CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION FOR EUROPE

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LIBERTIES CIVIC SPACE MESSAGING LAB

BUILDING SUPPORT FOR CIVIC SPACE: A MESSAGING GUIDE

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I. About the Guide

This guide is intended for staff working in organisations that want to improve attitudes among the public towards NGOs that promote progressive causes such as human rights, equality, anti-corruption and environmental protection, using tools such as campaigning, litigation and advocacy. For the remainder of the guide, these NGOs are referred to as 'advocacy NGOs'.

Public audiences can be divided into at least three segments on progressive causes, such as human rights, equality, environmental protection and social justice. Those who are solidly in favour of your cause (the base), those who are solidly against (opponents), and those in the middle, who are moveable. The moveable middle can be further divided into those who lean in your favour (soft-supporters), those who lean towards your opponents (soft opponents) and those who can go either way (undecideds).

Your 'base' includes your existing supporters, but also people who would be very likely to support you if you can reach them with your messages. Research in different countries on different human rights-related topics suggests that this base can be anything between 15% and 25% of the population.[1] The same is true for opponents. Your base and your opponents won't usually change their position. But the middle segments can. This moveable middle is usually the biggest chunk of the public.

Public-facing campaigns that are aimed at growing public support for a particular cause should try to mobilise your base and enlist their help to spread your message to shift at least part of the moveable middle over to your side. The messaging advice in this guide is designed to mobilise and persuade your base, soft supporters and undecideds.

Currently, advocacy NGOs message in a way that is likely only to appeal to supporters and is either ineffective or counterproductive with moveable middle audiences. This contrasts with their opponents' messaging. Evidence from different countries suggests that concerted smear campaigns against NGOs can shift undecideds from neutral to negative views, while not affecting support from supporters and soft supporters.[2] Smear campaigns against NGOs are used as a tool in their own right to harass and intimidate staff at NGOs and reduce public trust and support, and are often a prelude to legal and policy proposals to restrict civic space.

1 Much of this research is unpublished, but for published research that segments the population see research by More In Common on attitudes towards migration, available via their website.

2 See further the review of research contained in the Annex to Butler, I., 'How to talk about civic space: A guide for progressive civil society facing smear campaigns', Civil Liberties Union for Europe, 2021.

This guide will help campaigners to shore up support among supporters and soft supporters and win over undecideds. As a result, advocacy NGOs will be better able to fend off restrictions, deter the use of smear campaigns and, in the long-term, grow public support for measures that deliver a healthy civic space.

The guide is informed by the science and practice behind narrative change. This guide refers to this approach as 'persuasive messaging'. It draws heavily on the work of Anat Shenker-Osorio. The recommendations in this guide are based on an analysis of public opinion and message testing carried out in four EU countries in partnership with Liberties members as part of an EU co-funded project: Croatia (Centre for Peace Studies), Hungary (Hungarian Civil Liberties Union), Italy (CILD), and Sweden (Civil Rights Defenders). Analysis of public opinion in Croatia, Hungary, Italy and Sweden was carried out through social listening over Facebook in the summer of 2024 on selected local language pages, as well as with focus groups with undecideds in September and October of 2025. In these four countries, we explored attitudes towards and messaging on civic space as well as one other topic per country: migration (in Croatia and Sweden), access to citizenship (in Italy) and local environmental protection (in Hungary).

While the messages were tested with undecideds, as noted, they have been developed to also appeal to the base and soft supporters. Put otherwise, messages that risk alienating your base or soft supporters are not included in this guide.

The guide uses the term 'progressive' in a non-politically partisan sense to refer to public interest causes recognised in European legal instruments such as the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Section II of the guide highlights current messaging habits of advocacy NGOs that are probably working against them and explains what to do instead. Section III explains the structure of a persuasive message and sets out sample messaging, including creative content and messaging designed to respond to attacks.

II. Summary of key findings

Section II gives a summary of key findings and recommendations based on the work in all four countries. While there were differences between countries in undecideds' attitudes and the way they reacted to certain messages, the audiences had much more in common.

How should we refer to advocacy NGOs?

Terms like 'civic space', 'civil society', 'non-governmental organisation' and (depending on the language) 'civil society organisation' were alien to undecideds.[3] Undecideds had either not heard the terms or had heard of them but didn't know what they meant, and generally said that these terms held negative connotations for them. The social listening analysis suggests that these are terms mostly used among policy, professional and expert circles.

On the other hand, the generic term for referring to civil society as a whole ('association' in Croatian, 'civil society organisation' in Hungarian, 'non-profit association / organisation' in Swedish and Italian) brings to mind service-provision and grassroots or community-based organisations for undecideds. These kinds of organisations are largely seen in positive terms by our base, the middle and even opposition for filling in gaps left by the state, offering tangible support to people in need, enriching community and social life and as a vehicle for people to offer care and compassion to others.

Undecideds know very little about advocacy NGOs, in terms of the roles they play in making democracy work properly or the progressive causes they advance. Should we ever want to refer to our sector as a whole, there isn't really a short-hand term that we can use that will make this audience immediately understand the kind of organisation we're talking about.

When we described advocacy NGOs to undecideds during the focus groups, they were happy to continue referring to them using the local generic term for referring to civil society as a whole. Put otherwise, while advocacy NGOs aren't currently part of their concept of civil society as a whole, undecideds are comfortable fitting advocacy NGOs within this concept.

Accordingly, the guide recommends that if campaigners need to refer to advocacy NGOs as a whole, they should take a descriptive approach and be as precise as they can. For example, assuming that the generic commonly used word in a given country for civil society organisations is 'association', then: associations that work on… / associations that are trying

3 Except in Hungary, where the generic term for civil society (civil szervezet) broadly conceived translates as 'civil society organisation'.

to change… / associations that are drawing attention to… .

Do smear campaigns damage public opinion towards advocacy NGOs?

When we gave undecideds a description of advocacy NGOs, this evoked different reactions in different countries. The description stated that some organisations 'work on issues like migration, equality between men and women, climate change, equality for LGBTQ [persons] and fighting corruption in politics and government'.[4]

In Sweden and Italy, undecideds tended to react positively, saying that these are worthy causes and that it was a good thing that organisations exist to work on them, even if they themselves don't follow these topics. In Hungary, undecideds reacted negatively, saying that these kinds of organisations are interfering in politics and should not be working on these issues. In Croatia, undecideds had a more mixed reaction, with some seeing these causes as positive and others saying that such organisations absorb state funds without doing anything useful for ordinary people.

At the same time, in all four countries, it was clear that undecideds had no depth of knowledge and were sometimes even surprised that there were organisations working on these issues at all. What is remarkable and heartening is that it seems that concerted smear campaigns against advocacy NGOs have a weak and superficial impact on undecideds. Even in Hungary, where advocacy NGOs have endured over a decade of attacks, undecideds seemed only to have taken on board one of many attacks (that they engage in 'politics' which they shouldn't), and even then, we were able to dissolve this thinking with the messaging we tested.

How do undecideds interpret smear attacks?

Undecideds do not seem to realise that smear attacks against advocacy NGOs are part of a concerted effort by our opponents; whether as a strategy to reduce government accountability, make it more difficult for citizens to participate democratically, or to distract public attention or deflect blame away from those using smears. It seems that only our base realises this. Undecideds, in contrast, often repeat certain smears about advocacy NGOs which they accept at face value. Though, as noted, these views are superficially held and relatively easy to reverse. The exception to this was in Croatia, where participants said that politicians tend to attack NGOs to deflect unfavourable attention away from themselves or from difficult political issues. However, even here, participants thought that NGOs were not special: they were just one out of many targets.

4 We used the appropriate generic term for a civil society organisation for each country.

What do we need to message about to stimulate positive attitudes towards advocacy NGOs?

We found three lines of messaging to be effective at making undecideds in all countries more positive towards and enthusiastic about advocacy NGOs:

- First, showing undecideds that advocacy NGOs bring ordinary people like them together around commonly shared causes. Undecideds were enthusiastic about the potential for civil society organisations to unify citizens and thereby give them power to change society for the better. In testing, we found that this was best achieved through imagery showing the audience people they could identify with of different ages and walks of life (as opposed to people they identified as stereotypical activists) gathering in public, whether through marches, vigils or demonstrations. Presumably, campaigners can find creative ways of making the connection between ordinary people coming together and tools other than freedom of assembly used by advocacy NGOs, like litigation and advocacy.

- Second, informing or reminding undecideds of times when, by coming together, ordinary people have managed to achieve positive changes. Ultimately, campaigners should use examples that point to how advocacy NGOs played a role in bringing people together to achieve these successes. The end goal should be to dissolve fatalism (the widespread belief that ordinary people can't do anything to bring about big social changes) by pointing to how advocacy NGOs specifically mobilise popular support to create a more compassionate and caring society.

- Campaigners should consider a short-term and long-term approach to this line of messaging. First, because undecideds don't currently really appreciate the causes that advocacy NGOs work on. So this line of messaging would need to be accompanied by, or preceded by, the kind of messaging set out in the next bullet point. And second, because undecideds don't know much about what advocacy NGOs do, they probably haven't heard of most of the successes they've had. So in the long-run, campaigners should aim to popularise examples of past successes that can be linked to advocacy NGOs, especially where these successes can be linked to how advocacy NGOs have mobilised people.

- In the short-term, campaigners should point to achievements that highlight the things ordinary people can achieve when we come together, using examples that they think their audience might recognise. This could include historical (such as the transition to democracy) or contemporary changes (such as a pay rise for teachers) to laws or policies, but also examples of people helping each other through organisations during COVID or after natural disasters. Put otherwise, in the short-term, campaigners don't need

to confine themselves to examples that link to advocacy NGOs.

- In the longer-term, campaigners should increase public awareness of successes owed to advocacy NGOs while also pointing out that the success is (partly) owed to the participation of ordinary people in the work that led to the success. Campaigners will need to experiment to work out how to do this when their victories are down to tools that don't, on the surface, seem to involve the broader public, like litigation or advocacy. In cases where a success was achieved without using protests or demonstrations, this could perhaps be done by pointing to ways that ordinary people have supported litigation or advocacy. However, campaigners should strive to create the feeling that people are participating together, even if they're acting individually, e.g by taking action like donating, signing a petition, talking to a relative or sharing social media content. The reason for this is that in focus groups, one of the things that drove participants' enthusiasm was seeing people physically together.

- Third, breaking down progressive causes in a way that gets across to undecideds how these deliver something that they find important for themselves, people they care about or people they consider to be like them. This is a large task because it means advocacy NGOs need to get better at talking about all the topics they work on. Currently, advocacy NGOs do not talk about the causes they promote in a way that persuades or enthuses people outside their base. Section III explains this in more detail.

- In relation to topics like equality for marginalised groups, this requires advocacy NGOs to stimulate empathy for people whom undecideds currently regard as 'not like me', as well as dissolving negative stereotypes or frames that cause your audience to misdiagnose the problem. For example, in countries where we looked at migration, the audience tended to have a negative frame of people who migrate as unwilling to integrate culturally, which in turn made it harder for our audience to accept fairer policies towards them.

- The reason campaigners should show their audience how the causes advocacy NGOs promote deliver something they find important is that support for NGOs is largely based on whether the audience agrees that the cause being promoted is worthy or aligns with their values. This is supported by academic literature and was apparent in the focus groups. In each of the focus groups, participants were shown messaging and creative products that applied the persuasive messaging method on one substantive progressive topic. In general, participants began the session being, at best, vaguely positive that advocacy NGOs exist and pursue worthy causes that they weren't interested in. At the end of the session, they often wanted to know more about the issue, said that it was important that NGOs worked on the topic, and sometimes even said they intended to get more involved.

How do undecideds feel about protesters?

In all four countries, undecideds said that the right to protest was important and supported it. However, this support is conditional on protests not being disruptive or turning violent. Very often, people referred to methods used by environmental activists, or referred expressly to environmental protesters, negatively, in particular road blockages.

The focus groups did not test messaging that was aimed explicitly at shifting attitudes towards protesters. Nevertheless, it's likely that the following recommendations would help campaigners trying to build support for protests that provoke mixed feelings.

- First, when campaigners are talking to public audiences about protests, avoid images that suggest protestors are being disruptive or violent. Prioritise images that reflect how people attending protests come from all walks of life and are of different ages. As noted above, people become supportive of protest as a tool if they see people like them among protesters. This will also help to dissolve the negative stereotypes of protesters promoted by your opponents as eccentric, unlikeable, militant and violent.

- Second, point to times in the past when things that your audience is probably proud of or agrees with were achieved thanks to protest. The idea is to help the audience to realise that protest is a tool, the purpose of which is to make positive changes.

- Third, unpack how the cause being promoted by the protest aligns with your audience's values or delivers something they find important.

Where do undecideds differ from each other?

Among other differences, undecideds don't react the same way across countries to robust language. When describing how associations empower citizens to influence decision-makers, the messages tested originally stated things like 'by coming together ordinary people can demand / force / make our leaders' followed by the desired outcome, such as 'listen to our concerns' or 'deliver the services we all rely on'.

Audiences in Sweden and Italy reacted badly to this language, which they considered overly confrontational, aggressive or radical. Undecideds in these countries preferred language that conveyed the idea that citizens can make themselves heard or take part in a debate or offer constructive solutions, rather than compelling politicians to do something. In contrast, in Hungary and Croatia, undecideds had no problem with this kind of language.

Based on the discussions in the focus groups, it seems that this might be because in Hungary and Croatia, undecideds believe that politicians aren't motivated to act in the best interests of ordinary people, and so having power to pressure them is a positive thing. In Sweden, the reason seemed to be that undecideds had

respect for politicians and thought they were responsive to concerns raised in public discussion. In Italy, undecideds seemed to think that politicians were less interested in genuinely serving the public than in the past, but they also seemed to want to avoid confrontational public debate.

III. Drawbacks of current messaging practice.

Section III reviews the messaging habits of advocacy NGOs, points out where these are counter-productive and makes suggestions on how to improve them. Campaigners tend to make certain mistakes when trying to persuade public audiences to support advocacy NGOs as a sector or the specific causes they work on. These mistakes can be divided into two categories. First, in the way that they structure their messages. Second, in the details of their messaging. This section will outline these messaging mistakes to help you avoid them.

A. Structural mistakes

Campaigners tend to try to build support by using messages that focus on the harm they are fighting (like restrictions on protests, funding cuts, harassment through abusive administrative procedures, SLAPPs or smear attacks) and then talking about the appropriate legal or policy solution (for example, changing the relevant law, policy or institutional structures).

Messages that contain only one or both of these ingredients tend not to be effective at persuading audiences outside your supporters. This isn't to say that information about the harm and the solution doesn't belong in the message. Rather, the problem is that there are other elements missing. These include not giving the audience a (good enough) reason to care about the cause being advanced - whether that's civic space in general or the specific topics advocacy NGOs work on - not explaining why the harm is happening, and not giving the audience a vision to inspire them.

To understand the structural mistakes set out in this subsection, it would help campaigners if they first understand the structure that a message should follow in order to be most effective. Section III will go into this in more detail.

Structure of a persuasive message (also referred to as a 'narrative')
1) Values statement: tell your audience how the cause you are advancing delivers something that they find important for themselves, people they care about or people whom they consider to be like them.

Structure of a persuasive message (also referred to as a 'narrative')
2) Explain the problem: show your audience that the things they care about are at risk or aren't being delivered. Set out who or what is causing the problem and, in certain circumstances, what their motivation is. 3) Explain the vision your solution delivers: tell your audience what the world will look like if your solution is put into practice. This is often a call-back to the substance of the values statement. Do name your solution, but don't dwell on the policy details. 4) If necessary, show your audience that change is possible by reminding them of past positive social changes, and tell your audience what they can do to show their support for your solution.

i. Not giving your audience a good enough reason to care

Advocacy NGOs tend not to give their audience a (good enough) reason to care about the causes they are promoting. They tend to talk about the causes they promote in abstract or technical terms. Supporters tend to understand these terms and agree with them in principle. But moveable middle audiences don't understand how, for example, human rights standards help to protect or promote things that they value. Abstract arguments that do not connect to tangible things or moral rules that your audience finds important will have no emotional impact on them. And the latter is necessary in order to mobilise them to spread a message and take action in support of a cause.

For example, we asked focus group participants in four countries to react to the following or similarly worded message:

'A strong and healthy civil society is essential for democracy. Associations give ordinary citizens a way to talk to politicians about the problems we want solved. They also contribute their expertise to law-makers so they make better laws, and they monitor people in power so they don't break the law or take away our rights.'

This message is a summary of an argument frequently made by advocacy NGOs, though in a more concise and clearer form than the typical style of advocacy NGOs. Participants reacted to it in almost the same way in all countries. They appreciated that it was clear and concise, but remarked that it had no emotional impact.

The legal arguments that advocacy NGOs typically use are also unlikely to have the desired impact on moveable middle audiences. For example, arguing that your audience should oppose restrictions on protestors because this violates international law. Again, this is because the audience is unlikely to see the link between particular legal standards and things that they find important. In this example, a more persuasive argument would be to remind

the audience that they think it's important for people to be able to come together to express their views and concerns on issues that matter to them.

A message with a pure legal argument was tested in focus groups in Croatia. When shown a message to the effect that pushbacks should not be allowed because they are illegal under the European Convention on Human Rights the audience actually questioned whether the law made sense because it is important for a country to be able to protect its borders against illegal entry by people whom they considered to be potentially dangerous.[5] We also saw that a legal argument triggered our opponent's frame in the audience that potentially dangerous migrants are crossing into the country illegally.

Section III of the guide will go into more depth, but below are some short examples of how to shift away from using abstract or legal arguments and instead articulate what these principles or standards deliver that is of importance to your audience.

FROM	***TO***
Human rights law obliges governments to guarantee people's basic needs.	Human rights give us the means to demand that our leaders fund the things our communities need to thrive, like good schools and modern hospitals.
Everyone is protected against discrimination.	No matter the colour of our skin, who we love, who we pray to or how old we are, most of us agree that all of us should get the same opportunities to do well in life.
Marriage equality.	Everyone should be free to make a long-term commitment to the person they love, no matter who they are attracted to.
Environmental protection.	Most of us want our children to breathe clean air and drink clean water.
Democracy.	We all want our leaders to listen to our concerns and do what's best for ordinary people.

5 See similarly, published results of message testing by the Anat Shenker-Osorio in Australia.

Anti-corruption.	The resources we contribute should go to fund the things we all rely on, like roads, schools and hospitals.
The right to asylum.	Most of us will do whatever it takes to keep our families safe and give them a better life. We work, sacrifice, and even pack up everything so we can put food on the table, a roof over their heads and send our kids to a decent school.

ii. Making your message mostly about the harm you are fighting

Typically, advocacy NGOs focus their messaging on the hardships they are fighting. For example, in relation to civic space, this might mean informing your audience that NGOs and journalists are facing SLAPPs from politicians or businesses. On a topic like environmental protection, it might mean informing your audience about levels of pollution caused by fossil fuel use. Or on migration, it might mean making your audience aware of restrictions on search and rescue activities.

However, awareness alone of the harms advocacy NGOs are fighting tends not to be enough to persuade people outside the base to support us, and it has several drawbacks. First, it can cause the audience to tune out because they don't want to engage with a purely negative message. Second, it can reinforce their sense of fatalism by making the audience feel like the problem is too big or difficult to solve.

Third, it leaves the audience to fill in their own (usually mistaken) explanations for why the problem is happening. For example, campaigners might inform their audience that environmental protestors are victims of police violence and subject to prosecutions in a way that people protesting on other issues are not. Campaigners might expect that when the audience receives these facts, they will react with disapproval and interpret the facts as evidence that the government is trying to silence criticism of policies that benefit fossil fuel companies at the expense of environmental protection. But if undecideds tend to think that environmental protestors are excessively disruptive or potentially violent, as was the case in Italy, they may instead react to this kind of message with approval, seeing harsher measures against environmental protesters as legitimate. Similarly, imagine, as was the case in Croatia, that the audience has a (superficially) negative frame of advocacy NGOs, which they see as organisations that take up public funds without doing anything useful for society. A message that informs this audience that the authorities are cutting funds for advocacy NGOs without adding other elements to the message (such as giving them a

reason to care) would be likely to provoke the opposite reaction to what we intend. That is, they would probably think that reducing public funds is a good thing because it reduces waste or corruption.

For these reasons, it is important for your message to not only focus on talking about the harm. But also to include other elements, such as giving your audience a reason to care about advocacy NGOs and, if responding to smears, explaining the motivation behind the attack.

iii. Talking about the technical solution but not the vision

Campaigners often have solid recommendations about the legal and policy reforms the government should carry out. It's important to talk about policies and technicalities when you're telling the authorities what they need to do. But when talking to a public audience, focusing on laws and policies isn't enough to mobilise them, and going into too much policy or legal detail will even demotivate them.

Instead, you should mention the law or policy or decision that you want from the authorities. But campaigners must also set out their vision: if this solution is put in place, what will the world look like? What does this solution deliver for your audience? Below are some examples.

THE TECHNICAL SOLUTION	*AND ALSO WHAT IT DELIVERS*
The government should increase the minimum wage.	People who work should be paid enough to support their families.
The courts should automatically dismiss lawsuits based on insufficient evidence, make plaintiffs bear the costs and compensate defendants.	When we protect journalists from bogus lawsuits, we get the information we need to demand our leaders deliver the things we rely on.
NGOs should be protected from abusive audits and smear campaigns.	When we are free to come together and join our voices, we can demand that our leaders solve the problems that worry us.
The government should invest in renewable energy sources, green technologies and energy-saving measures.	By funding locally-made green energy and improving our homes, we can all afford to stay warm this winter.
The government should introduce minimum standards for public consultation.	All of us want a say in decisions that affect us. / When citizens get to have our say, our leaders make decisions that benefit all of us.

iv. Direct contradictions and repeating damaging frames

When NGOs are victims of smear campaigns, the most common response is to contradict the smears and try to establish the correct facts, perhaps using a myth-busting format. When we try to counter our opponents by directly contradicting their claims, we end up reinforcing the original damaging message, rather than the correction. To contradict a claim, we need to repeat it, and repetition makes information stick in the brain. The emotive words carry more weight, and the words we use to negate the false claim ('no', 'not', 'no one', 'nothing') get forgotten.[6] For example, saying that 'we do not misuse public funds' or 'we are not politically biased' will just tend to entrench the original damaging attack. Section IV sets out how to counter misinformation by using a 'truth sandwich' or by reframing the issue.

Sometimes advocacy NGOs try to proactively refute claims against them, for example, that they are corrupt or wasteful. Even though this is not a direct contradiction, it is still an unhelpful approach because it repeats a damaging frame. As will be discussed below, trust in NGOs is primarily based on your audience's agreement with the cause you promote. But if an NGO tries to build trust by proactively arguing that it has safeguards and processes in place to guarantee transparency and that funds are spent correctly, this is likely to backfire. It will probably prompt your audience to question your trustworthiness by asking why an organisation needs such safeguards to begin with.[7] Furthermore, any airtime dedicated to making these unproductive arguments is a missed opportunity to talk to the public about the thing that is effective at winning over their support; namely, the causes that advocacy NGOs promote.

6 See review of research in: Schwarz, N. et al., 'Making the truth stick and the myths fade: Lessons from cognitive psychology' 2 Behavioural Science and Policy (2016), 85.

7 See research discussed in: Keating, V. & Thrandardottir, 'NGOs, trust and the accountability agenda', 19 British Journal of Politics and International Relations (2017) 134. This article points to social psychology research that shows individuals are more likely to trust each other where they cooperate without external guarantees like a contract. External guarantees, like a contract, were found to lower trust between people who cooperate. Although some research finds that integrity is important to drive trust towards CSOs, this is mostly carried out in countries where the risk of misuse of funds by CSOs is part of public awareness. e.g. Saudi Arabia and Mexico. See: Alhidari, I. et al., 'Modeling the effect of multidimensional trust on individual monetary donations to charitable organisations', 47 Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly (2018) 623; Ron, J. et al., 'Ordinary people will pay for rights. We asked them.' Open Global Rights, 15 February 2017. The analysis of Keating & Thrandardottir, that focusing communications on integrity in a situation where it is not overtly in question (for example from a scandal or smear campaign) can backfire is also borne out by research on framing in general, which shows that making a 'non-problem' salient to your audience can backfire.

B. Mistakes in the details of the message

i. Negative slogans

Slogans capture the essence of your message. Currently, advocacy NGOs' messages tend to focus on the harm they are fighting, rather than talking about the world they want to create or showing their audience why their cause delivers something important to them. As a result, the slogans they use tend to be negative: saying 'no' to something bad, or calling for something bad to 'stop'.

This can become a problem, because we need to mobilise people to take action. And to mobilise moveable middle audiences they need a vision of a better future that they're willing to fight for. It's better to have a message that is, overall, a positive one. You can do this by focusing on what your campaign will preserve or prevent your audience from losing, and you can do it by invoking your vision of what things will look like if you win. This doesn't mean campaigns can never have a negative slogan, but the message behind the slogan should be a positive one. Below are some examples.

FROM THIS	TO THIS
Stop corruption	Fund our futures
We stand against discrimination	Freedom to… / Yes to equality
Stop burning fossil fuels	We want clean air / protect our health
No more violence against women	Safety for women and girls
End pushbacks	Compassion first

ii. Using overly sophisticated language

Communicators should keep their language at a level that will be understood by their audience, who are not experts and may not necessarily have a university degree. This doesn't just apply to legal jargon - it also applies to using complicated language more generally. Research shows that when we use language that is too complicated for our audience, this frustrates

them and puts them off from taking part in the discussion.[8]

The social listening report suggests that people outside of policy, academic, civil society and donor circles do not use the term 'civic space' or 'civil society'. Moveable middle audiences tend to speak about specific substantive topics, events, protests and, sometimes, organisations. The social listening reports also suggest that the term 'activist' has negative connotations in several countries. In the three countries where we tested terms like 'civil society organisation' or 'non-governmental organisation', undecideds did not know what they meant or had not heard of them, and the terms gave them a negative feeling.[9] This guide recommends avoiding these terms when talking to a non-expert audience.

When we used the relevant commonly used broader, generic term for civil society ('non-profit organisations / associations' in Italy and Sweden, 'associations' in Croatia and 'civil society organisations' in Hungary), this brought to mind organisations involved in service provision or grassroots organisations for undecideds. However, undecideds were happy to refer to advocacy NGOs using the relevant broader term after we described the causes they work on and the tools they use.[10] In situations where you need to refer to advocacy NGOs collectively, we therefore suggest that you avoid specialist terms like 'civil society organisation' or 'non-governmental organisation'. Instead use descriptive language and be as precise as possible. For example, non-profit organisations / associations that work on… / that are trying to change… / that are drawing attention to… .

Below are some further examples of how to simplify language advocacy NGOs tend to use.

8 See Schulman, H., et al., 'The effects of jargon on processing fluency, self-perceptions, and scientific engagement', Journal of Language and Social Psychology (2020); Oppenheimer, D., 'Consequences of erudite vernacular ut ilised irrespective of necessity: Problems with using long words needlessly', Applied Cognitive Psychology (2006).

9 Except in Hungary, where the generic term for civil society (civil szervezet) broadly conceived translates as 'civil society organisation'.

10 Depending on the country, we described advocacy NGOs using the broader commonly used term for civil society as a whole, such as 'non-profit associations / organisations' in Sweden. Then we further specified that they 'work on issues like migration, equality between men and women, climate change, equality for LGBTQ Italians, and fighting corruption in politics and government', gave examples of marches and protests as tools they used and explained how they make government responsive and accountable to ordinary people.

FROM THIS	***TO THIS***
SLAPPs.	Bogus lawsuits designed to stop civil society organisations helping ordinary people come together to protect e.g. their clean water / air, public funds from corruption.
We need transparency.	Our elected representatives should show / tell / explain how they make decisions (so that citizens know what is going on and can give their opinion).
Integration measures.	We should support people who come here for work or for safety to learn our language and culture and get a job so they can support their families and rebuild their lives.
Inclusion.	All of us, whether we have a disability or not, should have the same chance to live a good life.
Public consultation.	Citizens want to have a say over decisions that affect them.
Violation.	Broke the law.
Right to education / health care.	A good school for our children; we should be able to see a doctor and get treatment when we're sick.
Everyone has a right to participate in a democracy.	The only way for democracy to work for all of us is if it includes all of us. That's why every person has an equal vote in elections.
Accessibility.	Everyone should be able to get to and move around the places they need to be, whether it's the town hall, the place we work or a supermarket.

iii. Educational approaches

Campaigners sometimes try to educate audiences into agreeing with them. This tends to involve breaking down complicated concepts or explaining legal texts or their origins. Sometimes this is combined with myth-busting. The problem with educational approaches is that it tends to hide from the audience what the causes advocacy NGOs deliver for them that they find important.

Although formal human rights education has been shown to make students more supportive of human rights, advocacy NGOs are not communicating in an educational setting. We cannot force our audience to absorb hours of our materials. In a campaign context, educational content is a useful tool for helping the base or journalists deepen their knowledge. But it is not an appropriate tool for shifting opinions among the moveable middle.

This isn't to say that campaigners cannot give the moveable middle new information and perspectives. But they should only do this to the extent that it's necessary for the audience to understand why the cause being promoted is important. For example, imagine a situation where an environmental NGO wants to persuade their audience to oppose an industrial development that will harm local nature. And the NGO knows that their audience is worried about extreme weather, so campaigners want to argue that the development should be opposed because it will make extreme weather events more severe. But the NGO also knows that this audience does not understand that local forests and marshlands provide protection against floods and heatwaves. For this argument to work with that audience, campaigners would therefore need to explain to them how nature mitigates the impact of extreme weather locally.

Otherwise, as a general rule, campaigners should focus on explaining what the right or principle they're talking about delivers to the audience, rather than trying to break down the content. Below are examples of how to talk about judicial independence and the rule of law or SLAPPs.

FROM THIS	***TO THIS***
An independent judiciary is a requirement of the rule of law that protects against corruption.	Most of us want our leaders to fund the schools, hospitals, roads and buses our communities rely on. To make that happen, judges check that our representatives are following the rules and not pocketing our resources. Judges need to be independent from politicians so they can do their job without fear or favour.

FROM THIS	***TO THIS***
An independent judiciary is an element of the rule of law that ensures citizens' rights and freedoms are protected.	When judges owe their jobs to politicians, helping them pass their dangerous laws come first, and protecting our rights, like abortion care or having clean air and water, comes second.
SLAPPs are Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation designed to silence critical voices like activists or journalists by harassing them and draining their resources with baseless lawsuits.	Focus instead on the cause you are promoting and then explain SLAPPS as a problem that stops us delivering something we find important. e.g. All of us want air that's safe to breathe and water that's clean to drink, especially for our children and older relatives whose health is most at risk from pollution. But company x has been secretly leaking poisonous chemicals into the water and air. And now they are trying to stop journalists from telling the public by using bogus lawsuits to harass and bankrupt them.

IV. Sample messaging and creative assets

Section IV explains how to structure a persuasive message and gives examples of how to execute this, including through creative content, before covering how to respond to misinformation.

A. The structure of a persuasive message

Research and practice on public attitude change show that there are several common barriers that can prevent the audience from lending their support. These include: not seeing how the cause being promoted delivers something that they find important; having an inaccurate understanding of why the problem is happening (leading them to support the wrong solutions); not having a vision to inspire them to action; and thinking that change is too difficult to achieve (referred to as fatalism).

Campaigners can overcome these barriers by developing messages that follow a particular structure in a particular order. This type of three or four part message is referred to here as a 'narrative':

1) Values statement: tell your audience how the cause you're advancing delivers something that they find important for themselves, people they care about or people whom they consider to be like them.

Advocacy NGOs can speak about the causes they advance in two ways: the substantive topic they're working on and their structural role in society; more specifically they fact that they help to bring people together to make their voices heard and make positive change in society. This section will offer examples of how to communicate both of these dimensions.

2) Explain the problem: show your audience that the things they care about are at risk or aren't being delivered. Set out who or what is causing the problem. If executing a 'strategic' version of a narrative or a 'truth sandwich', you should also point out the motive behind the person causing the harm. This will be explained further below.

This means pointing out how the laws or policies you are contesting will mean that the audience or people they consider to be 'like them' will be harmed, or how values your audience thinks are important (like the need to treat people with compassion and dignity or the ability to join with others to have a say over decisions affecting them) will be threatened.

3) Explain the vision your solution delivers: tell your audience what the world will look like if your solution is put into practice. This is often a call-back to the substance of the values statement. Do

name your solution, but don't dwell on the policy details.

4) Remind your audience that change is possible by pointing to past positive social changes, and tell your audience what they can do to show their support for your solution.

When people take action to support a cause, it helps create a 'social identity' for them, which in turn makes them more likely to remain engaged and take further action in future.[11] This is important if campaigners are trying to expand their base of supporters to mobilise in future campaigns. A call to action can be something small, like asking the audience to share or respond to social media content. Research also shows that even when the audience agrees with you, they can still be reluctant to do things you ask of them because they have a sense of fatalism and feel that 'nothing changes'. Pointing to past examples of positive social change can help overcome this.[12]

In practice, reminders of past successes can get merged into the explanation of the solution, because it makes the message less repetitive. Following these three or four steps in the order given has been shown to be the most effective structure for a message that shifts your audience's attitudes towards your position and mobilises them to take action to show their support for your cause.

The sample narratives refer to examples of past successes that can be inserted depending on the cultural context. As noted above, in the short term, these should be examples of past successes in which either civil society played a significant role or were the result of ordinary people coming together. In the long-term campaigners should aim to popularise knowledge of the successes of advocacy NGOs and link these to popular involvement. By way of inspiration, examples of past successes could include things like the the transition to democracy, legal protections for workers, the creation of the welfare state or specific public elements of it like paid holidays or parental leave, the right to vote for women, joining the EU, the legalisation of divorce, abortion or marriage equality, successful mass mobilisations on topics like anti-corruption, protections for iconic areas of natural beauty, support by civil society during COVID, and natural disasters like floods, heatwaves and earthquakes.

11 See e.g., Bamberg, S. et al., 'Environmental protection through societal change: What psychology knows about collective climate action - and what it needs to find out', in Psychology and Climate Change (2018).

12 For an example of how fatalism affects your audience see: NEON, NEF, Frameworks Institute & PIRC, 'Framing the economy: How to win the case for a better system', (2018).

B. How to use the four-part narrative structure

Follow the four-part structure in full as often as you can. Some formats make it possible to use a full narrative, or allow you to add to the narrative with more detail, such as statistics, storytelling elements, or hooks for the media. For example, press releases, speeches, talking points for an interview, or a video script.

Of course, it won't always be appropriate or possible to deliver the narrative in full every time. Sometimes you will be using communication formats with limited space. In this situation, it's fine to use only part of your narrative. Choose which part of the narrative to focus on according to what you think your audience needs to hear the most. For example, our analysis of undecideds' attitudes and message testing shows that it's very important to dedicate attention to dissolving the negative frames about migrants that exist. Sometimes, the format you have available only allows you to summarise the essence of your narrative, such as when you develop a campaign slogan and image or hashtags.

Look at your campaign materials in the round and ask: are there enough products carrying the whole narrative for my audience to see it; do my communications products either remind my audience of the overall message or help them understand it? And don't forget, you don't need to deliver all your message using words: you can represent elements of it through images and videos. Work with a creative person or agency who has some experience of narrative change work and has worked on social justice-related causes with non-profit organisations to convert your narrative into creative assets for campaigning. Examples are included below for inspiration.

C. Messaging considerations affecting campaign strategy

Sub-section D will set out the sample messages recommended by the guide. Sub-section C will first set out how messaging considerations might affect the strategy of a campaign to increase public support for advocacy NGOs. Message testing in the focus groups suggests that campaigners should use the 'we decide' narrative as an overarching narrative, but not by itself. To be effective, the 'we decide' narrative needs to be used in combination with other messaging. The 'we decide' narrative builds support for advocacy NGOs by pointing to a) the causes that they promote and b) the tools that they use to bring people together to make their voices heard. However, there are two barriers that prevent the narrative from currently resonating with undecideds.

- First, undecideds know very little about the causes that advocacy NGOs work on. There isn't enough space in the 'we decide' narrative to unpack what these causes deliver for our audience. Undecideds tend to be 'undecided' not just about advocacy NGOs but also the causes they work on. Put otherwise, you can't persuade undecideds that advocacy NGOs deserve their support by just listing progressive causes

when they have mixed or only mildly positive feelings about some of these causes.

To overcome this barrier, campaigners need to reach undecideds with messaging that helps them realise that the causes advocacy NGOs promote are important to them. To do this, campaigners might choose to run campaigns that focus on unpacking one or more progressive causes, which will in turn increase support for advocacy NGOs working on those issues. For example, a coalition of advocacy NGOs might collectively decide on a sequence of campaigns covering specific topics chosen on the basis of which causes attract the most attacks by their opponents. Sub-section D ii sets out examples of messaging for inspiration.

- Second, undecideds tend to be a) fatalistic (i.e. do not think that people like them can make a difference) and are either unaware or do not have at the forefront of their minds that civil society organisations in general, and advocacy NGOs in particular, give people like them a way of uniting to pursue a cause and that b) this has allowed them to achieve tangible successes.

  Campaigners probably don't need a separate campaign to address this barrier - it could be done through dedicated creative materials as part of a campaign that executes either the overarching 'we decide' narrative, or a campaign that focuses on unpacking specific progressive causes. To be clear, overcoming this barrier requires two kinds of related messaging. One is showing our audience that advocacy NGOs bring people together around a particular cause. The other is showing our audience past successes achieved by civil society organisations more generally, though examples attributable to advocacy NGOs would also be useful. Undecideds were sometimes unaware of the examples of past successes they were given, which affected how well they reacted to the message.

Assuming that advocacy NGOs can mount campaigns that reach undecideds with the right messaging about specific progressive topics, this would open the way for them to use the more general 'we decide' narrative in the longer-term.

We are confident that these messaging approaches will win over undecideds. In message testing in the focus groups, participants became more positive and enthusiastic about and interested in advocacy NGOs when they were exposed to messaging that showed them how civil society organisations bring ordinary citizens together around common causes, pointed them to examples of past successes and gave them messaging about specific progressive causes using the persuasive messaging approach set out in this guide (on the topics of migration, access to citizenship and local environmental protection).

How messaging on specific progressive causes stimulates support for the NGOs that promote them

Campaigners might ask why the guide suggests talking about the causes that advocacy NGOs promote as a way of improving attitudes towards the organisations that promote them. Research shows that trust in NGOs is based on how much a person supports the cause that organisation is promoting.[13] *This finding was confirmed by the focus groups in all four countries where they were carried out. Further, people who trust NGOs are more likely to support them and the causes they promote. For example, by donating, volunteering, defending them from criticism, participating in protests and campaigns, or repeating their messages to others.*[14]

13 When an individual believes that an organisation shares their values, they are more likely to trust that organisation: Keating, V. & Thrandardottir, 'NGOs, trust and the accountability agenda', 19 British Journal of Politics and International Relations (2017) 134. Some researchers suggest that shared values are the single most important driver of trust: Schultz, C. et al., 'When reputation influences trust in nonprofit organisations. The role of value attachment as moderator', 22 Corporate Reputation Review (2019) 159; Siegrist, M. et al., 'Salient value similarity, social trust, and risk/benefit perception', 20 Risk Analysis (2000) 353. This is supported by research from other disciplines, which shows that people who support progressive causes in general, people who are more likely to trust progressive NGOs and people who show most support for progressive the NGOs are people who place greater emphasis on the values that underpin progressive attitudes; that is, universalism, benevolence and self-direction. See: Equally Ours et al., 'Building bridges: Connecting with values to reframe and build support for human rights', 2018; Schwartz, S. et al., 'Basic personal values underlie and give coherence to political values: A cross national study in 15 countries', 36 Political Behaviour (2014) 899; Davis, J. et al., 'In INGOs we trust? How individual determinants and the framing of INGOs influences public trust', 30 Development in Practice (2020) 809; Hudson, J. et al., 'Not one, but many "publics": public engagement with global development in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States', 30 Development in Practice (2020) 795; Crompton, T. et al., 'No cause is an island: How people are influenced by values regardless of the cause', 2014. See further the review of research contained in the Annex to Butler, I., 'How to talk about civic space: A guide for progressive civil society facing smear campaigns', Civil Liberties Union for Europe, 2021.

14 Schultz, C. et al., 'When reputation influences trust in nonprofit organisations. The role of value attachment as moderator', 22 Corporate Reputation Review (2019) 159; Alhidari, I. et al., 'Modeling the effect of multidimensional trust on individual monetary donations to charitable organisations', 47 Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly (2018) 623.

D. Sample messaging

The 'we decide' narrative has a 'gentle' and a 'strategic' version. The 'strategic' version of the narrative differs in the way that it explains the problem by pointing out the malign ulterior motive of our opponents in spreading misinformation, either about advocacy NGOs, the causes they promote or the groups they protect. In particular, by pointing out that attacks against NGOs or certain groups are part of a strategy to gain or maintain political power by deflecting blame or unfavourable attention away from the politicians making the attack. Campaigners may feel uneasy calling out their opponents so explicitly. If so, you can always use the 'gentle' version.

A 'strategic' version of a narrative was tested in Sweden and in Croatia. In Sweden, focus group participants reacted negatively, while in Croatia, where slightly gentler language was used, participants reacted with approval. The lesson to take from this is not that gentler language is always needed, but this might be the case. When the 'strategic' version of a narrative has been tested in other countries, including in Europe, using methods other than focus groups (such as randomised controlled trials), it has proven effective.[15] It's possible that the negative reaction in Sweden may have been avoided with softer language. But it's also likely that the message provoked backlash because of the method used to test the message in the focus group, rather than the message itself.

Campaigners should remember that in some countries, undecideds react badly to words and phrases that said citizens can join together to 'demand', 'force', or 'make' politicians take action on something. But in some countries, this is met with approval. Take this into account and adapt the narratives accordingly.

The sample narratives do not include a call to action, since this is something specific to a given campaign. The narratives can be adapted to respond to specific proposals for restrictive measures by adjusting the second part (the explanation of the problem) to specify the measure and the harm it's causing.

i. The 'we decide' narrative

This narrative explains how advocacy NGOs offer ordinary people tools to join together so that they have the power to demand that their leaders deliver things that they consider important, using examples of human rights-related causes that advocacy NGOs promote. Campaigners can adapt the narratives to include different examples of causes that advocacy NGOs promote or include a smaller number of examples.

15 This kind of narrative which exposes how our opponents use racism, transphobia or attacks on other groups or organisations as a strategy was developed and tested by Anat Shenker Osorio, and is also known as the 'race-class narrative'.

We decide - gentle

We all want leaders who deliver the things we rely on, whether it's making sure that we have enough teachers and doctors to care for us and educate our children or that we can afford to support our families and put food on the table, protecting us from the damage caused by climate change or making sure we all have the same opportunities regardless of who we love or our genders.

But today, many of us are going through hard times. We face rising costs for food, energy and housing, our hospitals are struggling, and wages haven't increased enough. Our homes and health are threatened by extreme weather, and some of us still aren't treated fairly just because of who we are. Sometimes it feels like our leaders aren't interested in solving our problems.

That's what makes non-profit associations so important. We bring people together so we can show our support for causes that matter to us, whether it's with petitions, protests, or court cases. In the past, we [insert past success]. When citizens speak with one voice, we can ask our leaders to listen to our concerns / we can demand that our leaders deliver the things all of us need to thrive.

(+Call to action)

We decide - strategic

Campaigners can decide to use the strategic, rather than the gentle, version of the narrative either in direct response to attacks against them, or if you consider that there is a more general climate of hostility towards advocacy NGOs. The strategic version functions to dissolve the misinformation directed at you by causing your audience to question the credibility of your opponent, by pointing to their hidden, malign motives. A later section below concerning 'truth sandwiches' will elaborate on this further. Campaigners are offered softer versions of the problem statement as well as a version with more direct language, which is along the lines of 'strategic' narratives that have been tested and shown to be effective in different countries.

We all want leaders who deliver the things we rely on, whether it's making sure that we have enough teachers and doctors to care for us and educate our children or that we can afford to support our families and put food on the table, protecting us from the damage caused by climate change or making sure we all have the same opportunities regardless of who we love or our genders. That's what makes civil society organisations so important. We bring people together through petitions, protests, or court cases so that ordinary citizens can draw the attention of our leaders to things we find important.

But today a handful of politicians…

[Examples of softer language]

... are attacking us and the work we do as a way to win over voters / because they don't want us to criticise their policies / because we hold them accountable and demand that they serve the public interest. They talk about us so that people don't talk about them.

[Examples of more direct language]

... attack us when we call them out for not doing their jobs properly. Like when they fail to fix our schools and hospitals or fail to protect our lakes and beaches from private developers. /

… spread lies about organisations like ours to distract us from the fact that they haven't solved the things we're worried about. Like our crumbling schools and hospitals and high food, housing and energy prices. /

… attack organisations like ours as a way of firing up their supporters to come out and vote for them. We reject their attempts to turn us against each other.

We will keep doing our jobs. In the past, we [insert past successes]. Today, we will continue to bring citizens together to talk to our leaders about their concerns / to force our leaders to make life better for all of us.

As explained above, if campaigners use the 'we decide' narrative, it's important to accompany this with other lines of messaging:

- To help undecideds appreciate the importance to them of progressive causes, campaigners need to deploy messaging that unpacks specific progressive causes that you have chosen as examples in the first paragraph of your narrative. This will be dealt with in sub-section C. ii.

- To help undecideds recognise that advocacy NGOs allow ordinary people to join their voices, campaigners need to deploy messaging - particularly through creative materials - that shows advocacy NGOs bringing ordinary people together around a cause. This will be covered in sub-section C. iii.

- To address fatalism, campaigners need to deploy messaging that highlights examples of past successes by civil society organisations more generally and / or advocacy NGOs more particularly. This will also be covered in sub-section C. iii.

As noted above, it may make more sense for campaigners to begin with a series of campaigns on chosen progressive topics and run a campaign with the 'we decide' narrative later, once undecideds have been exposed to messaging that helps them appreciate the importance

of progressive causes, recognise that advocacy NGOs bring people together around those causes and recognise that when citizens work together they can achieve positive social change.

ii. Messaging on specific progressive causes

As noted, trust in NGOs is largely based on whether the audience agrees with the cause being promoted. However, as set out in Section III, currently, advocacy NGOs message in a way that does not get across to their audience how the causes they promote align with their audience's values or deliver something that they find important. In message testing during the focus groups, we found that after being shown messages and creative content on specific progressive causes, participants became more positive and enthusiastic about the NGOs working on that topic.

This sub-section will set out sample messaging on four topics: migration, local environmental protection, access to abortion and marriage equality. Messaging suggested below on migration is based on messages tested in the Swedish and Croatian focus groups carried out as part of the same project (and to a lesser extent, the Italian focus groups in relation to access to citizenship). Messaging suggested on local environmental protection is based on messages tested in Hungarian focus groups. Messaging on the other two topics is drawn from campaigns on those topics from other countries. We are confident that the suggested messaging is much more effective than messaging currently used by advocacy NGOs, but suggest that campaigners use any methods available to them to test their effectiveness.[16] The messaging here is not set out in great depth. Rather, campaigners are referred to additional resources for more detailed guidance.

a) Migration

Traditionally, NGO messaging promoting the right to asylum focuses on showing the harm suffered by asylum seekers (such as violent pushbacks or harsh detention conditions) and tends to argue that the audience should support the right to asylum because it is legally protected under European or International Law. These arguments proved ineffective and counter-productive when tested in the Croatian focus group.

What proved effective in the Swedish and Croatian focus groups were two basic moral arguments, which have also been shown to be effective in other countries in this topic: the 'people move' narrative and the 'golden rule' narrative. The 'golden rule' was also tested as a written message in Italian focus groups, but adapted for the topic of access to citizenship. The 'golden rule' and 'people move' narratives were developed and tested by Anat Shenker Osorio and have been used with success in several countries. These narratives should be

16 For guidance see: Public Interest Research Centre, 'Howon to test your communications', 2018.

accompanied by messaging to stimulate empathy between your audience and asylum seekers (so that the audience recognises them as 'people like me' who deserve humane treatment) and messaging to dissolve a negative frame of people who migrate as unable or unwilling to integrate and adopt the cultural values of the receiving country.

Below is an example of the 'golden rule' narrative executed as a social media post and tested in Sweden:

Text on visual: 'When I lost my home in the fighting, I fled. I hope to rebuild my life in Sweden and sleep without fear.'

Social media caption text:' Most of us strive to treat others the way we'd want to be treated. If any one of us had to move because we feared for our lives, we'd like to know others would help us start over. Our asylum system should reflect our values.'

Below is an example of the 'golden rule' narrative executed as a social media post and tested in Croatia:

Text on visual: 'These parents will do anything for their children. Just like us' ;

Social media caption text: 'Most of us strive to treat others the way we'd want to be treated. In the past, Croatians who feared for their lives and their families found safety and the hope for a better life in other countries. Today, it's right that we do the same for people who risk everything to escape danger.'

Below is an example of the 'people move' narrative executed as a social media post and tested in Croatia:

Text on visual: 'Samane wants her children to be safe. Just like us' ;

Social media caption text: 'Most of us will do whatever it takes to keep our families safe and give them a better life. We work, sacrifice, and even pack our lives into suitcases to give our children a future. It's right that we welcome people who have risked everything to escape danger and support them to rebuild their lives.'

Here is a link to a video tested in the Swedish focus groups aimed at dissolving the negative frame of migrants as not contributing or integrating into Swedish society.

Here is a link to a video tested in the Croatian focus groups that is an example of how to dissolve negative stereotypes that people with a migration background are unable or unwilling to integrate.

For sample narratives on the topic of migration and further examples of creative materials, please refer to the guide 'Messaging for fair and humane migration policies in Sweden' and 'Messaging for fair and humane migration policies in Croatia'. Campaigners can also refer to the messaging guide 'Messaging to promote support for reform of citizenship rules in Italy', for sample narratives and creative products on the related topic of access to citizenship.

b) Environmental protection

Traditionally, NGO messaging promoting environmental protection takes on one of two forms.

- Campaigners emphasise the harms that they are fighting, like rising temperatures, sea levels and pollution and call on their audience to take urgent action. This is typically accompanied by imagery of environmental destruction like floods, fires, destroyed forests and polluted land, air and water.

and / or

- Campaigners point to nature as something the audience should want to protect for its own sake simply because it is beautiful, innocent, vulnerable and cannot protect itself. This is typically

accompanied by imagery of breathtaking landscapes or wildlife.

Messaging that is focused on the harm campaigners are fighting tends not to be effective with audiences outside supporters for a number of reasons. First, it makes the audience feel like the problem is too big to solve. Second, it makes the audience feel scared, which causes them to want to turn away from, rather than engage with, the message. We also found in the Hungarian focus groups that messaging that focuses on protecting nature for nature's sake, while effective, was less compelling than messaging that gave additional reasons for protecting nature.

The Hungarian focus groups were looking specifically at messaging that would stimulate undecideds to want to protect nature in their local area against damaging industrial or commercial developments - rather than environmental protection more generally. We found several arguments to be effective in making the audience want to protect nature, such as, because:

- it allows children and older generations to bond by exploring together and passing on their knowledge;
- it allows us to relax and spend quality family time together;
- it's part of our natural heritage that we have a moral duty to pass on to future generations;
- it protects us from extreme weather by storing water and soaking up pollutants.

Below is a collection of sample social media posts that performed well with undecideds to give campaigners a sense of how to message on environmental protection more effectively.

English translation: 'Wildlife every generation can still experience';

Social media caption text: 'Of all the things we want to leave our children and future generations, the natural beauty we explored and discovered when we were children with our own parents and grandparents may be the most important.'[17]

17 The social media caption text has been adjusted based on insights from focus group testing.

English translation: 'A countryside families can still enjoy';

Social media caption text: 'For many of us, natural beauty is our oldest form of heritage and a source of pride. It's been handed down from past generations for us to enjoy today and protect for our children in the future.'

English translation: 'A clean Danube we can swim in';

Social media caption text: 'Most of us want to protect nature in our area because it's where we relax and recharge our batteries with family and friends. It's where some of our most precious memories are made.'

English translation: 'Protect the nature that protects us from summer heat!';

Social media caption text: 'By storing water, absorbing pollutants and cleaning the air, lakes, rivers, forests, swamps and the animals that live in them can dial down the impact of extreme heat, storms and drought.'

Here is a link to a video that also makes the argument that we should protect nature because it protects us from extreme weather.[18]

For full sample narratives and further examples of creative materials, see the English version of the 'Messaging guide for community activists protecting the local environment from polluting projects'.

c) Marriage equality

Traditional NGO messaging on the topic of marriage equality has tended to argue that lesbian and gay couples should have the right to marry because everyone should have equal rights on principle, while pointing to the harm this unequal treatment causes, such as the lack of 'next of kin' rights in relation to medical treatment, social security, inheritance or adoption.

This messaging has tended to be ineffective for at least three reasons. First, because people outside of our supporters tend to have a frame of marriage that involves two people of the opposite gender. Second, because of a negative frame of people who are lesbian or gay as uninterested or incapable of long-term monogamy and wanting to challenge rather than join traditional institutions like marriage. Third, because most people tend to think that they have no personal connection to the issue.

Campaigns that were successful in building public support for marriage equality in the USA, Ireland and Australia reframed marriage and dissolved negative stereotypes of lesbian and gay people. Marriage was reframed as a relationship of mutual trust, respect and support where gender became irrelevant. Campaigns used storytelling to show lesbian and gay couples in long-term relationships alongside stories of heterosexual couples to emphasise that there was little difference between them and to dissolve negative stereotypes. And the argument shifted away from the administrative drawbacks or the abstract right to equality to one of fairness and freedom. Campaigners argued that we all share the same human experience (falling in love) and desire (to make a long-term commitment) and that it's unfair to deprive people of the freedom to enter marriage just because of their gender.

Campaigners' choice of messengers was also important. Centre-right religious and political figures spoke publicly of how they had shifted their position after careful consideration as a way of giving more conservative audiences permission to change their minds. And in addition to lesbian and gay people themselves, campaigns used story-telling that involved friends, colleagues and family members talking about how they wanted their loved ones to be able to have access to marriage because of the joy it had brought them, which also emphasised to

18 English translation: 'Nature protects us. From extreme heat and floods. Thanks to a new law, however, it is becoming easier to cut down our forests. This way, we could lose the wonders of nature which protect us. Join us and let's work together for the environment!'

the audience how they were connected to the issue through friends, colleagues or children who might not know yet if they were lesbian or gay.

For a review of marriage equality campaigns from around the world, see here. Examples of creative content from the Australian campaign can be found here. A valuable resource of creative content from campaigns in the USA can be found here.

Since none of these resources set out sample narratives as such, below is an example of what a narrative for a marriage equality campaign might look like:

> *All of us have fallen in love. When we find someone special, many of us want to make a long-term commitment to each other through marriage.*
>
> *But today, our out-dated laws deny some of us the freedom to commit to the person we love just because of who we are attracted to.*
>
> *Just like in the past when we [insert past success], we can modernise our laws, so all of us can be free to commit to the person we love, whether it's someone of the same or the opposite gender.*
>
> [+ call to action]

d) Access to abortion

Traditionally, NGO messaging promoting access to abortion has focused on the idea of personal autonomy, arguing that a woman should have control over her own body and the decision whether and when to have a family should be hers. This argument has tended to fail outside our supporters for a number of reasons. First, because people outside our base often have a negative frame of women who have an abortion as irresponsible or promiscuous, and therefore, view them as being undeserving. Second, because most people don't feel directly connected to the issue. Third, because of concern for unborn children. Fourth, because the language of 'choice' ('my body my choice') suggests that people who argue for abortion view the act as trivial or whimsical (in the way one might 'choose' which colour socks to wear or what flavour of ice cream to have today).

Campaigns that were successful in building public support for access to abortion in Ireland and Argentina, as well as creative materials tested in the USA, followed a similar approach to that used by the marriage equality movement. Abortion was reframed as a painful decision facing women in impossible situations, such as health problems threatening the mother or child, financial constraints that would prevent the family from supporting another child, or life situations where people are not in an environment or stage in their lives when they can bring up a child. Campaigners did not address directly the question of personal autonomy or moral correctness of abortion, but rather used as a starting point the reality that abortions happen and the choice is between treating

women who need them with compassion and giving them safe treatment, or allowing them to put their lives at risk with unsafe procedures. This approach acknowledges the concerns the audience might have while redirecting them to the need to provide women with care when they need it.

Campaigners' choice of messengers was also important. In addition to women with experience of abortion themselves, campaigns used story-telling that involved friends, colleagues and family members talking about how they wanted the women in their lives to have access to safe abortion care if they should ever need it. This helped to emphasise to the audience how they were potentially connected to the issue through friends, colleagues or their own children in the future. In Argentina, campaigners relied heavily on storytelling by doctors based in provincial areas who had treated women with serious injuries resulting from clandestine abortions since they were particularly trusted as messengers by moveable middle audiences outside urban areas.

Campaigners can find videos carrying these messages here, here and here, as well as a case study on the abortion campaign in Argentina and Ireland, which includes discussion of the messaging used.

iii. Examples of how to connect messaging on progressive causes to the NGOs that promote them

Below are two examples of how campaigners could connect progressive causes they're explaining with the NGOs that promote them within the same narrative.

Example of environmental protection

We all want our families to be healthy and feel safe in our homes.

Today, extreme weather like floods, forest fires and extreme heat are already causing health problems like strokes or breathing problems, damaging our homes, cutting off power and threatening our food supply.

A healthy environment soaks up pollutants and acts as a buffer against extreme weather like flooding and drought. But instead of protecting the nature that keeps us safe, the government is authorising projects that pollute and destroy our environment.

We can make a different choice. Non-profit organisations like ours bring ordinary citizens like you together, so we can ask politicians to listen to our concerns. We know what we can achieve when we unify, like when [insert past success]. Today, when we join our voices, we can make our leaders aware of how important we think it is to protect the nature that protects us and keep our health and homes safe.

[+ call to action]

Example of the right to asylum

Most of us strive to treat others the way we'd want to be treated. If any one of us had to move because we feared for our lives or for our families, we'd like to know others would help us rebuild our lives and quickly integrate into our communities.

But our leaders have made it almost impossible for people looking for safety to come here without risking everything. And for those who make it, our government refuses to give them the support they need to make a new start and contribute to our communities.

It doesn't have to be this way. Civil society organisations like ours bring ordinary citizens like you together so we can demand that politicians do better, and honour our values. We know what we can achieve when we unify, like when [insert past success]. Today, by joining our voices, we can call on our leaders to welcome people who come here for safety and support them to rebuild their lives and contribute to our communities.

[+call to action]

iii. Addressing fatalism and highlighting the tools NGOs offer for collective action

As discussed, as well as unpacking particular progressive causes for your audience, you should also dedicate messaging to addressing fatalism and to highlight the tools that advocacy NGOs offer for collective action.

Campaigners should think of addressing fatalism as a separate issue from highlighting how NGOs bring people together to achieve change. Having said this, it's possible to do both at the same time, and the reason they are dealt with together here is because we tested these two elements together as part of a single narrative or creative product in the focus groups.

The insights in this subsection derive from two narratives that were tested in all four countries, which are ultimately not included in the guide. Both narratives were tested either through creative assets (such as a social media post or video) or as a written message. While neither narrative had the impact we wanted on the audience's attitudes towards advocacy NGOs (and so are not part of the messaging recommended here), the testing did deliver two important insights. First, it showed us that undecideds react positively to seeing examples of how civil society organisations bring people together around a common cause. Second, it confirmed that being reminded of past successes helps undecideds overcome fatalism. These findings were true in all four EU countries where we tested messages and creative content about civic space.

In the short-term, when your objective is to address fatalism, there's no need to confine

yourself to giving examples of past successes from advocacy NGOs. Of course, if you can point to these, it will probably help cement a frame of advocacy NGOs as effective at doing good things, which is positive. And in the long-term, as outlined above, campaigners should build awareness among the public of these examples. But in the short-term, the main thing you're doing when addressing fatalism is helping your audience overcome the feeling that they are powerless and therefore there's no point getting involved in your cause.

If campaigners choose to highlight examples of past successes that are specifically due to advocacy NGOs, you should consider using storytelling as a technique. For example, having people who have been helped by laws, policies or court decisions act as messengers to talk about the positive impact on their lives. These could be 'ordinary' people e.g. locals who are able to enjoy public beaches saved from property speculators. Or it could be people from respected professions, e.g. doctors or teachers able to provide a better service because of increased resources. Or it could be service-delivery or grassroots civil society organisations whose work has been helped by advocacy NGOs e.g. local environmental groups who have received legal support from an advocacy NGO to protect local nature against developers.

When your objective is to highlight to people how advocacy NGOs bring people together, then you should try to stick to showing examples of people taking action together as part of the work of advocacy NGOs.

Below are links to examples of creative products tested in focus groups, with an explanation of which elements could serve as inspiration either to address fatalism or to highlight how advocacy NGOs bring people together.

This video, tested in the Croatian focus groups, implements a narrative not ultimately included in this guide. Although the video performed very well in focus groups, it mainly reinforced the audience's already positive opinions of service and grassroots NGOs, rather than causing them to realise that they should also support advocacy NGOs because of the similarity in the nature of their causes. Having said this, the video can serve as inspiration for campaigners. The images in the video showing people working together after natural disasters are examples that could be used to address fatalism. And the imagery of protestors protecting Dubrovnik against property developers serves as an example of advocacy NGOs bringing people together.

This video, tested in Hungarian focus groups, implements a different narrative also not ultimately included in this guide.[19] It is included

19 English translation: 'Hungarian history is full of moments when civil courage moved the country forward. What are you proud of from the past? Today we face new challenges. But just as in the past, there are those who stand up for the interests of us all. Whether they are fighting for healthier hospitals, better education for young people, or a more just Hungary, advocacy civil society organizations continue to represent values that we can all be proud of. Let's be the engine of change—together!'

here to show how historical examples of past successes can be executed in a creative format as a way of addressing fatalism. In addition, the more contemporary examples of different kinds of protest can provide inspiration for how to visualise the way advocacy NGOs bring people together around a cause.

In addition, this video also tested in Hungarian focus groups is an example of how to talk about a specific cause (in this case, environmental protection) while also highlighting how advocacy NGOs can bring people together in order to advance that cause.[20] This shows how campaigners can both build support for particular progressive causes while also highlighting the tools advocacy NGOs offer to bring ordinary people together to advance them in a single short video.

Campaigners should also be aware that undecideds react much more enthusiastically when they see 'ordinary' people represented in protests and other forms of collective action - rather than organisations, institutions or people they might identify as typical activists. This is probably because they consider these people to be 'like them' and therefore they find it more empowering.

E. Messaging for responding to misinformation

As discussed, communicators should generally avoid directly contradicting their opponent's messages, even if this is to correct misinformation. To contradict a claim, you need to repeat it, and repetition makes information stick in the brain. To neutralise your opponent's messaging, you can either reframe the topic on which you're being attacked, or use a 'truth sandwich'. A truth sandwich reframes the topic, but it has an additional layer, which is to expose your opponent's ulterior motives in using misinformation. A truth sandwich follows the same structure as a normal narrative or message. The main difference is that when explaining the problem, you point out that your opponent is attacking you as part of a strategy to serve a malign agenda - which is the same as in the 'strategic' version of the 'we decide' narrative. As a reminder, this is the structure to follow:

1. Values: rather than directly contradicting your opponents, begin by reminding your audience why they find the cause you are promoting important. Instead of directing attention to your opponents' message and letting them set the agenda, this allows you to bring your own cause back into focus.

20 English translation: 'Nature protects us. From extreme heat and floods. Thanks to a new law, however, it is becoming easier to cut down our forests. This way, we could lose the wonders of nature which protect us. Join us and let's work together for the environment!'

2. Explain the problem: expose your opponents' malign agenda; why are they attacking your organisation, the causes you promote or the groups you work with? Allude to your opponent's lies but don't repeat them.

3. Your vision and solution: return to the cause you are promoting by talking about how we can bring the situation into line with the values you outlined in the first step.

4. If this is part of a campaign, remind your audience of past successes and ask them to do something to show their support.

Reframing works by a) avoiding repeating the misinformation and b) giving your audience your alternative frame as a different way of understanding the issue. In a 'truth sandwich', the audience is, in addition, c) also prompted to let go of the misinformation by the revelation that the source of that misinformation is not trustworthy. In the context of an interview or a debate, you may respond to misinformation with a truth sandwich, and then use a short reframe to rebut a follow-up attack. In the context of an interview or debate, it may be impossible to avoid engaging completely with the substance of the initial attack while maintaining credibility. In this case, you should deal with the substantive issue as briefly as possible before reverting to talking about the cause you are promoting and, if appropriate, pointing out why you are being attacked.

Below are some examples of what (longer) truth sandwiches can look like, as well as (shorter) reframes in response to common attacks or misinformation relating to advocacy NGOs. Because a truth sandwich does not respond directly to specific attacks or misinformation, it can be repurposed to respond to different kinds of attacks. The main difference between different truth sandwiches is the explanation of the motivation behind the attacks. Shorter reframes may need to be adapted more closely to the original attack.

Example 1: truth sandwich that can work as a response to a range of attacks (e.g. accusations of political bias, foreign influence, corruption or wasting public funds) where the motivation of your opponents is to deflect attention from their failure to address people's material problems.

Whatever our party, most of us want our elected representatives to deliver the things we need to thrive: jobs that pay enough for us to support our families, good quality hospitals and schools, and homes, food and energy we can afford. Non-profit organisations like ours help to bring citizens together so we can speak with one voice to our leaders about our concerns.

Many of us are going through hard times because our government has failed to bring down the cost of living or fix our public services. And now they attack us because we're calling them out for not doing their jobs.

We reject their attempts to divide us. In the past, we helped ordinary people join together to protect the right to divorce and abortion care. Today, we will continue to bring citizens together so we can let our leaders know what's important to us.

Shorter generic reframe

Certain politicians are attacking us because they're trying to deflect blame for failing to solve the problems citizens are worried about. Most of us, no matter who we vote for, just want politicians to come up with real solutions instead of trying to divide and distract us.

Shorter reframe where the attack is an accusation of political bias against an environmental NGO

We're working to make sure that citizens have clean water to drink and air that's safe to breathe. It's not a question of left or right. It's a question of right or wrong. The fact that certain politicians have a problem with this and feel the need to attack us should make us ask who they care about more: companies polluting the environment or ordinary people.

Shorter reframe where the attack is an accusation of foreign influence because of your sources of funding against an NGO working on migration

Most of us think it's right that we should welcome people running from war, just like we were welcomed by people in other countries in the past. This is what we work on. We are completely transparent about where our funding comes from, and every year we publish this information on our website. Certain politicians are attacking us because they win votes by blaming people who migrate for problems like high living costs.

Example 2: a truth sandwich that can work as a response to a range of attacks where the motivation of your opponents is to deflect attention from corruption.

Most of us want our elected representatives to use our contributions to fund the things we rely on, like good quality hospitals and schools, pensions that let us live in dignity, and rent and energy prices we can afford.

But a tiny number of politicians are using their position to profit themselves. And when we call them out for this, they attack us so that people will look at us instead of them.

It's our job to inform citizens about how their funds are being used and help them join their voices together when they're not happy about what our leaders are doing.

Shorter reframe.

It's our job to inform citizens and give them the tools they need to join their voices when they want to raise concerns with our leaders. Certain politicians attack us because they don't want us to report on their corruption.

Example 3: a truth sandwich that can work as a response to a wide range of attacks where the motivation is to stop you from criticising their harsh policies towards environmental protestors

Today, many of us are worried about climate change and the damage it is already causing to our health and homes. Many of us feel that our leaders aren't going far enough to protect us and are ignoring our concerns. So we express ourselves through protests.

But instead of paying more attention to ordinary citizens, certain politicians want to double down and deter people from going on to the streets to show their support. And when organisations like ours tell them that police brutality and prosecutions aren't in line with the law, they attack us.

It's our job to inform citizens when our leaders threaten our freedoms. We will keep doing this because ordinary people should be free to express their opinions on important issues like climate change.

Short reframe.

It's our job to inform citizens when our leaders threaten our freedoms. Certain politicians attack us because they want to deter people from protesting that the government isn't doing enough to protect us from climate change.

Contact

The Civil Liberties Union for Europe

The Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties) is a non-governmental organisation promoting and protecting the civil liberties of everyone in the European Union. We are headquartered in Berlin and have a presence in Brussels. Liberties is built on a network of national civil liberties NGOs from across the EU. Unless otherwise indicated, the opinions expressed by Liberties do not necessarily constitute the views of our member organisations.

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