communication and assess if the tools will be available for members and officials throughout the organization.

Party Structure Audit Worksheet: Annex 3A

3.3 RESHAPING PARTY STRUCTURES

Once the analysis is complete, the party can begin reevaluating its organizational structure. Based on the assessment, the party can reorganize into key teams following the snowflake model. In this model, teams collaborate on shared tasks and provide mutual support, ensuring that the removal of one member does not disrupt the entire workflow. It is important to consider the makeup of these teams and ensure diversity of their members, in particular seeking gender parity for these teams, especially those responsible for decision-making. The snowflake model emphasizes the following key teams:

- **Leadership Team:** Comprising the party leader, senior politicians, and senior staff capable of deputizing for one another, this team is responsible for high-level political decision-making.
- **Strategy and Communications Team:** This team is tasked with citizen outreach, political strategy development, internal and external communication, and the creation of information and election materials.
- **Grassroots Organizing Team:** This team is responsible for maintaining relations with civil society, grassroots campaigning, and providing party member training.
- **Operations Team:** This team handles the internal democratic processes of the party, administrative tasks, and ensures the smooth functioning of party activities.
- **Legal Team:** This team ensures the party's legal compliance and offers support to party officials and members facing legal challenges.

The snowflake model interconnects these teams, enabling a continuous flow of communication and shared purpose. While not everyone is involved in every activity, the interconnectedness ensures task continuity, reducing the risks of disrupting the party's information flow. Given the constant risk of government crackdowns in certain environments, the party can enhance its resilience further by distributing leadership across teams and potentially locating some leaders overseas for added protection. This approach aligns with the snowflake model's principle of shared responsibility and resilience.

TOOL 3B: CREATE INTERCONNECTED TEAMS

To enhance the resilience of your party structure and implement the snowflake model effectively, it is important to create interconnected teams within your organization. These teams should be designed to overlap, with members participating in more than one team, fostering robust interconnectivity and collaboration. Here are some steps to consider:

- **Identify Key Teams:** Determine the essential teams within your party that are responsible for different functions such as communications, grassroots campaigning, policy development, and community outreach.

- **Cross-Team Participation:** Encourage members to participate in multiple teams simultaneously. For example, a member from the communications team could also be part of the grassroots team. This cross-team involvement will facilitate better coordination, information sharing, and synergy between different aspects of party work.
- **Regular Inter-Team Meetings:** Organize regular meetings where representatives from each team come together to discuss strategies, share updates, and coordinate their efforts. These meetings will ensure a smooth flow of information, alignment of tasks, and effective implementation of the party's overall strategy.
- **Distributed Leadership:** Distribute leadership roles within the party to limit the risk of disruption in the event of a crackdown or targeted actions against specific members. Consider sharing or rotating leadership responsibilities among several members, both domestically and internationally. This approach ensures that if one member is targeted, the functioning of the party remains uninterrupted, reflecting the resilience inherent in the snowflake model.

By creating interconnected teams and promoting cross-team participation, your party will foster collaboration, information exchange, and resilience. Regular inter-team meetings will facilitate effective coordination, while distributed leadership will minimize the impact of potential disruptions. These strategies will strengthen your party's ability to withstand challenges and maintain its operations in restrictive environments. Creating these teams is also a chance for those individuals who are often not selected for party leadership positions—such as women and other marginalized groups—to have opportunities to gain experience in leadership positions and foster diversity and inclusivity within the party.

[Creating Interconnected Teams Worksheet: Annex 3B](#)

FIGURE 3: CREATING INTERCONNECTED PARTY TEAMS



Once you have established a structure of overlapping teams within your party, it's important to remain flexible and adaptable. Recognize that this structure is not set in stone and be open to the possibility of merging, splitting, forming, or reforming teams as strategic needs evolve. By maintaining a nimble approach, you can be more responsive to emerging trends and events, giving you an advantage over your opponents.

3.4 LOCAL AND REGIONAL PARTY ORGANIZATION

At the local or regional level, where skilled leaders may be limited, you can implement a streamlined party structure that reflects the principles of overlapping teams and shared responsibility. Consider the following organizational model:

- **Management Team:** This team consists of the branch president and secretary, responsible for overseeing the local party bureaucracy, including administrative tasks, record-keeping, and coordination of branch activities.
- **Campaign Team:** The campaign team focuses on local grassroots activities, such as organizing and executing campaign efforts, training party members in effective campaigning techniques, and developing candidates for local elections. It plays a crucial role in mobilizing support and engaging with the community.

- **Membership Team:** The membership team is responsible for recruitment initiatives, organizing social events to foster camaraderie among members, and ensuring the welfare and engagement of party members at the local level. It actively works to attract new members and create a welcoming and inclusive environment within the party.
- **Regional Legal Teams:** Similar to the legal team at the national level, regional legal teams can handle legal matters specific to the local or regional context, ensuring compliance with relevant laws and regulations, and providing legal advice and support when needed.

When populating the teams at every level of the party, it's important to prioritize diversity and representation. Consider setting targets to ensure inclusivity, such as aiming for half of all positions to be filled by women or reserving a proportion of places for youth or individuals from minority communities within the country. This helps ensure that your party reflects the diversity and voices of the population it aims to represent.

3.5 INTERNAL PARTY TRAINING/CAPACITY BUILDING

For political parties operating in restrictive environments, it is of utmost importance to prioritize building internal capacity. This entails not only communicating the overall party strategy but also disseminating crucial internal information about the organizational structure, communication procedures, and operational processes to ensure alignment among all members.

To enhance resilience, the organization should consistently develop and update resource documents, manuals, and guidelines. Investing in both in-person and online training, while fostering peer-to-peer interaction, is vital for equipping key officials with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively execute the organization's strategy. This approach empowers them with a clear understanding of their roles, responsibilities, and best practices, thereby mitigating potential harm. It also highlights the significance of comprehending the specific tasks associated with their respective roles.

3.6 RECRUITMENT IN CLOSED AND CLOSING SPACES

To effectively build your party's organizational structure, identifying, recruiting, and mobilizing new talent and developing that talent into leaders is crucial. Here are some approaches for involving traditionally excluded and marginalized groups, promoting membership recruitment, and ensuring grassroots engagement:

- **Establish Support Systems:** Prioritize the establishment of support processes and systems before member recruitment to avoid exposing new members to unnecessary risk, especially in closed and closing spaces. Thoughtful planning can enhance safety and inclusivity, particularly for traditionally underrepresented and excluded groups.

- 
- **Utilize Existing Membership Networks:** Empower existing party members to leverage their personal social networks for recruitment and engagement. Provide tools and training in persuasive communication, party-specific informational materials, access to secure digital platforms, and guidelines for safe recruitment practices. Leveraging existing networks can broaden your party's reach and grassroots support.
 - **Facilitate Recruitment in Closed Environments:** In restrictive environments, recruit discreetly or openly, considering the risks involved for both the party and the individuals approached. Peer-to-peer contact and voluntary expressions of interest can be effective recruitment strategies.
 - **Involve Traditionally Excluded Groups:** Ensure representation and participation of traditionally excluded groups, including women, persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTQI+ communities, young people, and Indigenous people. It is critical to remember that all traditionally excluded groups—and sub-groups within those groups—have unique barriers and challenges that can impede them from safely participating in party activities. Understanding those challenges is crucial for approaching these groups in a safe and effective way.
 - **Mainstream Inclusive Participation:** Tackle the participation of excluded groups at every level of your party structure. Consider reserving positions for marginalized groups within elected or appointed party roles and advocate for candidate quotas in elections. Address discrimination based on gender, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity within the party.
 - **Engage in Issue-Based Campaigning:** Find issues that resonate with citizens and mobilize support, even under oppressive systems of government. Channeling public concerns into political mobilization can be an effective tactic. Identify issues that activate citizens and connect with their daily life concerns. In certain closing spaces, activities related to gender or the participation of women can be seen as less threatening, as sexist and patriarchal mindsets of authoritarian leaders often discount the impact that women can make. Parties can exploit these negative attitudes towards women to safely implement gender equality-related activities.

By implementing these strategies, your party can foster inclusivity and resilience and strengthen its impact in closed and closing spaces.



TOOL 3C: ELEMENTS OF GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNING

Grassroots organizing should be tailored to the specific context in which parties operate. This approach centers on building meaningful relationships with voters in local communities, understanding their interests, and addressing their challenges with relevant solutions. Active engagement, listening, and empathizing with community members are key components of this strategy. By effectively implementing grassroots organizing, your party can establish strong voter connections and have a significant impact at the local level.

Outlined below are five interrelated aspects of efficient grassroots campaigning, ranging from building relationships with citizens to delivering messages and engaging party members. Use this table as a source of inspiration to explore each element and identify opportunities to fulfill relevant roles in your daily activities. It's crucial to recognize the interconnectedness of each category, and many of the suggested actions can be undertaken simultaneously by the same individuals.

FIGURE 4: ELEMENTS OF EFFICIENT GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNING

	OPEN SOCIETIES	CLOSING SOCIETIES	CLOSED SOCIETIES
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH CITIZENS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parties go door-to-door having conversations with voters. • Surveys and consultations are used, often in busy shopping areas. • Politicians hold public meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Street activity is limited so party activity only takes place in larger groups. No activist operates alone. • More emphasis is put on peer-to-peer contact as public meetings and street work are too risky. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public activity is replaced with smaller scale, distributed campaigning. • House meetings are used as a way of collective activity with less risk of being broken up.
DELIVERING A MESSAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Party members are given resources to make arguments online and offline. • Parties deliver printed materials door-to-door. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Printed materials are distributed one-on-one rather than more widely. • More emphasis is put on briefing members to have persuasive conversations face to face as environment becomes more restrictive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Much activity moves to online secure forms of communication. Offline work is almost all peer-to-peer.
CAMPAIGNING ON ISSUES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parties identify local “hot” issues and propose simple solutions to them to win support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parties seek alliances that provide strength in numbers and build wider alliances. • Parties may avoid directly challenging the regime, and instead choose to campaign on issues with a regional or local focus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is too unsafe to campaign directly to the public, so the party works through CSOs to raise issues and maintain contact with citizens. • Parties still run campaigns on political issues, but look for “safe issues” that do not directly challenge the regime. • Parties and CSOs should consider the potential risks to CSOs, and parties should take a Do No Harm approach. • CSO operations are also limited.

	OPEN SOCIETIES	CLOSING SOCIETIES	CLOSED SOCIETIES
GATHERING DATA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information from conversations and surveys is collected and stored securely for further use. Data is analyzed and used to help focus grassroots activity more effectively, e.g. on particular neighborhoods or households. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizens are nervous about giving personal details. Parties make more use of secure applications to allow mass communication. Standard data such as publicly available lists of voters, is not available, therefore parties have to build their own lists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holding data centrally of party supporters or members is high risk. Parties use secure applications to store data. Members are vetted before they are added to distribution lists.
ENGAGING MEMBERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members have clear roles as activists, helping to contact voters, deliver materials, and attending public events. Members have opportunities to develop as they take responsibility for organizing campaigning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parties still run campaigns on political issues, but look for “safe issues” that do not directly challenge the regime. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extra resource has to be devoted to equipping members with the skills and tools to engage with voters on a one-on-one basis.

4. IDENTIFYING AND ENGAGING YOUR ALLIES

4.1 FORMING STRATEGIC COALITIONS

In closed or closing spaces, political parties can strengthen their pursuit of democratic change by forming strategic coalitions with like-minded democratic organizations and institutions. These alliances are particularly crucial as parties may encounter resource and influence limitations in such environments, and coalitions can amplify their impact.

By establishing coalitions, democratic parties enhance their operational efficacy, even when facing potential attacks and restrictions. Collaborations with like-minded partners enable ongoing engagement with the public, fostering a collective voice for democratic change in challenging circumstances.

CSOs, especially those representing marginalized groups, bring valuable expertise in navigating these environments, offering innovative strategies and solutions that enhance party resilience and expose them to fresh ideas and approaches for forming strategic coalitions. There are sometimes special measures or accommodations needed to work with these marginalized groups, especially in closing or closed spaces. It is essential to engage with these organizations and take cues from them on how to safely engage and interact with them and their membership.

In instances where parties are entirely banned or forced to operate from exile, coalitions with supportive actors from the international community and diaspora communities enable party members to continue their work within the country. This chapter explores the significance of coalitions and provides relevant resources to support parties in building effective partnerships and navigating closed and closing spaces effectively.

4.2 MAPPING POTENTIAL PARTNERS AND SETTING GOALS

Building a coalition requires a clear and well-defined purpose that serves as a guiding principle for the collective actions and decisions of the group. To initiate the process of coalition building, it is important to identify stakeholders who are invested in the country's democratic future. This includes democratic political parties, CSOs, international organizations, and even diaspora community organizations operating in exile. Here are the key steps:

- **Purpose Development:** Articulate the purpose or shared objective of your coalition. This serves as the foundation that brings different organizations together and guides the coalition's overall strategy.
- **Stakeholder Analysis:** Conduct a comprehensive analysis of potential partners' goals and objectives before approaching them to join the coalition. Identify any gaps in their capacity that the coalition can help address.
- **Identifying Shared Interests:** Determine the shared interests among potential allies, including diaspora communities. Aim for a smaller group of organizations with a deeper shared interest in promoting inclusive democratic change. Organizations are more likely to join a coalition if it aligns with their own goals and priorities.

- **Prioritization:** Assess the likelihood of collaboration with each potential partner and prioritize those that are more accessible or willing to collaborate. Start by inviting smaller, less influential organizations to join the coalition before approaching larger, more influential ones.
- **Maintain Focus and Diversity:** Avoid forming a coalition with too many partners, as it can dilute the shared commitment and hinder effective action for democratic change. Instead, seek a diverse roster of organizations, including CSOs representing minority communities and diaspora community organizations that bring a range of resources and expertise to the coalition.

TOOL 4: MAPPING COALITION PARTNERS

As a way of thinking through the issues above and strategically choosing which parties or organizations are best suited for allyship or coalition, a mapping worksheet is included as Annex 4.

[Mapping Coalition Partners Worksheet: Annex 4](#)

4.3 POLITICAL PARTY COALITION BUILDING

Cooperating with other democratic parties can be challenging, particularly in polarized political systems or between parties with a history of strong competition. In this context, it is important to be aware of how authoritarian leaders often employ divisive tactics to maintain their rule over opponents. Parties invested in democratic systems need to be strategic and willing to put aside differences to achieve shared strategic objectives, even if only for a limited time or under specific circumstances.

An illustrative example of coalition building by political parties in an authoritarian state is the case of Venezuela. In 2015, the Democratic Unity Roundtable was formed as a coalition of opposition parties to challenge the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela. The coalition included a wide range of parties with different ideologies, but these parties rallied around the shared objective of restoring democratic governance and addressing the economic crisis in the country.

4.4 CIVIL SOCIETY COALITION BUILDING

Shared interests in addressing societal challenges and finding potential solutions often motivate CSOs and political parties to form formal or informal coalitions. CSOs possess valuable expertise and can offer imaginative strategies to navigate closed and closing spaces securely and efficiently, especially for parties representing marginalized groups.

However, it's essential to acknowledge that crackdowns targeting democratic parties may also extend to CSOs protecting human rights or addressing issues considered threatening by the regime. In some cases, even CSOs providing essential services may face repression.

When considering coalition building, political parties should approach CSOs by highlighting the unique contributions they bring to the table while taking into account the potential risks involved. Collaborations can take various forms, from ad hoc partnerships to more long-term commitments. For example, if a party lacks an electoral path but aims to improve healthcare for children, it may collaborate with a CSO to provide volunteer-based health services. A real-life example can be seen in the actions of Belarusian democrats after their parties and associated CSOs were banned following fraudulent (non-democratic) elections in 2020. In response to the perceived ineffective pandemic response from the regime, democratic forces, led by CSOs, distributed face masks and supported those in self-isolation.

These activities serve a political purpose by providing services to address unmet needs and demonstrating the connection between party members and leaders to the daily lives of people. Compared to more confrontational political campaigns, these actions are less likely to provoke a response from anti-democratic regimes.

However, it is crucial to recognize that CSOs primarily serve the interests of their members, rather than acting as a back-up plan for suppressed political parties. Building coalitions with CSOs must be rooted in mutual respect for each other's roles.

In some cases, there may be a lack of trust between political parties and CSOs, e.g., with parties or CSOs concerned about the possibility that a prospective coalition partner could be infiltrated by the regime, or about the authenticity or integrity of their prospective partner's motivations and approaches. Identifying and addressing these issues early on in the cooperation process is critical, and building trust should be a priority. Steps toward building trust include fostering open communication, identifying shared goals, promoting transparency, and respecting the autonomy and individual roles of each entity. These efforts should be integrated into any coalition-building strategy with CSOs. By working together effectively, political parties and CSOs can form strong alliances that advance democratic values and navigate challenging environments more effectively.

4.5 INTERNATIONAL ALLYSHIP

When considering potential allies, political parties operating in closed and closing spaces should explore formal and informal partnerships with various international actors. These coalitions can include overseas governments, sister parties through party networks and internationals, donor country agencies, and diaspora community organizations. Potential allies could include:

- **Overseas Governments:** Cooperating with overseas governments can bring several advantages, such as political and diplomatic support, advocacy at international forums, and resources for promoting democratic change. However, it is essential to navigate these partnerships with caution to avoid accusations of foreign interference or unwanted influence on domestic affairs. Shared values and objectives must align to ensure a fruitful collaboration.
- **Donor Country Agencies:** Donor country agencies can provide valuable financial assistance, technical expertise, and capacity-building support to political parties. However, parties should be aware of potential conditions attached to the support, as donor agencies may have their own priorities that could impact the autonomy of the recipient party.
- **Sister Parties/Internationals:** Engaging with sister parties and party internationals offers support and opportunities to share experiences with parties facing similar challenges globally. While these connections can provide valuable knowledge and strategic advice, parties must consider potential dependencies and financial commitments associated with such engagements.
- **Diaspora Community Organizations:** Collaborating with diaspora community organizations can be highly beneficial for political parties operating in closed and closing spaces. Diaspora communities often maintain strong ties to their countries of origin and are actively engaged in advocating for democratic change and human rights. These partnerships can amplify the party's message, mobilize support, and foster international solidarity. However, parties should approach these partnerships with sensitivity and mutual respect for the diaspora community's perspectives and interests.

It's essential for political parties to carefully weigh the advantages and potential risks associated with cooperating with different international entities. In some cases, covert cooperation might be more efficient and less risky than open official partnerships. Political parties should exercise utmost discretion in these cases and consider the specific context in which they operate to determine the most suitable approach for engaging with international allies.

4.6 PARTIES IN EXILE

Cooperating with parties in exile or operating as a party in exile presents unique opportunities for political parties in closed and closing spaces. These parties face fewer restrictions and can utilize their position to raise international awareness and work towards establishing a free and inclusive political system in their home country. Here are the key aspects to consider:

- **Partnerships:** Parties in exile can freely form coalitions and partnerships with various actors, including diaspora community organizations, other political parties facing similar circumstances, governments, and CSOs. By collaborating with these partners, they can combine resources, share expertise, and amplify their collective voice on the international stage, mobilizing support for democratic change.

- **International Advocacy and Awareness:** Parties in exile can engage in international advocacy efforts to raise awareness about political repression and human rights abuses in their home countries. Through lobbying, meetings with government officials, building relationships with journalists, and participating in international forums, they can garner support for democratic change and shape global discourse on democracy and human rights.
- **Grassroots Support and Communication:** Operating in exile allows parties to establish communication channels with activists and citizens within their home countries. They can use technology and other means to maintain contact, exchange information, and foster grassroots support for democratic change.
- **Fundraising and Support:** Parties in exile can engage in fundraising activities to sustain their operations and support democracy activists within their home countries. They can seek financial support from international donors, diaspora communities, and other sources to provide resources, training, and assistance to those working for democratic change.
- **Strategic Planning for Transition:** Parties in exile play a critical role in developing strategic plans for the eventual transition back to their home country. They can engage with activists, civil society, and other political actors to formulate policies and strategies for democratic transition, preparing for the establishment of a democratic government and addressing the challenges of democratic consolidation.

4.7 MITIGATE RISKS OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

When collaborating with international partners from closed and closing spaces, political parties should be aware of specific risks and challenges that may arise:

- **Accusations of Foreign Interference:** As mentioned above, authoritarian regimes often employ tactics to discredit opposition parties by portraying them as foreign agents or puppets of external forces. Collaborating with international partners, particularly those perceived as adversarial by the regime, can potentially be exploited to undermine the party's credibility and legitimacy. Parties must be prepared to counter such accusations and clearly articulate their independence and commitment to the interests of their home country.
- **Legal Restrictions and Reprisals:** Many authoritarian states have laws and regulations that restrict political parties from receiving direct funding or assistance from foreign entities. Engaging in collaborations that violate these laws can subject the party to legal consequences or provide the regime with a pretext to clamp down on its activities. It is crucial to navigate these legal frameworks carefully and explore alternative forms of support that comply with local regulations.
- **Surveillance and Infiltration:** Authoritarian regimes often employ surveillance and infiltration tactics to gather intelligence and undermine opposition movements. Collaborating with international partners may increase the party's exposure to such surveillance and infiltration efforts. Parties should exercise caution and employ measures to protect sensitive information and maintain operational security.

- **Reputational Risks:** Collaborating with certain international partners can carry reputational risks, especially if those partners are viewed unfavorably by segments of the party's support base or society at large. Parties must assess the potential impact on their reputation and carefully consider the trade-offs between the benefits of collaboration and potential negative perceptions.

By being aware of the risks and proactively addressing them through the measures outlined below, political parties can navigate collaborations with international partners more effectively:

- Clearly communicate their independence, objectives, and commitment to democratic principles to both domestic and international audiences.
- Develop robust internal security and communication protocols to protect sensitive information and prevent potential infiltration.
- Stay vigilant to detect and respond to any attempts of surveillance or manipulation by authoritarian regimes.
- Regularly assess the impact of collaborations on the party's reputation and adjust strategies accordingly.
- Engage in strategic communications to proactively counter false narratives and accusations of foreign interference.
- In certain circumstances, parties may find it necessary to keep their partnerships discreet or limit public disclosure to protect the safety and security of individuals involved.

By being proactive and mindful of these risks, political parties can navigate collaborations with international partners more effectively and strengthen their efforts towards democratic change in challenging environments.

PROS AND CONS OF WORKING WITH INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS	
PROS	CONS
International partners play a crucial role in legitimizing parties by connecting party leaders with respected figures, advocating for democracy champions, and raising concerns with foreign governments.	Illiberal governments can delegitimize democratic parties by defaming them as agents of foreign powers.

International donor agencies can offer significant resources to parties, including training activists or supporting research into public attitudes.	Anti-democratic regimes increase restrictions on parties and other democratic actors based on funding from international non-profit organizations (INGOs).
Respected foreign figures can be instrumental in helping parties secure media coverage that might otherwise be difficult to obtain.	Being pictured with international donors or diplomats may boost a regime narrative that party leaders are out of touch with ordinary citizens.
International coalitions can give parties influence and experience of policy making they would otherwise lack in the domestic setting.	If supportive international governments impose sanctions on the regime, the government can claim that democratic parties are acting against the best interests of the country and its people.

4.8 RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

To ensure the success of a coalition, effective operational mechanisms are crucial. While some of these principles have been outlined above, they are summarized below in the form of **the five Cs—communication, consultation, consensus, compromise, and coordination**—which are essential for making coalitions work:

- **Communication:** Clear and continuous communication is vital at all levels. It is important to communicate within your party, ensuring members understand compromises made and the reasons behind them. Transparent communication among coalition partners fosters trust, enables information sharing, promotes transparent decision-making, and avoids misunderstandings. External communication with the public is also essential to demonstrate the benefits of the coalition and maintain support for democratic change.
- **Consultation:** Constructive and collaborative discussions with potential partners are crucial once a shared interest has been established. Focus on creating a common communication framework that strengthens the collective image and objectives of all coalition partners. Regular consultation allows for understanding each other's processes, interests, and objectives. It facilitates conflict resolution and ensures all coalition partners have a voice in decision-making processes.

- **Consensus:** Approach discussions with a collaborative mindset, prioritizing consensus-building and finding common ground. Avoid a zero-sum game mentality and view negotiations as an opportunity for mutually beneficial agreements. Save discussions of disagreements for later stages, prioritizing shared interests and potential areas of compromise. This approach fosters smoother and more effective coalition-building.
- **Compromise:** In situations where consensus cannot be reached, the willingness to compromise plays a vital role. Parties should be open to giving up certain objectives or accepting opponent's objectives in exchange for reciprocal benefits. Clear communication of the advantages gained from compromise maintains trust and fosters a cooperative atmosphere within the coalition.
- **Coordination:** Establish clear mechanisms for coordination within the coalition. Determine leadership roles and responsibilities for facilitating and managing the relationship. Define decision-making procedures, establish channels for internal dispute resolution, and identify spokespeople for the coalition. Effective coordination ensures efficient collaboration and a unified voice for the coalition.

By adhering to these rules of engagement, a coalition can foster mutual understanding, shared objectives, and a cohesive narrative that reinforces unity and purpose. Approaching discussions with openness, respect, and a collaborative mindset strengthens the coalition's effectiveness in promoting democratic change.

4.9 INVOLVE TRADITIONALLY EXCLUDED GROUPS

Working through coalitions can be a specifically valuable approach when engaging with traditionally marginalized groups living in closed and closing spaces. Women, people with disabilities and minority groups often face targeted attacks by anti-democratic regimes and are subjected to divisive narratives that serve to perpetuate the government's grip on power. As a result, they may establish their own representative structures and CSOs and approach mainstream political parties operating outside their communities with suspicion.

In this scenario, seeking a coalition with these traditionally excluded groups can serve as a meaningful pathway to establish relationships and build trust with marginalized communities. It is crucial to respect the representative structures they have created for themselves and recognize their unique perspectives and experiences. Engaging in a coalition should be viewed as the initial step in a relationship-building process, with the potential to recruit members of these groups into your party and empower them to actively contribute to promoting democratic change.

5. ELEVATING YOUR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

5.1 UNDERSTANDING STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

In closed and closing spaces, strategic communication is paramount for political parties to navigate the challenges of anti-democratic regimes and effectively connect with citizens. As the information landscape is often controlled by authoritarian regimes, parties must provide reliable and practical information that addresses people's real-life challenges and aspirations. Effective communication should focus on offering viable alternatives to the status quo and engage in a two-way exchange that centers on the concerns and needs of the people.

A comprehensive communication strategy should address all aspects of the regime's oppressive structure, not fixating on a single issue such as corruption. By presenting a holistic and accurate depiction of the challenges citizens face, parties can offer comprehensive solutions to address these challenges and gain broader support.

This chapter provides guidance on structuring communication activities, including:


- Recognizing the importance of strategic communications in closed and closing spaces
- Analyzing the target audience, including undecided or less engaged segments
- Developing a core script for clear and consistent messaging
- Framing and reframing the debate about the country's future to the party's advantage
- Collecting feedback from citizens to establish two-way communication and foster engagement
- Managing crisis communications and effectively responding to disinformation campaigns

By following these principles, political parties can use strategic communication as a powerful tool to promote democratic values, rally support, and effectively navigate the challenges posed by anti-democratic regimes.

5.2 COMMUNICATING FOR DEMOCRATIC CHANGE

Communicating for democratic change is of utmost importance, especially for political parties operating in closed and closing environments. These parties often encounter obstacles in accessing traditional and online media due to the control exerted by anti-democratic regimes over information. Digital surveillance, repression, and attacks are common tactics employed by such regimes to suppress opposition voices. In such challenging circumstances, effective communication becomes vital for setting the agenda and promoting democratic values. Here are the key aspects to consider:

- **Developing a Compelling Narrative:** In closed and closing spaces, where anti-democratic regimes control information and narratives, political parties must craft



a compelling narrative that resonates with citizens. This narrative should go beyond criticizing the regime and instead focus on offering tangible solutions to address citizens' real-life challenges and aspirations. By portraying a clear and appealing vision of how democracy can improve their everyday lives, parties can inspire and mobilize support.

- **Adaptable Language and Visual Aids:** Communication in closed environments requires adaptable language that can reach diverse audiences effectively. Utilizing engaging visual aids, such as infographics and videos, can overcome language barriers and convey messages more powerfully. In the digital age, leveraging various media channels, including social media platforms, independent websites, and online forums, is crucial for reaching a wider audience and fostering engagement.
- **Overcoming Information Barriers:** Anti-democratic regimes restrict the flow of information, making it challenging for parties to disseminate their messages. To overcome these barriers, parties can employ secure communication tools and platforms to protect sensitive information and maintain the safety of party members and supporters. Engaging grassroots activists to share information through trusted networks and organizing offline events, like town hall meetings or community gatherings, can provide direct communication with citizens despite information control.
- **Engaging with Independent Media:** Collaborating with independent media outlets is a strategic approach to amplify the party's message and reach a broader audience. Independent media can provide alternative perspectives, act as a platform for critical voices, and counter disinformation spread by regime-controlled media. Building relationships with journalists and media organizations committed to upholding democratic principles helps build credibility and trust among citizens.
- **Monitoring and Responding:** In closed and closing spaces, monitoring public discourse and citizens' reactions to communication efforts is vital. It allows parties to adjust their messaging, address misconceptions, and counter regime propaganda effectively. Engaging with citizens through social media platforms, promptly responding to comments and inquiries, and fostering open dialogue not only builds trust but also demonstrates the party's commitment to engaging with the people they represent.

By crafting a compelling narrative, prioritizing citizens' concerns, using adaptable language and visual aids, overcoming information barriers, engaging with independent media, and actively monitoring and responding to public discourse, political parties can effectively communicate their vision for democratic change and garner support among the population. Effective communication becomes a potent tool in challenging authoritarian rule and paving the way towards a more democratic and inclusive society.

5.3 UNDERSTANDING YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Understanding your target audience is especially critical for political parties operating in closed and closing spaces, where challenges abound in reaching and engaging with citizens due to information restrictions and the control exerted by authoritarian regimes.



In such environments, the following aspects are particularly vital when developing a communication strategy:

- **Identify Core Supporters:** In closed spaces, identifying core supporters who align with democratic values and goals is essential for effective communication. These individuals can serve as the foundation of your party's support base and help amplify your message within their communities. Understanding core group members' demographics, interests, and motivations enables you to tailor messages that resonate with this dedicated group.
- **Explore Undecided Individuals:** Engaging with undecided individuals is a critical challenge in closed environments. These individuals may have concerns focused on economic prosperity rather than political freedom due to the regime's control over information and narratives. Understanding their perspectives allows you to craft a narrative that combines their interests with those of your core supporters, making your message more persuasive and inclusive.
- **Tailor Your Message:** Adapting messages to the specific concerns and aspirations of your target audience is crucial in closed spaces, where disseminating information is constrained. Highlighting how democratic change directly addresses their needs, such as economic improvement, access to better healthcare and promoting respect for freedom of speech and universal human rights. Often, certain messages are more effective with certain groups, and so understanding which messages resonate with marginalized groups can be critical to ensuring a diverse reach of your message.
- **Provide Actionable Steps:** Once individuals are persuaded to support your movement, it is crucial to provide them with actionable steps to get involved. Encourage them to amplify your message by sharing it with others, both online and offline. Create opportunities for them to volunteer their time, participate in events, and engage in activities that advance your cause. Empowering your supporters to actively contribute to the democratic change you seek enhances their sense of ownership and commitment.
- **Adapt and Evolve:** Flexibility and adaptability are key in navigating the challenges of communicating in closed environments. Constantly monitoring the effectiveness of your communication strategy and adjusting based on audience feedback and changing circumstances can help ensure your messages reach the intended audience despite information restrictions.

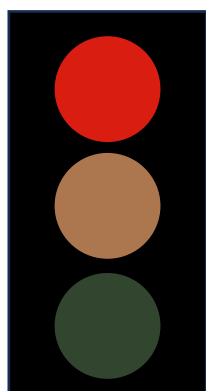
By understanding your target audience, tailoring your messages, providing actionable steps, and continuously adapting your communications strategy, you can effectively engage and mobilize support for democratic change in closed environments. Adapting your communication to the concerns and aspirations of your audience and offering them a meaningful role in your movement fosters a sense of connection and shared purpose, increasing the likelihood of success in achieving your goals.

5.3.1 SEGMENTING YOUR AUDIENCE

Segmenting the strategic audience in closed societies can be challenging due to limited access to traditional data sources. However, we can conceptualize this task based on assumptions and evidence where available. Let's consider the population as a spectrum ranging from strong supporters to entrenched opponents and divide them into three categories:

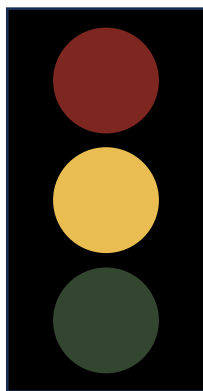
- **Core Supporters** (green lights, 30 percent): These are individuals who strongly support the party's democratic values and goals. They actively engage with the party, participate in events, and advocate for its cause. This segment represents the most committed and active base.
- **Potential Supporters** (amber lights, 40 percent): This group comprises individuals who are not yet fully aligned with the party but may be open to its ideas and vision for democratic change. They might have some reservations or concerns about the party but are not strongly opposed. This segment represents a significant opportunity for the party to expand its support.
- **Opposition or Entrenched Opponents** (red lights, 30 percent): This category includes individuals who are strongly opposed to the party's goals and vision. They actively resist and may be loyal to the existing regime. This segment represents the most challenging audience with whom to engage and persuade.

FIGURE 5: SEGMENTING YOUR AUDIENCE



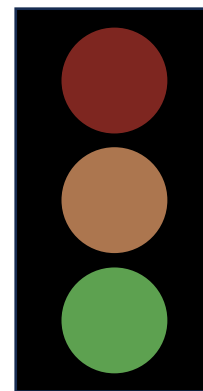
RED LIGHTS

Who are the people who will never agree with you no matter how good your argument is? You should avoid arguing with them as it isn't a good use of your limited resources.



AMBER LIGHTS

Who are the undecided citizens who have not yet made up their minds? These are the most important people. If you win them over you win. What are their values, their interests, etc.?

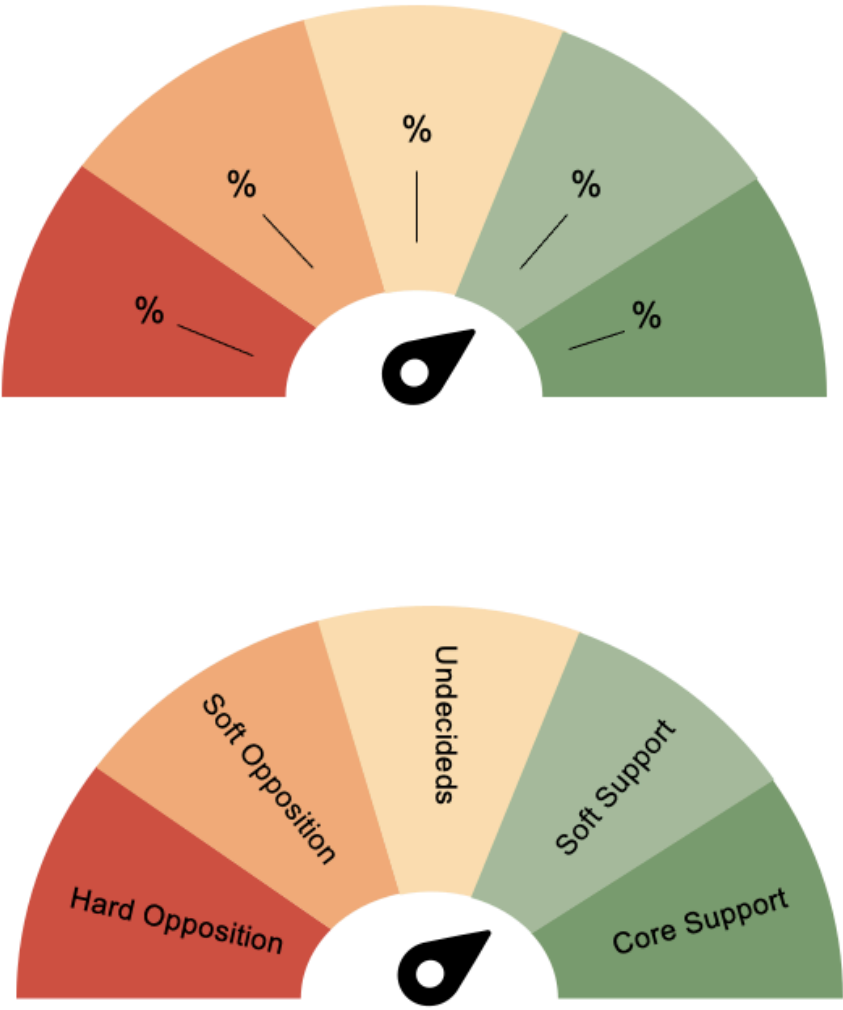


GREEN LIGHTS

Who are your core supporters? These are the people who already agree with you. You don't need to persuade them, only mobilize them.

To further refine your target audiences, employ the two tools provided below. While prioritizing the undecided segments of the population in the middle as your primary audience remains crucial, it's worth considering that in certain closed or closing spaces, mobilizing existing supporters might prove more effective given the small party's limited resources. Carefully contemplate which core audiences to concentrate on as an integral component of the party's strategic planning process.

FIGURE 6: AUDIENCE SPECTRUM



5.3.2 TARGETING YOUR AUDIENCE

<p>TARGET GROUP</p>	<p>ANALYSIS</p> <p><i>What is known about the target group? Are they linked to a particular demographic or geography? Can you define their attitudes?</i></p>	<p>STRATEGY</p> <p><i>What do you need to do to influence these groups? List some starting assumptions. Can you test or refine these?</i></p>
<p>Core Supporters</p>	<p>Middle-income young voters based in the capital city who have strong concerns and priorities focusing on the promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.</p>	<p>Engage with young voters through social media campaigns, targeted advertisements, and online content that addresses their concerns and priorities.</p> <p>Utilize visually appealing and shareable content to maximize reach and engagement.</p>
<p>Soft Supporters</p>	<p>Upper-income older voters based in large cities who prioritize issues such as education, job opportunities, and environmental issues.</p>	<p>Develop targeted messaging and communication that speaks directly to these issues to increase soft supporters' level of support and engagement.</p> <p>Engage in personalized outreach, such as one-on-one conversations, and build a sense of belonging to the party.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Undecided</p>	<p>Diverse in terms of demographics, interests, and priorities.</p> <p>They lack information or have limited exposure to different political options.</p>	<p>Provide clear and accessible information about the party's vision, values, and proposed solutions to societal challenges.</p> <p>Use multiple communication channels, including social media, town hall meetings, and door-to-door outreach to reach undecided voters.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Soft Opposition</p>	<p>Older voters based in the countryside with low education who have misconceptions about the party or hold negative views based on misinformation and propaganda.</p>	<p>Develop communication strategies to counter misinformation and clarify the party's positions.</p> <p>Utilize fact-based messaging to challenge negative perceptions, and present accurate information about the party's goals and principles.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Hard Opposition</p>	<p>Supporters of the current regime who hold deep-rooted beliefs that conflict with the party's principles.</p> <p>They are resistant to change and highly critical of the party's vision.</p>	<p>Look for potential allies or influencers within the hard opposition group who may have more moderate views.</p> <p>Engage with those more moderate individuals, and explore opportunities for dialogue or collaboration that could lead to a shift in their perspectives.</p>

5.4 DEVELOPING YOUR MESSAGE

After identifying your target audience and strategizing effective communication strategies to reach them, the next step is to develop compelling messages that resonate with your audience. Crafting the right message is crucial for effectively communicating your party's vision and goals. Here are some strategies and tools to help you develop and refine your message:

- **Focus on Key Elements of Democracy:** Identify the essential elements of democracy that resonate with your target audience. This may include themes such as accountable government, combating corruption, promoting the rule of law, and advocating for the rights of marginalized groups. Highlighting these elements helps establish the core values and principles for which your party stands.
- **Tailor Your Message to Address Concerns:** Consider how the concerns and aspirations of your target audience are denied under authoritarian rule, and tailor your message to address their specific needs. Connect your party's vision to the issues that matter most to the people, demonstrating how your policies and actions in support of democratic change can bring about positive change in people's lives.
- **Use Clear and Concise Language:** Craft your message using clear and concise language that is easy to understand and remember. Avoid jargon or complex terminology that may alienate or confuse your audience. Keep your message straightforward and focused, making it accessible to a wide range of individuals.
- **Utilize Storytelling Techniques:** Incorporate storytelling techniques into your messaging to engage and resonate with your audience. Personal anecdotes, real-life examples, and narratives can help illustrate the impact of your party's work and connect emotionally with the audience.
- **Test and Refine Your Message:** Continuously test and refine your message based on feedback and audience response. Conduct focus groups, surveys, or community discussions to gather insights and assess the effectiveness of your message. Adapt and adjust your messaging as needed to ensure it resonates with your target audience.

By investing in the development of a compelling and persuasive message, you can effectively communicate the value and impact of your party to potential supporters. Remember to align your messaging with the core values of democracy, address specific concerns of the target audience, use clear language, incorporate storytelling techniques, and continually refine your message based on feedback and audience engagement.

TOOL 5A: MESSAGE REFINEMENT TOOL

This tool assists you in developing your messaging by emphasizing the problem you aim to solve, the solution you offer, and the action you want people to take in support of democratic change. A working draft of such a message is outlined below:

Problem: *What are the main problems people experience living under the regime?*

- The problem is what your target audience thinks is the problem, not just what you and your supporters believe.
- Describe the problem as simply as possible in ways that relate to people's lives and indicate its bigger impact on society.
- Highlight problems that are directly and unarguably the responsibility of the anti-democratic regime.

Example: *Our nation is becoming poorer under a regime that steals from the people.*

Solution: *For what are you campaigning, and how does it relate to the problem?*

- Relate to the experience of your audience rather than invoking abstractions.
- A modest solution might be more credible than one that makes unreasonable, unachievable promises.

Example: *We cannot promote economic development without an accountable government.*

Action: *What do people need to do in order to change the outlined problem?*

- Give people something tangible they can do to change the problem.
- If there are elections coming, message that a vote for your party can help to solve the issue.
- If a democratic transition is some distance away, call for a specific, smaller, concrete step towards the eventual goal.

Example: *These goals can only be accomplished in a democratic system of government.*

Message Refinement Worksheet: Annex 5A

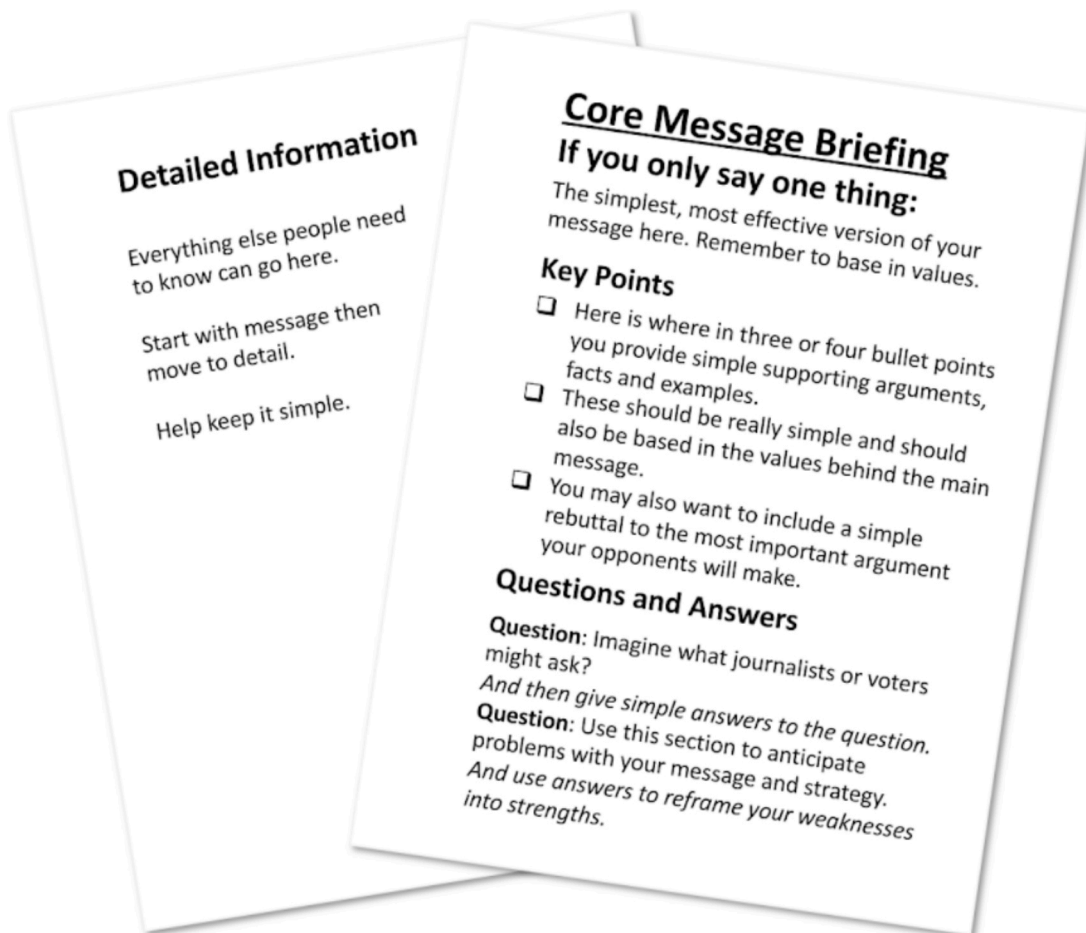
TOOL 5B: DEVELOPING A CORE SCRIPT

Another valuable tool for maximizing communication opportunities in a restricted environment is a core script. This serves as the metaphorical "same page" that ensures all members of your party are aligned and synchronized with the same message.

A core script is a predefined set of key messages, talking points, or themes to which everyone involved in communication efforts should adhere. It helps maintain consistency, clarity, and cohesion in your messaging, particularly when faced with limited opportunities for communication.

[Developing a Core Script Worksheet: Annex 5B](#)


FIGURE 7: DEVELOPING A CORE SCRIPT



5.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

In closed and closing spaces, fostering two-way communication between political parties and citizens is of utmost importance. It enables parties to better understand the needs and concerns of the people they represent and helps in developing effective communication strategies tailored to their aspirations.

- **Collecting Feedback for Message Resonance:** In closed environments, where access to traditional data sources is limited, parties must explore alternative means of collecting feedback. Engaging with CSOs, conducting community surveys or interviews, and analyzing social media trends can provide valuable insights into citizens' perspectives and attitudes. By measuring message resonance through these channels, parties can assess the effectiveness of their communication and refine their messaging accordingly.
- **Seizing the Moment Amidst Challenges:** Operating in closed and closing spaces presents unique challenges for democratic parties. Timeliness is critical in strategic communications, and parties must be agile in responding to current events and public sentiment. Being attentive to citizens' concerns and addressing emerging issues promptly sets them apart from authoritarian regimes that may dismiss public sentiment or respond slowly.
- **Engaging Citizens and Building Trust:** Building trust is paramount in encouraging citizens to openly express their views and participate in two-way communication. Democratic parties must demonstrate their commitment to standing up for citizens' rights and interests. Engaging citizens through town halls, public consultations, and social media interactions fosters a sense of accessibility and inclusivity, empowering citizens to actively shape their democratic future.
- **Overcoming Communication Barriers and Ensuring Safety:** Closed and closing spaces often limit citizens' access to information and pose safety concerns for those engaging in open communication. Parties must employ secure communication methods and anonymous participation options to protect individuals providing feedback.
- **Adapting to Dynamic Environments:** Political landscapes in closed and closing spaces can change rapidly. Parties must remain agile and adaptable to address emerging concerns and respond to evolving situations. Regularly seeking feedback and adjusting communication strategies accordingly will help parties stay relevant and connected to their constituents.
- **Promoting Inclusivity for a Representative Agenda:** Two-way communication should be inclusive, ensuring that voices from all segments of society are heard and considered. Parties must make efforts to engage with marginalized groups and ensure their participation in feedback mechanisms. This promotes a more representative and responsive party agenda.



Overall, two-way communication empowers political parties to be more responsive, inclusive, and effective in advocating for democratic change in challenging environments. By actively listening to citizens and engaging them in the decision-making process, parties can foster stronger connections and build a collective vision for a democratic and inclusive future.

5.6 THE POLITICS OF FRAMING

Faced with constant attacks from anti-democratic forces and hostile media, it is easy for your communications to become reactive, spending excessive time responding to unfounded smears and allegations instead of telling your own story. However, communicating defensively puts you at the mercy of your opponents, allowing them to control the public debate. To effectively communicate your vision for democratic change, you must take control of framing, i.e., the way you shape perceptions and provide context to information. You need to distinguish between your and the regimes framing. For example:

- **Their Frame:** External forces are causing the problem. We must retain power and crush those who are against us.
- **Your Frame:** We have the power to address this problem; we need change.

Avoiding the repetition of opponents' frames is key, as it only reinforces their position. Instead, as a political party you should seek to control framing by introducing alternative perspectives to your audience. Keep your frames simple and concise, as complex or intellectual frames are often overshadowed by opponents' simpler messages.

While ideally, you could communicate your frame directly through the media without addressing your opponents' frame, the reality is that you may face direct questions that require you to address or acknowledge your opponents' frame, especially because media channels are likely controlled by the regime. In such situations, the goal is to engage in strategic reframing. By reframing the conversation and redirecting it to your definitive frame, you can regain control of the narrative.

Through framing and strategic reframing techniques you can more effectively communicate your message to the public. This approach allows you to shape the debate, advance your democratic goals, and emphasize the importance of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, even in challenging environments.

5.7 DEVELOP A NARRATIVE: TELL YOUR STORY

Developing a compelling narrative, based on **the five Vs—values, violation, vision, voices, and vote**—is essential for democratic parties operating in closed and closing spaces. By incorporating these elements into your narrative, you can create a powerful story that resonates with supporters, guides their behavior, and inspires them to take action for democratic change.

- **Values:** Build your story on shared values between your party and your audience. Emphasize the importance of democratic change and the values it represents, such as freedom, justice, equality, and human rights. Highlighting these values creates a strong foundation for your narrative.
- **Violation:** Introduce an antagonist or opposing force that is in violation of the shared values. This could be the repressive regime or those responsible for suppressing democracy and denying the rights of the people. By highlighting the violation of these values, you create a sense of urgency and the need for change.
- **Vision:** Present a vision of how things could be in a democratic society. Paint a clear picture of the future you envision, where democratic principles are upheld, and the rights and aspirations of the people are respected. Back this vision with a brief statement of a plausible strategy for achieving it, demonstrating that change is possible and attainable.
- **Voices:** Elevate diverse stories and perspectives within your narrative. Ensure that everyone feels represented within the party, including marginalized groups and underrepresented communities. By showcasing diverse voices, you create a sense of inclusivity and demonstrate that your party values and respects the experiences and aspirations of all members of society.
- **Vote:** Place your audience inside the story and emphasize their role in achieving the desired change. Make it clear that your audience's vote, support, and other actions are crucial in realizing the vision you have presented. Highlight the power of your audience's voice and engagement, even under repression, to bring about the democratic change citizens desire.

By developing a narrative that incorporates these elements, you can create a compelling story that resonates with your audience, instills a sense of purpose and belonging, and motivates your audience to take action to achieve democratic change. Remember to continuously refine and adapt your narrative based on feedback and evolving circumstances to ensure its relevance and effectiveness.

TOOL 5C: NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT TOOL

Developing a narrative that aligns with your target groups, message, and frame is essential for effective communication. Below is an example of narrative messaging:

VALUES	Our constitution is the rulebook we live by as a society. Those rules and rights apply to everyone, regardless of where we come, who we are, or how we worship. There can't be one rule for us as citizens and another for those who govern us.
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VIOLATION	The anti-democratic regime has betrayed these values. They break the law to silence those who use our right to speak out for better government and against corruption and misrule.
VISION	We the people will defend the rights that protect us all. We will ensure that those who rule us are responsible to those whom they are supposed to serve. Only by building a movement where we all stand together can we protect our values from those who believe they are not responsible to the people.
VOICES	As opposed to the regime, our inclusive movement represents diverse voices throughout our country. Our values respect the experiences and aspirations of all members of society.
VOTE!	If you want a future where the rules apply to everyone fairly, join our party, and be part of defending our country's values.

Narrative Development Tool Worksheet: Annex 5C

5.8 MESSAGE ANALYSIS

Developing a narrative that aligns with the characteristics and interests of your target groups, your core message, and your frame is essential for effective political communication, especially in closed and closing spaces. To maximize the impact of your message and resonate with your audience, it should embody **the six Cs** outlined below:

- **Concise:** In closed and closing spaces, where information may be limited or controlled, crafting a concise message is crucial. Citizens need to quickly grasp and remember your party's key points for democratic change amidst the noise and propaganda.

- **Credible:** Building credibility is especially challenging in environments where disinformation is prevalent. Back your message with verifiable facts and evidence that resonate with the experiences and concerns of citizens. Establishing trust in your party's messaging is vital to gain support.
- **Contrasting:** Distinctly differentiate your party from the authoritarian regime and other opposition groups. Clearly articulate how your vision for democratic change offers tangible solutions to the issues citizens face, setting your party apart as the preferred choice.
- **Compelling:** Motivating citizens to actively engage in democratic change requires a compelling message. Appeal to their intellect with rational arguments backed by evidence. Simultaneously, connect emotionally by tapping into their aspirations for a freer and more inclusive society.
- **Consistent:** Consistency is vital to reinforce your party's identity and goals. Reiterate your message across various platforms and contexts, ensuring citizens encounter a consistent narrative that aligns with your party's vision.
- **Conscientious:** Demonstrate sensitivity to citizens' needs and concerns, showing genuine empathy and understanding. Your messaging should reflect your commitment to unity, inclusivity, and the pursuit of democratic values without resorting to divisive tactics employed by oppressive regimes.

By incorporating the six Cs into your message development, you can create a compelling narrative that effectively communicates your party's vision for democratic change. Tailor your message to the specific context and values of your target audience, and engage in strategic communication that resonates with citizens and inspires them to support your cause.

5.9 IDENTIFYING “SAFE” ISSUES

While it is important to expose the failures of an anti-democratic regime, it is crucial to approach the issues strategically, considering the potential risks involved. Immediate focus on the most contentious issues, such as exposing corruption within the regime's inner circle, can provoke both popular anger and a strong reaction from security forces, jeopardizing the campaign and the safety of supporters.

Strategic decision-making is necessary to mobilize a large number of people and advance the cause effectively. By initially choosing "safer" issues to communicate and on which to campaign, such as addressing local corruption or highlighting environmental concerns, you can attract a broader base of supporters. This approach allows for the gradual mobilization of people and builds momentum for the movement.

Once people are engaged and mobilized, you can gradually shift your communication focus to more sensitive political priorities. This tactical approach ensures that the movement gains strength and support before confronting the most challenging and high-risk issues. By strategically sequencing your campaign, you can maximize the impact and minimize potential risks, allowing for sustained progress in advancing democratic change.

5.10 CHOOSE THE RIGHT COMMUNICATIONS CHANNEL

When developing your communication strategy, it is crucial to carefully consider the target audience, message development, and the most effective medium for delivering your message. However, operating in closed and closing spaces or under authoritarian regimes poses unique challenges when it comes to utilizing various communication channels. It is important to navigate these challenges while still reaching and engaging with your audience effectively.


- **Radio:** Radio can be a powerful tool in closed and closing spaces, as it often reaches a wide audience, including those with limited access to the internet or social media. However, in some authoritarian states, the government may exert control over radio frequencies and content. In such cases, partnering with independent or community radio stations that operate outside of government control can be a viable option. Additionally, utilizing online radio platforms or podcasts can help overcome restrictions on traditional radio channels.
- **Print Media:** Print media can provide in-depth coverage and reach diverse segments of the population. However, in closed spaces, the government may control or heavily censor print media outlets. Exploring alternative forms of print media, such as underground newspapers or independent publications, may be necessary to bypass government restrictions. Additionally, distributing print materials in creative ways, such as through community networks or discreet distribution channels, can help overcome barriers.
- **Social Media:** Social media platforms have become vital tools for communication and mobilization, even in closed and closing spaces. However, authoritarian regimes often employ tactics to suppress online dissent, including censorship, surveillance, and intimidation. It is crucial to take precautions to protect digital security and privacy, such as using encrypted messaging apps and virtual private networks (VPNs). Additionally, leveraging alternative or less monitored social media platforms, as well as utilizing offline methods to share social media content (such as USB drives or offline sharing events), can help overcome restrictions. It might also be necessary to share messages outside of the country and then broadcast them back in.
- **Diversified Approach:** Adopting an integrated approach that combines multiple communication channels can help overcome challenges in closed and closing spaces. By diversifying your channels, you can reach different segments of the population and increase the likelihood of your message reaching its intended audience. This may involve creatively adapting traditional channels, such as radio and print media, while harnessing the power of social media and digital platforms.

It's not only the message that matters, but also who delivers it. Consider different messengers for different moments, identifying in advance who can best deliver the message with the most credibility. It is also important to continuously assess the effectiveness of your chosen channels, adapt to changing circumstances, and stay one step ahead of government restrictions.

5.11 COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

While many anti-democratic regimes may be threatened by the democratic availability of information and consequently block access to media channels, few can completely obstruct all communications. Planning to develop your own communication channels, while ensuring their accessibility and using credible messengers, is a key strategic element of promoting democratic change. These efforts can be facilitated by taking the following principles into consideration:

EMOTIONAL	Your audience will react powerfully to content that makes them feel good about being connected to your party or angry on behalf of people suffering. Sharing achievements possible with their support creates a sense of community and pride.
URGENT	Your followers will value breaking news and exposé-style content. They will keep returning to your channel if it is where they hear news first.
HUMOROUS	People respond well to communications with an informal, friendly and, where appropriate, humorous tone. While this can be a challenge for parties under attack from anti-democratic forces, it is important to ensure your communication is not exclusively focused on negative emotions.
ACTIONABLE	Content that converts people's passion into action brings them closer to your party. This might encompass giving people a crowdsourced activity or asking them for a donation.
AUTHENTIC	People want "the real deal." Living and promoting your values is critically important for democracy fighters.
ACCESSIBLE	If people can't access the content, then they can't engage with it. There may be special accessibility considerations you need to explore for people with certain disabilities to ensure that they are able to access your content. You should also keep in mind that not all people have the same access to various dissemination channels like radio, television, or social media (for example, globally, women often have less independent access to technology and the internet), so this should be kept in mind when determining how to promote your message.



A key challenge for parties in a restrictive environment is providing a “balanced diet” of this content. For example, parties dealing with violent suppression have no shortage of stories that are upsetting and may elicit emotional responses. However, if your communications are only focused on this type of content, it might eventually leave people feeling fatigued or discouraged about their ability to respond to oppression.

5.12 HANDLING ADVERSITY

Communications in closed and closing spaces are essential for political parties to overcome numerous challenges and navigate through adversities. As they face sudden bans, restrictions, arrests, and violent suppression, strategic and agile communication becomes a lifeline to maintain momentum and garner support. To effectively tackle these challenges, parties must have a well-prepared plan and a responsive communications team in place.

To be ready for such situations, parties can take proactive steps:

- **Maintain a secure communication list:** Creating and updating a list of national and international press contacts allows for swift communication with key stakeholders when critical events unfold.
- **Establish an agile response team:** Assembling a response team of four to five communications professionals or spokespersons ensures quick decision-making even under pressure. Having multiple members is vital to account for potential arrests or repression targeting individuals on the team.

Roles within the response team include:

- **Manager:** This role should be filled by an experienced communicator with respect and authority, capable of making swift decisions. It's best if the chairperson of the response team is not the most likely target for arrest or other forms of repression, so it may be a good strategy to look beyond the most prominent party leaders or figures to fill this role.
- **Operative Coordinator:** This role is responsible for noting agreed actions, following up with task assignees, and conducting regular team meetings to monitor progress and adjust strategies.
- **Communicators:** These are experts in crafting and disseminating initial responses, continuously monitoring and evaluating communications during challenging situations, and adjusting messaging as needed.
- **Affiliated Experts:** Involving relevant subject specialists and spokespersons, who are not directly affiliated with the party but support its activities, can bolster credibility and effectiveness.

The designated response team, equipped to handle adversity, plays a crucial role in managing communications during challenging situations. Although additional subject specialists and spokespeople may be involved, the response team remains the core group responsible for navigating through these difficult circumstances.

In times of adversity, acting quickly and decisively becomes paramount, which may not be feasible with a larger group involving extensive discussions and deliberations.

TOOL 5D: CRISIS CONTACT LIST

Your crisis contact list includes the core team and alternates on whom to call if those people are detained. To improve resilience, you may designate primary or standby members of the team who live outside the country.

ROLE	PRIMARY TEAM MEMBERS	STANDBY MEMBERS
MANAGER <i>Crisis communication coordinator</i>	Name	Name
	Contact	Contact
OPERATIVE COORDINATOR <i>Note taker and person who can organize things quickly</i>	Name	Name
	Contact	Contact
COMMUNICATORS <i>Communicators developing materials</i>	Name	Name
	Contact	Contact
AFFILIATED EXPERTS <i>Experts supporting the crisis team (i.e. academics)</i>	Name	Name
	Contact	Contact

[Crisis Contact List Worksheet: Annex 5D](#)

5.12.1 COORDINATING FIRST RESPONSE

In the ever-changing landscape of political challenges, the ability to respond swiftly and decisively is critical for parties operating in closed and closing spaces. Take the following tips into consideration:

- **Implement decisive early communication:** Understand the importance of prompt communication during challenging situations. Communicating early demonstrates leadership, builds trust, dispels rumors, and helps maintain the safety of individuals. Delaying communication relinquishes control and allows the situation to escalate.
- **Maintain transparency with a journalist:** Consider having a pre-existing relationship with a journalist who can help shed light on the situation and maintain transparency, which is crucial for democratic movements.
- **Be ready to make a statement within one hour:** Anticipate challenging situations and prepare language in advance to respond quickly. Plan for different scenarios such as attacks, arrests, or office raids, and walk through the plan during regular strategy meetings.
- **Counter-frame with alternative messaging:** Develop a truthful counter-frame to challenge the authorities' narrative. Craft messages that highlight the breadth and strength of your party's support or appeal for unity across party lines against arbitrary actions. Maintain a reasonable, calm, and reassuring tone.
- **Ensure accessible communications:** Make your crisis communications accessible to a wide range of people in the community. Consider distributing information in major languages spoken in the country, including Indigenous languages, and utilizing accessible formats such as audio.
- **Coordinate response with civil society and international partners:** Assess the need for urgent communications and response coordination with CSOs at home or international partners, leveraging alliances and prior work in building and maintaining partnerships.
- **Provide accurate information:** Share only what you know to avoid speculation. Express empathy for those affected by the crisis. Communicate when people can expect to hear from you next, providing a timeline for updates and information sharing.

By following these guidelines, you can ensure that your crisis communication is effective, truthful, and empathetic, helping your party navigate challenging situations in closed and closing spaces.




5.12.2 FIRST RESPONSE TO YOUR NETWORK: THE FLASH MESSAGE

Flash messages—a short alert sent at the start of a crisis to your leadership, members, and supporters—are a common form of first response. This type of message is sent out on a messaging app and might look like the column on the right, based on the prompts on the left:

<p>DEFINE:</p> <p>Inform your network what is happening.</p>	<p>IMPORTANT: Arrests of leading party members have taken place tonight and are ongoing. We are working to establish who has been detained, the government's justification or pretexts, and the safety of our activists.</p>
<p>FRAME:</p> <p>Offer a frame to explain why it is happening.</p>	<p>It is clear the government is targeting our party because it's worried about our growing support across the country.</p>
<p>EMPOWER:</p> <p>Make an ask that empowers those who might otherwise mainly feel afraid.</p>	<p>Please monitor this channel for further updates. In the meantime, please be alert for your own safety and pass this message on securely to your networks, both inside and outside the country.</p>

TOOL 5E: FIRST PUBLIC RESPONSE

Convene your crisis meeting over your designated communication channel and work through how you will define and frame the crisis to empower your audience. The coordinator will keep the meeting focused on its first task: agreement on an initial public response.

	<p style="text-align: center;">GOAL</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> What do we want to achieve?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">INFORMATION</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> What do we know?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">COMMUNICATION</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> What do we want to communicate?</p>
<p>DEFINE</p>	<p>Alert your activists.</p> <p>Reassure your broader audience before rumors or disinformation reaches them.</p> <p>Establish yourself as the channel for reliable information.</p>	<p>Be clear about what you know and what is a rumor.</p> <p>Do not cause confusion or undermine your credibility by spreading unverified disinformation.</p> <p>What has happened? Who is affected? Is there a risk to our members?</p>	<p>What is the most simple and accurate version of events you can share with the public?</p>

FRAME	How do you want people to understand what is happening?	<p>If this is an externally-caused crisis, have the authorities offer their own explanation.</p> <p>If internally-caused, do you acknowledge your party's fault to foster trust and demonstrate your integrity?</p>	Write one sentence that offers a simple way to understand what is happening. You want your frame to reach the broadest audience. Simplicity supports that.
EMPOWER	What is the most useful thing for people to do right now?	What information do you want your network to share? Remember that anything you send will be distributed quickly and widely in the heightened circumstances of a crisis.	Make sure whatever you ask people to do can be done safely by anyone receiving the message. Recipients of the message will only feel empowered if the action you are suggested is something they are able to do.

First Public Response Worksheet: Annex 5E

5.12.3 AFTER YOUR FIRST RESPONSE: ESTABLISH YOUR PRESENCE

TOOL 5F: ESTABLISH YOUR PRESENCE

After your first response, it is important to establish your presence and maintain a strategic approach to crisis communication. Here are some guidelines for your crisis communication strategy:

- **Establish a communications cadence:** In the first meeting of your response team, agree on a consistent communication schedule. This could include nightly briefings at the same time or a commitment to daily emails. Establishing a cadence helps you manage your time effectively, maintain message control, and set expectations with journalists and party members.
- **Select a media spokesperson:** Choose one or, at most, two individuals to act as the primary national media spokesperson(s) across the available communication channels. These spokespersons should deliver consistent messages and be the primary point of contact for media inquiries. Other party leaders can amplify the messages delivered by the spokesperson(s) but should not contradict them.
- **Communicate with party members and social media advocates:** Assign the task of communicating with party members, advocating through social media, and handling telephone calls from journalists to those who hold leadership roles. It is important to maintain consistent messaging across these platforms and ensure that all party members are aligned with the communication strategy. If any party member posts unhelpful information, have an authoritative representative contact them to request its removal promptly.
- **Maintain coherent and consistent messages:** By adhering to a consistent communication cadence and ensuring coherent messaging from designated spokesperson(s), you can enhance your party's credibility and trustworthiness during challenging times. Consistency in messaging is crucial for maintaining public confidence and preventing any confusion or contradictory information from circulating.
- **Be transparent and reliable:** Be honest and transparent with party members and your audience about the crisis, while also considering the safety of those most affected. Establish your communications channels as reliable sources of information, not just for your supporters but for everyone. Accuracy is crucial in countering disinformation spread by anti-democratic regimes.

- **Issue a call for action:** When sharing information that may cause fear or concern, pair it with a clear call to action that empowers your audience and makes them feel more in control. Trust is built by being honest about the risks and providing actionable steps.

Establish Your Presence Worksheet: Annex 5F

5.12.4 MONITOR, EVALUATE, AND LEARN


Monitoring, evaluating, and learning are crucial aspects of crisis management. Even with the right procedures in place, crises can be unpredictable, and it's important to continuously assess and adapt your approach. Here are some key considerations:

- **Control and consistency of communications:** Regularly evaluate whether you have control over your party's communications and whether everyone is consistently conveying the same message. Ensure that you are proactively telling your own story rather than simply reacting to the actions of your opponents.
- **Reassessing decisions:** Continuously reassess the decisions you made during the initial response to determine if they are still the best course of action. Crises can evolve rapidly, and it's essential to adapt your strategy accordingly.
- **Measurement of success:** Define your criteria for success and monitor whether you are achieving your desired outcomes. Learning from the crisis quickly allows you to establish effective structures and processes for ongoing crisis management.

5.12.5 COUNTERING INFORMATION MANIPULATION


In closed and closing spaces, the spread of mis- and disinformation through print and digital media has become a significant challenge. Information manipulation campaigns might target all party members or focus on traditionally marginalized members such as women, ethnic and religious minorities, or LGBTQI+ people. Authoritarian governments, perceiving the free flow of information as a threat, seek to control and manipulate it. These campaigns undermine democratic processes and exploit print media and digital technologies and platforms to spread false or harmful content.

Government propaganda and hate speech, which were once confined to state newspapers and radio, now reach people's smartphones, amplifying the impact of information manipulation. Moreover, mis- and disinformation may circulate through encrypted messaging applications, such as WhatsApp and Signal, that are difficult to monitor, which adds to the challenge of identifying the spread of false or harmful content about your party.



It is essential for political party representatives to be aware of information manipulation and equip themselves with the necessary tools and knowledge to effectively identify and respond to this challenge. Specific efforts should be made to assist hard-to-reach audiences and groups who may be more likely to encounter, or be targeted with, false or harmful content. Here are some strategies to consider:

- **Model good behavior and verify information:** Publicly commit to refraining from creating, utilizing, or spreading false or harmful content. Place a strong emphasis on verifying information sources, particularly in contexts where reliable data may be scarce. Acknowledge and correct any mistakes made in sharing or promoting manipulated, misleading, or harmful content. Actively denounce the use of manipulated information by your supporters or allies. By adhering to these practices, your party contributes to the authenticity and reliability of the information ecosystem.
- **Respond to widely spread false information:** Provide your activists with tools and resources to respond to mis- and disinformation effectively. Establish secure, member-only sections on your website or use secure membership mailing lists to provide simple responses countering false narratives. Your crisis communication team can play a significant role in coordinating these efforts and ensuring timely and accurate responses.
- **Highlight bad behavior:** Whenever an anti-democratic regime is caught in a lie or manipulating the information environment, leverage that opportunity to raise questions about the truthfulness of their entire narrative. While it may be challenging to definitively prove that the regime is engaged in information manipulation campaigns, use clear-cut cases to expose their dishonesty in your communications and advocacy work.
- **Train party members to identify false, misleading, or harmful content:** Foster trust and protect against information manipulation by providing training to party members and supporters involved in press relations and communications. Sensitize party members to ways to identify false, misleading, or harmful content and to promote good practices for fact-checking and sharing content online. Establish mechanisms for members to flag false or misleading election-related content to campaign leadership, and establish protocols for reporting this content to social media platforms. Encourage party members to call out this information when they encounter it. Engage a network of experts in areas such as strategic digital communications and information integrity who can provide guidance and support regarding whether and when to respond to false, misleading, or harmful content, and how to do so thoughtfully.
- **Monitor and analyze trends:** Establish a system for monitoring and analyzing information manipulation trends specific to your political context. This could involve partnering with research institutions and media watchdog organizations, or utilizing digital tools designed to detect and track the spread of mis- and disinformation. Regularly assess the nature and scale of information manipulation campaigns targeting your party and its members.

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- **Build partnerships and collaborations:** Forge partnerships and collaborations with CSOs, media outlets, fact-checking initiatives, and other political parties that share a common interest in countering information manipulation. By joining forces, you can amplify your efforts, pool resources, and share expertise to effectively combat information manipulation.
 - **Engage with digital platforms:** Establish channels of communication and collaboration with major digital platforms, such as social media networks and search engines. Advocate for transparency, responsible content moderation practices, and effective mechanisms to report and remove false, misleading, and harmful content. Work towards developing policies and initiatives that prioritize the protection of democratic processes and the promotion of accurate information.
 - **Empower citizens with media literacy:** Invest in media literacy programs and initiatives to empower citizens to critically analyze information and distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources and the quality of information. Develop educational materials, workshops, and campaigns that equip individuals with the skills to identify and counter information manipulation. Foster a culture of media literacy within your party and encourage members to actively share these resources with their networks.
 - **Promote independent journalism:** Support independent journalism and investigative reporting that plays a crucial role in uncovering and exposing information manipulation. Collaborate with reputable and independent media outlets and journalists who prioritize accuracy, fact-checking, and ethical reporting. Encourage party representatives to engage with responsible media and provide accurate information to counter false or misleading narratives.
 - **Continuously adapt and evolve:** Recognize that information manipulation tactics and techniques evolve rapidly. Stay updated on emerging trends, and adapt your strategies accordingly. Continuously evaluate the effectiveness of your efforts, seeking feedback from party members, activists, and external stakeholders to refine your approach and remain at the forefront of addressing information manipulation.

By implementing these strategies, your party can actively address information manipulation, build trust, promote media literacy, and ensure the authenticity and reliability of your communications in the face of anti-democratic tactics.

6. PREPARING FOR DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS

6.1 PREPARING FOR DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS

In the final chapter, the focus of this guidebook shifts towards the ultimate goal of political parties operating in closed and closing spaces: democratic transitions.

Transitioning from authoritarian rule to a free and inclusive political system is a complex and challenging endeavor. The absence of established constitutional processes or accepted norms for power transition might add further intricacy to the task. As pro-democracy parties, it is crucial to envision and prepare for this shift from campaigning to governing, irrespective of the anticipated duration or swiftness of the transition.

The complexities of democratic transitions demand careful consideration and strategic planning. It is not just about the reputation of your party; assuming political power carries profound responsibilities. Particularly in cases where free elections have been absent for a significant period, the success of democracy hinges on avoiding instability and swiftly delivering on promises made to the people. Fulfilling fundamental campaign promises, ranging from ensuring access to clean drinking water to providing essential services, becomes paramount during the transition period to maintain public support.

Understanding the different stages of transition is crucial for navigating this complex landscape. From regime compromise to constitutional drafting and elections, each stage presents its own set of challenges that require strategic thinking and planning. Additionally, the transition process involves engaging with entrenched actors, such as the military, security forces, and bureaucratic structures associated with the previous regime. Effectively negotiating with and reforming these entities is essential to safeguard the integrity and progress of the democratic transition.

Another vital aspect of transition planning is the development of practical policies that address real-world problems. Having well-thought-out solutions ready ensures that democratic gains achieved in the political realm are effectively translated into tangible improvements for the people. While a considerable portion of transition planning occurs behind closed doors, efforts should be made to make the process as transparent and inclusive as possible.

The tools presented in this final chapter are designed to assist you in navigating the complexities of democratic transitions. Whether you are working towards a transition in a parliamentary or presidential context, operating in a semi-democratic environment, or planning for free elections after a period of undemocratic rule, these tools will provide valuable guidance and insights for your political party. Parties should embrace this opportunity to forge a path towards a more democratic future, where the principles of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity are upheld.

6.2 SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION ELEMENTS

A successful transition to democratic governance requires careful attention to key elements that lay the foundation for effective government: preparation, process, personnel, and policy agenda, or **the four Ps**. By focusing on the four Ps, your party can navigate the complexities of assuming power and ensure a smooth transition that delivers on the promises made to the people.

- **Preparation:** Preparation is crucial in closed and closing spaces, where an accepted constitutional order or process for a peaceful transition of power may not exist. Political parties operating in such environments must think far in advance and plan meticulously for the challenges they may face. This preparation includes navigating restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and association and anticipating potential crackdowns by the authoritarian regime. By conducting thorough scenario planning, risk assessments, and strategic communication, parties can enhance their readiness for the transition and adapt to the unique challenges posed by closed and closing spaces.
- **Process:** Managing the transition process in closed and closing spaces requires navigating the constraints imposed by authoritarian regimes. These regimes often resist relinquishing power and may employ tactics to undermine or disrupt the transition. Political parties must carefully design a process that balances the need for transparency and inclusivity with the realities of operating under authoritarian control. Building strategic alliances, engaging with civil society, and leveraging international support can strengthen the legitimacy of the transition process and mitigate potential obstacles imposed by the regime.
- **Personnel:** Assembling a capable and diverse team to lead the government becomes particularly challenging in closed and closing spaces. Authoritarian regimes often suppress dissenting voices, target political activists, and restrict the participation of certain groups, including women, minority communities, and the LGBTQI+ community. Political parties must navigate these challenges and prioritize inclusivity and representation in personnel selection. This selection requires identifying individuals who possess the resilience, courage, and commitment to democratic principles to navigate the complexities of transitioning from authoritarian rule to democratic governance.
- **Policy Agenda:** Developing a comprehensive policy agenda in closed and closing spaces requires addressing the unique socio-political context and the restrictive environment imposed by authoritarian regimes. Political parties must carefully consider the immediate needs of the population while also envisioning long-term goals for democratic development. They must develop policies that address systemic problems, such as human rights abuses, corruption, and institutional weaknesses, while also ensuring the delivery of essential services to the people. Balancing the demands of democratic governance with the need for stability and security poses a significant challenge that political parties must navigate during the transition.

6.3 PREPARATION FOR TRANSITION AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

Preparation for transition and government reform in closed and closing spaces presents unique challenges that require careful consideration. In these settings, where there may be limited political freedoms and increasing restrictions, navigating the transition process becomes even more complex. Here are some insights on addressing these challenges:

- **Showcasing Governance Capabilities:** Highlighting your party's governance capabilities becomes crucial in closed and closing spaces where there may be limited opportunities for political expression. Emphasize your party's expertise, experience, and commitment to effective governance as a means to inspire trust and gain credibility despite the constraints.
- **Shadow Cabinet:** Establishing a shadow cabinet is particularly important in states where political opposition may face increased scrutiny and limitations. This shadow cabinet, composed of qualified, diverse individuals who can assume key roles in the government if elected, serves as a visible demonstration of your party's readiness to govern and deliver on its policy agenda.
- **Transition Team:** Formulating a dedicated transition team becomes essential in closed and closing spaces where the transfer of power may face resistance or obstacles. This team, led by a trusted individual, should have the expertise to navigate the specific challenges of assuming government, including managing potential opposition or bureaucratic resistance.
- **Identifying Failures and Inefficiencies:** Conduct a thorough assessment of the existing government structure to identify failures, inefficiencies, and areas requiring reform. Understand the limitations imposed by the authoritarian regime and strategize ways to address these shortcomings.
- **Continuity of Government Functions:** Prioritize the continuity of government functions during the transition, particularly in closed and closing spaces where public services may already be strained or lacking. Identify critical areas that require immediate attention and develop strategies to ensure the uninterrupted provision of essential services to the population.
- **Legislative Agenda:** Developing a comprehensive legislative agenda becomes essential in closed and closing spaces where there may be limitations on policy-making processes and restrictions on civil society engagement. Identify key areas for legislative reforms that align with your party's policy priorities and work towards addressing the urgent needs of the society within the confines of the political context.
- **Phased Approach:** Recognize the challenges posed by closed and closing spaces and adopt a phased approach to the transition process. This allows your party to gradually navigate any constraints, build public support, and strategically address challenges without jeopardizing the overall goal of democratic transition. Balance immediate actions with long-term planning to ensure a smooth transition and effective governance under challenging circumstances.

By adequately preparing for the challenges of assuming government and focusing on system reform, continuity of government functions, and policy development, your party can navigate the complexities of a democratic transition.

6.4 TRANSITION PROCESS OF DEMOCRATIC CHANGE

As the transition process from authoritarian rule to democracy unfolds, careful consideration of several factors is crucial to solidify the democratic process. Ensuring a successful transition requires effective communication and strategic planning. Here are key principles to guide your party in navigating this critical period:

- **Reassuring Citizens:** Instill confidence and alleviate concerns about potential political instability by communicating a thoughtful and comprehensive plan for the transition. Assure citizens that the process will be transparent, carefully managed, and inclusive of all opinions, including those who currently support the regime. Emphasize the benefits of democratic governance and how it can lead to a more inclusive and prosperous society.
- **Inclusive Process:** Demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity by involving a diverse group of citizens in creating the new system of government. Encourage meaningful participation from traditionally excluded groups, such as women, youth, and other underrepresented communities, such as appointing them to key government leadership roles in the transition government. Ensure their voices are heard and their perspectives integrated into the decision-making process to build a stronger and more representative democracy.
- **Representation:** Uphold respect for human rights and ensure the representation of all segments of society. Increase women's meaningful participation in political processes and leadership roles to achieve gender equality and promote diversity. Empower youth and underrepresented groups to take up formal roles and have real influence in shaping the new government and policies.
- **Speedy Elections:** Set clear timelines and ensure the prompt organization of free and fair elections to prevent any potential retrenchment of the old regime during the transition. Swiftly establishing a democratic electoral process will maintain momentum and prevent attempts to undermine the transition.
- **Stability and Security:** Prioritize maintaining stability and security during the handover between the old regime and the newly elected democratic government. Collaborate with relevant institutions and stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition and minimize potential disruptions or power vacuums. Prioritize the safety and security of citizens and protect democratic institutions to foster confidence and trust in the new government.

By addressing these aspects of the transition process, your party can work towards a smooth and successful transition to democratic governance, promoting inclusivity, stability, and respect for human rights. It is crucial to adapt strategies and approaches based on the specific challenges and dynamics of the authoritarian regime in which you are operating. Effective communication and strategic planning will play a vital role in solidifying the democratic process during this critical phase of change.

6.5 STAGES OF DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

In the transitional period before elections take place, events and circumstances are often unpredictable and out of your control. However, understanding the typical stages of a transition can help guide your party's strategic planning. Here are some common stages to consider:

- **Regime Compromise:** The regime bows to popular pressure and grants a process of democratization or is forced out of office through mass civil disobedience, etc.
- **Constitutional Drafting:** Representatives from across society agree on a constitutional framework for new elections, the functioning of government, and the codification of legal rights for citizens.
- **Government Formation:** After elections, and before formal transfer of power, parties may negotiate a coalition or sharing of key government roles.
- **Government of National Unity:** After regime capitulation and elections, democratic forces may consent to temporary rule by a unifying figure while the other elements of transition are debated and agreed upon. Such an arrangement decreases the risk of a rollback of hard-won progress.
- **Elections:** Elections raise many questions. When will they occur, and where will people vote? Who will oversee the elections? Who will count the votes, and how? Will nominations and/or elections reserve places for women, youth, particular ethnic groups, or regions?
- **Government Transition:** How will the formal transition of power demonstrate the legitimacy of the new government? Who will oversee, authorize, or “bless” the transfer? What transitions might there be at the more mundane or bureaucratic level?

TOOL 6A: TRANSITION PROCESS NARRATIVE

To effectively navigate the stages of democratic transition, your party must craft a coherent and compelling narrative that directly addresses the challenges and potential solutions. The stages for creating a succinct story could look like this:

- **Regime Compromise:** We recognize the complex political landscape and commit to inclusive negotiations with all stakeholders, including the ruling regime, opposition groups, CSOs, and international actors. By fostering dialogue and finding common ground, we aim to establish a framework that respects diverse opinions and guarantees equal participation for all.

- **Constitutional Drafting:** We acknowledge the importance of an inclusive and participatory constitutional drafting process. Ensuring that citizens from all backgrounds have a voice in shaping the new constitution, we aim to create a foundational document that upholds democratic principles, protects human rights, and establishes mechanisms for accountability and good governance.
- **Institutional Reforms:** We understand the need to rebuild and strengthen democratic institutions that have been weakened or compromised. Our focus will be on promoting transparency, professionalism, and integrity within the executive, judiciary, security forces, electoral management bodies, and public administration. By reforming these institutions, we aim to restore public trust and ensure they serve the best interests of the people.
- **Electoral Preparations:** We commit to creating a level playing field for all political parties in the electoral process. Implementing robust electoral laws, ensuring fair voter registration, and providing comprehensive voter education are essential steps. Establishing independent electoral management bodies to oversee the process and prevent electoral fraud or manipulation is a priority.
- **Election Campaigns:** Our campaign will be driven by a genuine commitment to listen to the concerns and aspirations of the people. We will actively engage citizens through various channels, including online platforms, town halls, and direct interactions. By incorporating their feedback into policies and programs, we aim to build a government that truly represents the will of the people.
- **Election Day and Results:** We will ensure a transparent, inclusive, and peaceful election process. Respecting the outcome of the elections and facilitating a smooth transfer of power if we are successful are fundamental commitments. Upholding democratic values and principles throughout the transition and beyond is vital, recognizing that our success lies not just in winning elections but in sustaining an inclusive democracy.

By crafting a compelling narrative that emphasizes inclusivity, transparency, and responsiveness to citizen input, your party can forge a democratic transition that reflects the aspirations and collective will of the people. Through active citizen engagement and continuous adaptation, you can build a stronger and more inclusive democracy for all.

Transition Process Narrative Worksheet: Annex 6A

6.6 DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS: PERSONNEL

At this stage of the democratic transition planning, it is crucial to identify key individuals who will play significant roles in the process. By presenting trustworthy and respected figures, citizens can gain confidence in the transition:

- **Regime Negotiation:** In order to establish a transition, it is essential to identify a respected and unifying figure who can serve as the lead negotiator in dealings with the current regime. This individual should possess strong diplomatic skills and the ability to bridge divides. Such a figure could include a renowned statesperson, experienced mediators, or respected political leaders with a history of promoting dialogue and reconciliation.
- **Government of National Unity:** To form a transitional government that represents the aspirations of the diverse population, it is necessary to identify a unifying figure who can effectively lead the interim administration. This individual should have a track record of promoting inclusivity and fostering consensus. Additionally, it might be crucial to involve a range of diverse and representative organizations or community leaders who can come together to form a broad-based transitional government.
- **Constitution Drafting:** To ensure the legitimacy of the proposed constitutional process, it is important to involve experts, civil society leaders, and respected figures from traditionally excluded groups. Their involvement will lend credibility and inclusivity to the drafting process. By including individuals who have expertise in constitutional law, human rights advocacy, and social justice, the resulting constitution will reflect the values and aspirations of the entire society.
- **Elections:** To endorse a plan for free and fair elections, it is important to seek the support of individuals with a strong reputation for upholding democratic principles and ensuring electoral integrity. This could include prominent political figures, respected members of civil society, or reputable international organizations with expertise in election monitoring. Additionally, the proposal for the chairperson of the electoral commission should be someone with a proven track record of impartiality, professionalism, and commitment to democratic values.
- **Government Transition:** During the government transition phase, it is crucial to establish a diverse and representative team of ministers who can effectively govern and address the needs of the nation. This team should comprise individuals with expertise in various fields, representing different sectors of society. Furthermore, it is important to identify individuals who can shadow the portfolios of the regime ministers, ensuring continuity and a smooth transition. The team should strive for gender balance and reflect the ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity of the nation, promoting inclusivity and equal representation.

By incorporating these key personalities into the democratic transition narrative, the process gains credibility, representation, and inclusivity, fostering trust among citizens and demonstrating a commitment to democratic values.

TOOL 6B: TRANSITION PLANNING

To effectively manage the transition process, it is essential to identify and prioritize the tasks involved. Below is a partial list of transition tasks that may be included in your list. Rank each task on a scale of one to five, with higher scores indicating higher priority.

TASK	RANK (1-5)
Releasing political prisoners	
Auditing public offices/funds for corruption	
Implementing police/military reforms	
Vetting potential ministers	
Appointing and briefing shadow ministers	
Appointing technical experts to fill key civil service positions	
Restructuring government (e.g., changing ministers' portfolios, reducing the size of government, adding new ministries)	
Improving the inclusiveness of the government (e.g., promoting women ministers, a younger cabinet, ethnic group representation)	
Setting a timetable for swearing in and taking office	
Liaising with the civil service	
Writing an inaugural speech or key messages to define the transition period	

6.7 CRAFTING A POLICY AGENDA

Transitioning from an opposition movement into a governing entity presents unique challenges that require a comprehensive and nuanced approach when crafting a policy agenda. Here are additional insights on developing this agenda that are tailored to the context of closed and closing spaces:

- **Economic Stabilization:** Pay special attention to preventing economic collapse and promoting economic stability. Develop comprehensive measures to mitigate inflation, protect jobs, attract investments, and ensure the delivery of essential services. Consider strategies such as creating supportive business environments, fostering entrepreneurship, promoting trade and investment, and implementing social safety nets to address economic inequalities and vulnerabilities.
- **State Function Continuity:** Ensure the continuity of core state functions to maintain stability and public confidence. Focus on sustaining essential public services, such as security, justice, healthcare, education, and infrastructure, during the transition period. Develop plans to rebuild and strengthen government institutions, enhance public administration, and promote transparency and accountability in the delivery of public services.
- **Citizen Engagement:** Actively engage citizens in the democratic transition process to foster inclusivity, ownership, and trust in the government. Promote civic education programs that provide citizens with the necessary knowledge and skills to participate meaningfully in democratic processes. Establish platforms for public dialogue, consultation, and feedback, ensuring that diverse voices, including marginalized and underrepresented groups, are heard and considered in policy-making decisions.
- **Strategic Policy Development:** With immediate stabilization needs addressed, shift towards developing a comprehensive and forward-thinking policy agenda that reflects the unique challenges of formerly closed and closing spaces. Prioritize goals that address the needs and aspirations of the population while considering the constraints and limitations imposed by the authoritarian regime. This may include policies aimed at promoting human rights, strengthening the rule of law, expanding political freedoms, reforming electoral systems, and advancing social justice and equality.
- **Policy Implementation and Monitoring:** Develop robust mechanisms for policy implementation, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure effective delivery of your agenda. Establish transparent and accountable governance structures, including performance measurement frameworks, to track progress, identify challenges, and make necessary adjustments. Engage CSOs, independent experts, and international partners to provide expertise, oversight, and support in policy implementation and evaluation.

In crafting your policy agenda, it is essential to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including CSOs, academic experts, and community leaders. Seek their input, expertise, and feedback throughout the process to ensure the inclusivity and effectiveness of your policies. Adapt your agenda to the specific needs, aspirations, and realities of the population, taking into account the unique challenges posed by transitions to democracy from closed and closing spaces.



6.8 CONCLUSION

As you reach the conclusion of this playbook, take a moment to reflect on the knowledge and practical guidance you have acquired to navigate the complexities of operating in closed and closing spaces. The transition to democracy is a gradual process that demands patience, resilience, and continuous engagement with the people whose lives it will ultimately transform. As your party embarks on this transformative journey, maintain an unwavering commitment to the principles of transparency, inclusivity, and accountability that underpin a democratic society.

The transition to democracy is ultimately a reflection of the collective will of the people. As you guide this transition, always remember that your primary responsibility is to honor this will by delivering a government that respects and responds to the needs and aspirations of its citizens. Despite the challenges that may arise along the way, every step taken towards establishing a democratic government founded on respect for universal human rights and the rule of law signifies significant progress towards creating a fair, just, and prosperous society for all.

**ANNEXES:
WORKSHEETS AND
TEMPLATES**

ANNEX 1

TOOL 1A: WORKSHOPPING STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT TOOL INSTRUCTIONS

To use this tool, write the left column below on a flip chart or online white board,, and work through the questions in each space. Start with the header box, then move through the quadrants in the sequence below.

WHAT IS NEXT?	Summarize your starting assumptions. This tool tests elements of your strategy by thinking about past and future and by looking outward and inward. Focus the discussion by starting with a summary of the next step in your strategy.
LOOK FORWARD	Encourage the imagination needed for good strategy. You want to avoid negativity and encourage creative thinking, but avoid wishful thinking.
LOOK BACKWARDS	Analyze how your party has performed in the past. This is not about placing blame for past failures; rather, you are looking for a positive and constructive discussion that reflects on your current situation and focuses on lessons from the past that can be applied to future plans.
LOOK INWARDS	Draw on the experience of participants to illuminate how and to what extent what is seen and felt at the grassroots may be totally different from the understanding and experience of those close to the leadership.
LOOK OUTWARDS	Look for inspiration and practical lessons from other parties, activists, and movements.

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT TOOL EXAMPLE

Here is an example of what a foresight table might look like for a long-standing democratic movement that has been campaigning for many years.

<p>WHAT IS NEXT?</p>	<p>We plan to use the respected standing of our current leader to develop a new generation of younger leaders to broaden our appeal to younger voters who are currently passive on the question of democracy.</p>
<p>LOOK FORWARD</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our leader is respected but is older and has spoken about the need to think about what comes next. • Our support is concentrated among people who remember the protests and crackdown of a decade ago. • Younger people are more passive and less engaged with our movement but make up a growing proportion of the electorate. If we don't gain traction with them, we risk becoming irrelevant. • Does shifting focus to younger voter's risk alienating our long-standing supporters?
<p>LOOK BACKWARDS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using young leaders to connect with young people has sometimes worked, but we've never sustained the connections. • We have never developed a message with lasting appeal to those potential voters. • We've been discouraged and given up too easily, rather than experimenting, learning, and continuing to pursue the goal. This time we need to be more determined.
<p>LOOK INWARDS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We don't have enough young people active; most of our leadership is older. We need to identify new young leadership. • We have to change the way we communicate, placing less focus on our leader.
<p>LOOK OUTWARDS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other parties have been faster at adapting to new social media platforms and at allowing their members to have a creative voice on those platforms. • Other parties have been better at using younger spokespeople, including young women and young people from ethnic minority groups.



STRATEGIC FORESIGHT TOOL INSTRUCTIONS TEMPLATE

See instructions above.

WHAT IS NEXT?	
LOOK FORWARD	
LOOK BACKWARDS	
LOOK INWARDS	
LOOK OUTWARDS	

TOOL 1B: STRATEGY COMMUNICATION

Use this template to brainstorm how to edit your strategy down to a single sentence answering the three implicit questions below. Once your content is defined in this single-sentence format, you can break it up for easier communication, while retaining its simplicity.

<p>IF WE DO THIS ACTION...</p>  <p>What do we do?</p>	<p>...THEN WE WILL WIN THIS GOAL...</p>  <p>Why do we do it?</p>	<p>...BECAUSE...</p> <p>How does the What advance us to the Why?</p>

ANNEX 2

RISKS FACED IN ANTI-DEMOCRATIC REGIMES:

Administrative Risks:

State bureaucracy targets the party through administrative means, making it difficult to operate legally by imposing burdensome requirements and restrictions.

Economic Risks:

Party members, activists, or leaders may face job loss, expulsion from education, asset seizure, or targeting of their businesses.

Identity-Based Risks:

- Leaders and activists from traditionally marginalized and underrepresented groups, such as women, racial, ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities, Indigenous people, LGBTQI+ individuals, and persons with disabilities, face threats based on stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.
- Women, girls, and LGBTQI+ individuals may experience an increased risk of sexual harassment, violence, and abuse.

Judicial Risks:

Detention, arrest, and imprisonment on false charges are common, often accompanied by the risk of ill treatment and torture while in custody.

Political Risks:

- Authoritarian governments may stigmatize your party's reputation, labeling it as an enemy of the state and a political and security risk.
- Harmful gender tropes and stereotypes may be used to discredit and undermine the party's legitimacy.

Property Risks:

Houses, offices, and vehicles associated with the party, including personal property of leaders or members, may be targeted for vandalism or arson.

Informational Risks:

Your party's confidential information—such as communications, lists of supporters, party strategies, the design of organizing efforts, and even physical location and movements—is likely a frequent target. The theft or leak of such information can lead to physical risks for party members and supporters as well as contribute to reputational risks and impact your party's strategic success.

Digital Risks:

- The digital systems with which your party maintains and interacts—such as communication applications, databases, online accounts, mobile devices and computers, the internet and social media—often facilitate and enhance other categories of risk. Harassment on social media can have a variety of negative impacts on party members and supporters. This harassment can impact party members' mental health, and digital surveillance of communications and internet activity can contribute to risks to their physical safety. In addition, social profiles and party members' digital footprints can be leveraged to facilitate judicial action, and the hacking of party accounts and data systems can result in political and reputational consequences tied to the leak of sensitive information, which, in turn, can fuel damaging information manipulation campaigns.
- Communications and movements can be monitored, bugged, or hacked.
- Party leaders, members, activists, and supporters may face technology-facilitated attacks, including online hate speech, harassment, violence, and abuse. This risk disproportionately affects women, LGBTQI+ individuals, and other marginalized identities.

Mental Health Risks:

Leaders, activists, and members may experience mental health challenges, potentially leading to neglect of personal safety or disillusionment.

Risk of Violence:

Members, activists, and individuals associated with the party, including family members and personal friends, may be targeted, harassed, and attacked to intimidate the regime's intended targets.

This violence can range from online attacks and abuse to excessive use of force by security forces, physical assaults, or even murder.

Women, in particular, may face unique forms of violence and differentiated impacts of that violence, ranging from domestic violence in the home to sexual violence, impacting their individual and collective readiness to engage in politics.

Risk During Foreign Travel:

A handful of regimes have the power, tools, and resources to track, surveil, and hurt political opponents outside their own borders with and without awareness/cooperation of other state actors.

Recognizing and assessing these risks is essential for developing strategies to mitigate and address them, ensuring the safety and well-being of party members, activists, and leaders, as well as the overall success of the democratic movement.

TOOL 2A: REGISTERING RISK

Use the table below to identify the risks you face when operating in closed and closing spaces; consider your vulnerabilities for each risk; review steps taken to mitigate the risks; plan additional needed mitigations. Rank the likelihood and impact of each risk, using the ranking scales below.

	RISK	
VULNERABILITIES		
MITIGATIONS IN PLACE		
MITIGATIONS NEEDED		
PROBABILITY (1-5)		
IMPACT (1-5)		

Once you have completed listing and analyzing each risk, begin your priority assessment: Rank each risk from one and five for the likelihood of its occurring or continuing.



PROBABILITY RANKING				
1	2	3	4	5
Possible but very unlikely	Possible but unlikely	Less likely but still worth monitoring	Likely to happen but depends on a change in circumstances	Already experienced, or judged to be certain to occur

Next, rank risks by how big an impact their occurrence would/does have on your ability to function.

IMPACT RANKING				
1	2	3	4	5
Would have minimal impact on party members and operations	Would be irritating or distracting but not critical to your operations	Would remove your party's ability to function normally but still allow you to function	Would severely disrupt your party and would risk the safety of your supporters	Would make it impossible for your party to function Serious risks to the lives and liberty of leaders or supporters

TOOL 2B: RISK PRIORITY MATRIX

Use your impact and probability rankings to prioritize risks on which to focus.

 IMPACT	5 VERY HIGH					
	4 HIGH					
	3 MEDIUM					
	2 LOW					
	1 VERY LOW					
		1 VERY LOW	2 LOW	3 MEDIUM	4 HIGH	5 VERY HIGH
	PROBABILITY 					

ANNEX 3

TOOL 3A: PARTY STRUCTURE AUDIT

Perform an audit addressing the areas below. Be sure to analyze your party structure as it is rather than as you would want it to be.

List—at national, regional, and local levels—the usually permanent **roles** required for party organization and daily work, from leadership to essential implementers. Each role should include the competency required for it.

List the **projects** on which the party must deliver.

Who makes **decisions** at each party level?

Who is responsible for **delivery** of planned, existing, or ongoing projects?

Are there individuals with sole responsibility for critical tasks? Are there tasks that uniquely depend on particular individuals? Outline organizational **vulnerabilities** below.

You have defined responsibilities in terms of roles, projects, decision-making, and delivery. You have looked at where responsibilities may depend on too few people. How can you more broadly **distribute responsibility** throughout your organization?

- Who else could be involved in the responsibilities defined?
- What single-person tasks could be performed by a team?
- What existing teams could use more members?
- Can you ensure that recruitment from traditionally excluded or underrepresented groups is coordinated with genuine sharing of responsibility, including for decision-making?

TOOL 3B: CREATE INTERCONNECTED TEAMS

Use the template below to redraw your party structures based on the teams you have identified. Consider whether roles are sufficiently organisationally distributed so as to limit any risk from a crackdown. Teams should overlap, with individuals sitting on more than one team as illustrated in Chapter Three.



ANNEX 4

TOOL 4: MAPPING ALLIES

Use the tool below to list potential political party, CSO, and international allies. Analyze where their missions and yours overlap.

ORGANIZATION AND LEADER
TYPE OF ORGANIZATION
MISSION
WHAT SHARED INTERESTS DO WE HAVE?

ANNEX 5

TOOL 5A: MESSAGE REFINEMENT TOOL

Assess whether your message meets the following criteria/guidelines for problem, solution, and action, listed below.

PROBLEM

What are the main problems people experience living under the regime?

- Describe the problem as simply as possible in ways that relate to people's lives and indicate its impact on society.
- Choose problems that are directly the responsibility of the anti-democratic regime.

SOLUTION

What are you campaigning for and how does it relate to the problem?

- Relate to the lived experience of your audience rather than invoking abstractions.
- A modest solution might be more credible than one that overpromises. Is your solution something the regime could offer, too, or is it something signally associated with your party?

TOOL 5B: DEVELOPING A CORE SCRIPT

Use the worksheet below to develop your own core script. What is the **single most important thing** you want anyone speaking on behalf of your party to communicate? This should be the best version of your message as worked on in the message development sheet above.

IF YOU ONLY SAY ONE THING:

Next, what are your **three best arguments** in support of that message? You want a simple sentence or two using the clearest, simplest language. Ask whether your arguments support your message or stray from it.

ARGUMENT 1-3:

To what questions do you need answers? Think about what journalists constantly ask or about what your opponents say when they attack you. Anticipate the **three most common questions** and write clear and **simple answers** for them that highlight your key messages.

QUESTION 1-3

ANSWER 1-3

TOOL 5C: NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT TOOL




Work through your own narrative based on the discussion on target groups, framing and messaging in Chapter Five. You can brainstorm and invite party members and supporters to tell their own stories and use their personal experiences to inform the narrative.

<p>VALUES</p> <p>What are your values? What simple beliefs, widely and deeply felt by the people with whom you are communicating, are at the core of your argument?</p>
<p>VIOLATION</p> <p>How are those widely held values being violated by the anti-democratic regime? Who are the villains who violate the values?</p>
<p>VISION</p> <p>How would the world work if it reflected your values? What would things look like if you succeed? How will you get there?</p>
<p>VOICES</p> <p>How does your party and movement represent inclusivity and diverse voices in society?</p>
<p>VOTE!</p> <p>What is your demand and your call to action? What particular action, or series of actions, are you asking people to rally around?</p>

TOOL 5D: CRISIS CONTACT LIST




ROLE	PRIMARY TEAM MEMBERS	STANDBY MEMBERS
<p>MANAGER</p> <p><i>Crisis communication coordinator</i></p>	Name	Name
	Contact	Contact
<p>OPERATIVE COORDINATOR</p> <p><i>Note taker and person who can organize things quickly</i></p>	Name	Name
	Contact	Contact
<p>COMMUNICATORS</p> <p><i>Communicators developing materials</i></p>	Name	Name
	Contact	Contact
<p>AFFILIATED EXPERTS</p> <p><i>Experts supporting the crisis team (i.e. academics)</i></p>	Name	Name
	Contact	Contact

TOOL 5E: FIRST PUBLIC RESPONSE

	GOAL  What do we want to achieve?	INFORMATION  What do we know?	COMMUNICATION  What do we want to communicate?
DEFINE			
FRAME			
EMPOWER			

TOOL 5F: ESTABLISH YOUR PRESENCE

Gather your crisis team to focus on your next steps, using the template below.

	KNOW  What do people know?	FEEL  What do people feel?	DO  What are people doing?
CURRENT STATE			
OUR ROLE			
DESIRED STATE			

ANNEX 6

TOOL 6A: DEVELOP YOUR TRANSITION PROCESS NARRATIVE

Take the six stages of democratic transition outlined in Chapter Six, place them in order, and tell a short story about each element. Once complete, this should form a narrative that can be used to reassure citizens about your plan for a transition to democracy.

REGIME COMPROMISE	
CONSTITUTIONAL DRAFTING	
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