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CAN I BUILD A FUTURE?

YOUNG MOVEMENTS, POLITICAL CHANGE,
AND THE FUTURE OF MULTILATERALISM

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DISCLAIMER

This report draws on a purposefully selected, non-exhaustive sample of 215 cases across 97 countries. The figures describe patterns within that sample. They cannot show how common those patterns are worldwide or establish that a movement alone caused an institutional change. The research draws on publicly available information reviewed through August 2026. Some events remain contested, continue to change, or have been incompletely reported. The accompanying table provides the evidence and coding for all 215 records, while the annex gives fuller accounts of the cases discussed in the report.

The content of this report is the work of the authors and does not necessarily represent the views of the UN Foundation. Our Future Agenda conducted all case research, source review, analysis and writing, and made all final coding decisions. OpenAI’s generative AI tools were used to check coding consistency and to create the illustrations.

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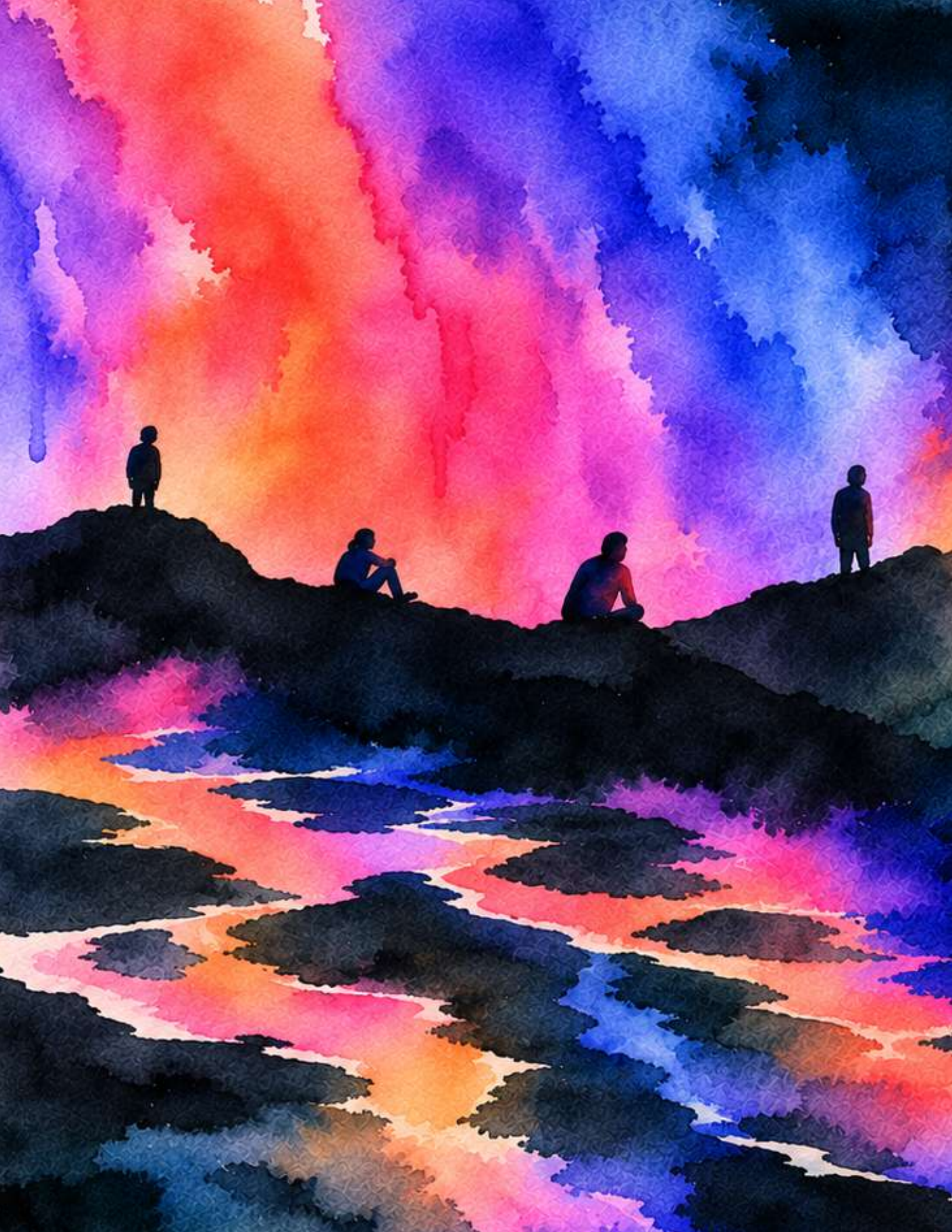
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OVERVIEW

Movements shaped by young people are often judged at the moment the cameras leave: a bill falls, a minister resigns, and a protest is declared a victory or a failure. By then, the most important part of the story may be beginning.

India's Cockroach Janta Party began with an insult. After the country's chief justice compared unemployed young people to cockroaches during a Supreme Court hearing in 2026, organizers claimed the name and marched in insect masks. Their banners captured a growing national fear that India was producing qualified young people faster than it was producing jobs.

In Hungary, the movement behind "Free country, free university" outlived the occupation. Students had sealed the entrance to the University of Theatre and Film Arts with red-and-white tape to resist a state-directed takeover. The takeover went ahead, but they formed a new association and continued classes elsewhere.

Neither case fits neatly into victory or failure. In India, an unresolved grievance resurfaced under a new name and with new campaigners. In Hungary, students lost control of the university but created an association through which they could continue teaching and organizing.

Both cases reflect a wider shift that Anton Jäger calls hyperpolitics. Political engagement can surge through protests, elections, and online debate even as the parties and organizations that once linked one struggle to the next have weakened. Young people can shape a mobilization yet have little say in the decisions that follow. The immediate outcome therefore captures only part of what changed. The larger question is what shifted within the institutions a movement confronted, and whether people remained able to act together after public attention moved on.

WHAT THIS REPORT SHOWS

The report examines a purposefully selected qualitative sample of 215 cases across 97 countries from the [Carnegie Global Protest Tracker](#) and additional public reporting. Sources had to document a role for young people, students or named youth-linked organizations.

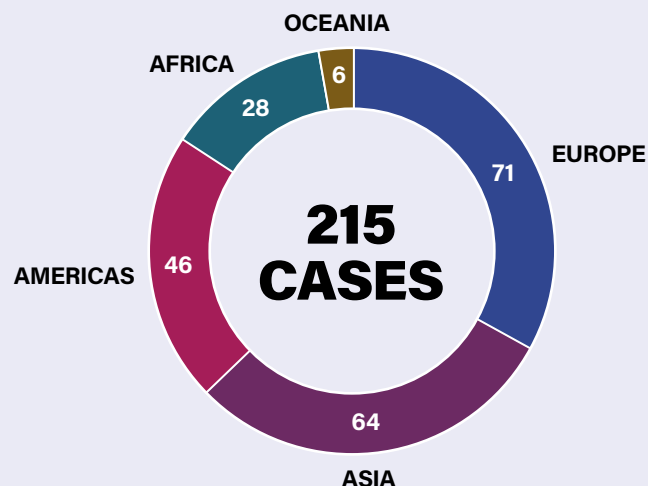
It follows each demand from mobilization into negotiation, litigation, government, or implementation, asking who gained authority, what institutions changed, and what participants could still use afterwards. Where a claim crossed borders, it also follows how international commitments changed choices at home, and how domestic political change affected what governments were prepared to uphold together.

The outcomes often diverged. In one-quarter of the cases, institutions changed without leaving young people and their movement partners better able to act together. In one in six cases, institutions made no clear change, yet people emerged with stronger collective capacity.

Fewer than one in ten cases showed institutions advancing the central demand by the review date. In more than half of all cases, authorities acted on part of a wider claim while leaving the rest unresolved. An official response therefore rarely settled the dispute. It changed where the dispute was fought.

THE SAMPLE IN NUMBERS

Drawn from 97 countries between January 2019 and June 2026.



1 IN 4 CASES

Institutions changed, but collective capacity did not strengthen.

1 IN 6 CASES

Institutions made no clear change, but collective capacity strengthened.

The five chapters follow what happens to the movement and its demands:

CHAPTER 1: YOUNG PEOPLE IN PROTEST TODAY

Asks who speaks for a movement and whose authority survives when protest enters negotiation, litigation, or government.

CHAPTER 2: MAKE LIFE POSSIBLE

Follows official responses into services, budgets, and daily life to see whether they changed the conditions that brought people into the streets.

CHAPTER 3: MAKE POWER ANSWERABLE

Examines whether institutions can be made to disclose evidence, accept responsibility and provide remedy, including when the state's response creates a new grievance.

CHAPTER 4: MAKE THE FUTURE GOVERNABLE

Asks what movements leave behind and whether participants retain organizations, relationships, and knowledge they can use when the next decision or dispute arrives.

CHAPTER 5: WHERE GLOBAL COMMITMENTS MEET DAILY LIFE

Follows these struggles across borders, tracing how international law, finance, and diplomacy shape national priorities and how political change alters what member states are prepared to uphold together.

For many young people, politics now arrives through movements and online networks more readily than through organizations that keep people involved between one fight and the next. What survives the protest therefore shapes who keeps influence, which demands endure, and what governments do with the pressure they inherit.

The future of multilateralism is tied to those domestic contests over what governments owe their citizens, and how those contests change what they are willing to promise the rest of the world.



CHAPTER 1

YOUNG PEOPLE IN PROTEST TODAY

In December 2024, women carrying K-pop light sticks joined the crowds opposing President Yoon Suk Yeol's declaration of martial law. Young conservative men rallied in his defense. The National Assembly overturned the decree and impeached the president. The Constitutional Court removed him in April 2025, and voters chose his successor two months later.

The divisions visible on the streets had been forming for years. Jong-Cheol Kim and Suhong Chae show how gender became one of the sharpest lines in South Korean politics. Young women had emerged as a progressive force, while anti-feminist online communities and conspiracy theories drew some young men toward the far right. Young people helped shape the protest, but age did not produce a common constituency, organization, or mandate.

That trend runs through the wider review. Across the 215 movements examined from 2019 to 2026, young people played different roles. In about three in four cases, they either set much of the direction or helped shape a broader coalition. In the rest, they joined campaigns led primarily by other actors.

Most movements brought together at least three kinds of organization. Student associations and civic or community groups appeared most often, alongside digital networks, parties, unions, professional bodies, families and diaspora groups. These actors could work together around a demand while disagreeing over the political agenda that should follow. Each remained answerable to different people and brought its own authority and influence to bear.

WHO SPEAKS FOR A MOVEMENT?

A movement can bring large numbers of young people into politics without deciding who will speak for them once institutions respond. Governments, courts, and parties tend to deal with the leaders and organizations they can identify. Those actors may have helped shape the campaign while representing only one part of it.

Research by [UNICEF Innocenti](#) shows why this matters. Movements with young people on the front lines tend to be larger, more inclusive and more likely to achieve positive outcomes. Yet those successes do not reliably produce gains for young people themselves. Once the movement forces a response, officials, party leaders and established organizations often control the decisions that follow.

Young people usually enter this handover from a weak position. The [Global Youth Participation Index](#) found stronger participation in civic life than in elections and formal politics across 141 countries. In 28, no young representative sat in the lower house. Young people may therefore have their greatest influence through movements while holding little authority inside the institutions that act on their demands.

[Bangladesh](#) shows what happens when that distance suddenly narrows. The 2024 protests began over public-sector job quotas and grew into the uprising that forced Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina from office. Student leaders who helped lead the mobilization then took different paths. Some entered the interim government, while others formed the new National Citizen Party.

Their influence reached directly into government and party politics. Yet formal access did not settle who spoke for the movement. In 2026, [voters backed constitutional reforms associated with the uprising](#), while the [National Citizen Party won only six of 300 parliamentary seats](#). Support for the uprising's demands had not become a broad mandate for the party formed by some of its leaders.

Research led by [BRAC Institute of Governance and Development](#) found that the opening reached participants unevenly. Some organizations led by young people were invited into policy discussions for the first time. Indigenous Adivasi organizations disputed claims that Bengali young people spoke for the wider movement and later saw their issues fall down the government's agenda. LGBTQI organizations that had joined the uprising reported shrinking space and greater insecurity afterward.

Access to power had grown, but the movement's collective influence had narrowed. Former student leaders entered government and parliament, yet they could not carry every group's claims with them. Bringing leaders of movements into formal institutions changes who has access to power, but it does not guarantee fuller representation for the wider coalition.

WHEN THE DEMAND CHANGES HANDS

Movements can force an issue into a court, legislature, or agency without controlling what happens next. Once another institution takes responsibility for the claim, its powers and rules shape what can be decided, who can participate, and what counts as a response.

Albania's TikTok ban shows how several actors can carry different parts of one dispute. After the government imposed the ban in March 2025, young activists and the Democratic Party's youth organization protested in [Tirana](#). BIRN Albania and Journalists of Albania [separately challenged](#) the policy before the Constitutional Court. The Government [restored access](#) in February 2026 after TikTok agreed to further safety measures. The [Court later ruled](#) that the blanket restriction was unconstitutional.

Restoring access met the immediate demand. The Court's judgment set a constitutional limit on blanket bans but did not determine how Albania should address safety concerns on the platform.

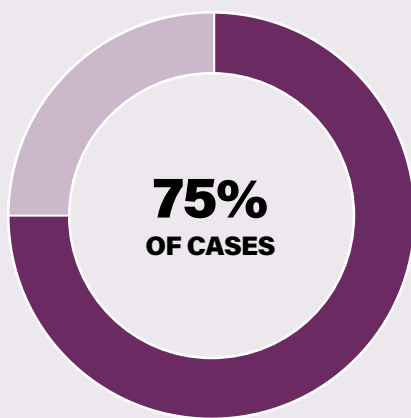
[Kristina Voko](#), executive director of BIRN Albania, pointed to a complaints process between TikTok and the responsible agency as one route for addressing future concerns. But the protesters did not lead the litigation or the agreement that restored access, while the litigants did not represent everyone who had opposed the ban.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's comparative research places this division in a wider pattern. Its [study of ten countries](#) found activists pursuing change through parties, government, civic organizations, and new forms of organizing after protests subsided without consistently preserving the influence they had held during mobilization. A [second study](#) found that courts, prosecutors and investigators could take actions movements themselves could not.

Once a court or agency takes up a claim, its rules determine what can be heard, decided, and enforced. That can carry a demand further than protest alone. But it also changes who has the power to define what counts as an answer.

WHO CARRIES THE DEMAND INTO DECISIONS?

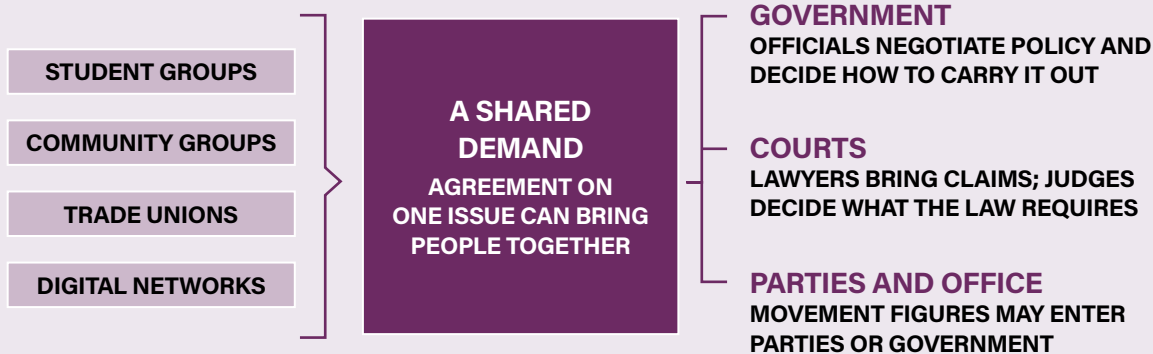
Drawn from 97 countries between January 2019 and June 2026.



**YOUNG PEOPLE SET MUCH OF
THE DIRECTION OR HELPED SHAPE
A BROADER COALITION.**



**HAD NO YOUNG
REPRESENTATIVE IN THE
LOWER HOUSE.**





CHAPTER 2

MAKE LIFE POSSIBLE

Young people use their daily lives to judge whether institutions work: what a bus journey costs, whether water reaches their home, and whether education leads to decent work. Failure becomes political when the same communities repeatedly carry the cost and have little influence over how that burden is shared. A government can repeal a decree in a day, but reliable services or safer streets depend on what changes in people's lives after the government responds.

In October 2019, President Lenín Moreno removed Ecuador's fuel subsidies under Decree 883. The measure formed part of a wider austerity package and raised transport costs, particularly for rural households. The Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, known as CONAIE, led the resistance with young people participating through student and community networks. Following mass protests and negotiations facilitated by the United Nations and the Episcopal Conference, Moreno repealed the decree. Six years later, another administration removed a diesel subsidy. CONAIE mobilized, but the strike ended without a comparable agreement.

Soledad Chango, Inkarrí Kowii, and Luis Gonzalez-Quizhpe place both protest cycles within a longer struggle over global debt, rural poverty, and economic adjustment. Repealing Decree 883 relieved households of one increase. It did not establish how future administrations should close fiscal gaps or how much of the adjustment rural communities would reasonably be expected to carry. The dispute returned because the distributional choice remained.

The United Nations–World Bank Pathways for Peace study treats services, natural resources, security and political power as connected sources of conflict. Institutions cannot remove disagreement over how public costs and protections are shared. They can provide credible ways for people to contest those choices peacefully and influence the response. Ecuador's 2019 negotiations provided such a pathway and produced immediate relief. But they did not give affected communities a continuing role in later subsidy decisions. When the dispute returned six years later, CONAIE mobilized again. This time, the protests ended without an agreement, and the Government left the diesel-subsidy policy in place.

The same connection ran through the wider review of movements. Four in five cases combined a claim about daily life with one about accountability or governing rules. More than half concerned safety, peace or protection from violence. Others dealt with decent work, public services, education, housing, land and natural resources.

KEEPING THE LIGHT ON

Political pressure can remove a leader or halt a policy faster than it can repair a public system. Only 19 of the 215 cases showed institutions advancing the central demand, while another 125 progressed part of a wider claim. A concession or change in government could matter while leaving households dependent on the same unreliable service.

[Madagascar's 2025 Gen Z mobilization](#) began after prolonged failures in water and electricity. As protests spread and the authorities used force, the demands widened to include corruption, accountability, and President Andry Rajoelina's departure. Rajoelina left office and the military took power. But his departure did not repair the systems supplying water and electricity. [Research](#) highlights the scale of the service failure. Only one in four households was connected to the public electricity grid, and most connected households still lacked a reliable supply. Nearly had gone without clean water at least several times during the previous year. Large majorities judged the Government's performance on both services poorly. Months after the change in government, a [Gen Z Madagascar activist](#) reported that outages had become shorter, although water and electricity remained unreliable.

The uprising changed who governed. But removing a president did not restore reliable water or electricity. That depended on whether the institutions responsible for those services could turn political change into something households experienced in daily life.

PRACTICE IS THE PROOF

[Jonathan Fox and his co-authors](#) distinguish a government response from accountable responsiveness. In almost one in three cases reviewed, institutions opened an inquiry, changed a rule, or created a process without evidence of follow-through. The test was whether

movements influenced what institutions did in practice: how police treated people, how governments spent public funding, and whether communities were protected.

[Nigeria's EndSARS movement](#) took its name from the country's Special Anti-Robbery Squad, which had faced longstanding allegations of serious abuse. In October 2020, the inspector-general dissolved SARS, while the federal government directed states to establish judicial panels. Some panels included young organizers and civil-society representatives, and several later awarded compensation. Yet the [International Crisis Group](#) warned that SARS could reappear under another name unless authorities investigated past abuse and changed recruitment, supervision, and accountability throughout the police service. Dissolution changed the structure on paper. Reform required officers to exercise power differently in their encounters with the public.

The Philippines tested the same distinction in public spending. Reports of "ghost" and substandard projects suggested that money intended to protect communities from flooding had been lost to corruption. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr established an [Independent Commission for Infrastructure](#) before the largest demonstrations on September 21, 2025. Protesters demanded prosecutions, the recovery of public funds, and remedies for affected communities. By July 2026, [at least 45 people faced charges and another 43 remained under and/or had been referred for investigation](#). Legal action had advanced, but responsibility at the highest levels remained unresolved and the budget still contained mechanisms vulnerable to abuse.

Researchers at the [University of the Philippines](#) put the point plainly: "Do the science first before spending." They [argued](#) that officials should use hazard evidence to decide which projects to fund and open those decisions to technical and public scrutiny. Prosecutions addressed past wrongdoing, but did not guarantee better decision-making for future projects.

LOOSE ENDS

Movements often unite grievances that governments handle in siloes. Transport, taxation, climate policy, and public services sit in different departments and budgets. Families experience them together. A government can answer one demand while leaving the wider problem in place.

[France's Gilets Jaunes](#), or Yellow Vests, exposed this divide. The movement began against a planned fuel-tax increase, then widened to purchasing power, fair taxation, public services, and democratic voice. Young people joined an intergenerational and politically mixed coalition. President Emmanuel Macron cancelled the increase, opened the Grand Débat, and [enacted emergency economic measures](#).

The concessions made a measurable difference. The [Institut des politiques publiques](#) estimated that the emergency measures increased household disposable income by an average of 0.8%, although the gains varied across the population. Families received real relief, but France had not settled how to reduce emissions without placing disproportionate costs on people with few transport alternatives.

Research by the [French Council of Economic Analysis](#) explains what the fuel-tax decision left unresolved. It argued that effective carbon taxation had to combine lower emissions with social fairness and transparency. Its proposals included returning new revenues to households, placing more of the cost on businesses, and investing in alternatives to fossil fuels. Cancelling the increase removed one cost. A workable response still had to connect climate policy with household income and access to transport.

The Yellow Vests widened their demands because the pressures on daily life were already connected. Across the movements reviewed, governments often settled one issue while leaving the others exposed. The stronger test was whether their decisions worked together to make life more secure and affordable.

DAILY LIFE DEMANDS BECOME DEMANDS ABOUT PUBLIC POWER



COMBINED DAILY-LIFE DEMANDS WITH CLAIMS ABOUT PUBLIC POWER.

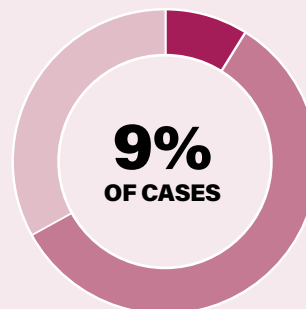
DAILY LIFE DEMANDS

SAFE STREETS AND PROTECTION
WORK AND EDUCATION
AFFORDABLE LIVING COSTS
RELIABLE PUBLIC SERVICES
LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

CLAIMS ABOUT PUBLIC POWER

RESPONSIBILITY FOR HARM
A SAY IN DECISIONS
FAIR SHARING OF COSTS
ACCESS TO EVIDENCE
RULES THAT APPLY CONSISTENTLY

WHAT MOVEMENTS DEMANDED, WHAT INSTITUTIONS ACTED ON



SAW INSTITUTIONS ADVANCE THE CENTRAL DEMAND, AND IN 58% THEY PROGRESSED ONLY PART OF A WIDER CLAIM.



CHAPTER 3

MAKE POWER ANSWERABLE

When the railway station in Novi Sad collapsed in November 2024, killing 16 people, Serbian students demanded to know how a renovated public building had become lethal. They called for the release of contracts and other records, an investigation, and action against those responsible. University plenums coordinated blockades as the movement spread across the country. Authorities released some documents, officials resigned, and prosecutors opened proceedings, but demands for full disclosure and independent oversight remained unresolved. The state had acted without providing a defensible account of how the collapse had happened.

Colin Anderson's five-year study of accountability in Mozambique, Myanmar, Nigeria, and Pakistan shows why a list of government actions is an unreliable test. People need to know what an institution owed, examine whether it met that duty, and see it correct any failure. These parts depended on one another in Novi Sad. Investigators could not establish the full chain of responsibility without complete records. Resignations could close the immediate political dispute without correcting the official practices behind the collapse.

Two in three cases reviewed demanded investigation, accountability, or remedy. Movements could force an answer, but they could not guarantee who controlled the evidence, how responsibility was assigned, or what followed. In many cases, the institution under scrutiny still held those powers.

JUSTICE DELAYED

Across 57 of the 215 cases reviewed, movements sought documents, communications, or other evidence needed to challenge an official account. Opening an investigation did not guarantee access. When the evidence could implicate the institutions holding it, those institutions could still restrict what investigators reviewed.

In Mexico, the families of the [43 Ayotzinapa students](#) who disappeared in 2014 have kept the case open across three presidential administrations. Their campaign secured an independent investigation by the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts, which exposed serious flaws in the Government's original account and pursued evidence involving the military.

Successive administrations announced new investigative steps, only to encounter the same resistance once evidence implicated the armed forces. President Enrique Peña Nieto accepted the independent inquiry, then declined to renew its mandate after investigators turned to the armed forces. His successor, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, created a truth commission and invited the experts back, but cooperation broke down after they documented military interference and missing records. Current President, Claudia Sheinbaum, appointed another investigative team and opened talks to bring international experts back, while continuing to support the military's claim that it had supplied the relevant documents.

[Anaya-Muñoz and Gallagher's study](#) distinguishes opening an investigation from changing how a state behaves once evidence implicates powerful institutions. Successive administrations opened new processes while resisting the disclosure of those processes required. By 2026, the [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#) was still calling on Mexico's security and intelligence agencies to provide investigators with the information they held. The families pursued that demand in court. A federal court then ordered the Defense Ministry to release [the missing](#)

[intelligence records](#), making disclosure a legal obligation rather than a decision for the military.

The families repeatedly rebuilt the investigation when formal processes failed, overcoming the short life of most protest cycles. Their organization could preserve the demand and reopen the investigation. It could not release evidence held by the institution under scrutiny.

BACK TO THE STREETS

Returning to the streets can show that a movement retained people, memory, and relationships. It can also show that an earlier response failed to place a lasting limit on power. In 22 of the 215 cases, institutions later weakened or reversed a decision made in response to a movement. The question is whether earlier organizing changed the institution or simply left people better prepared to mobilize again.

Romania offers a rare view of what survives from one round to the next. In February 2019, the government adopted Emergency Ordinance 7 without public debate. It changed how chief prosecutors were appointed and reduced oversight of a unit that investigated magistrates. Judges and prosecutors protested alongside students, teachers, and civic groups. The Government amended parts of the decree, but left their concerns about political control unresolved.

Six years later, independent outlet, [Recorder](#) alleged that senior judicial figures had obstructed corruption cases and punished magistrates who spoke out. Some [10,000 people marched](#) in Bucharest, while thousands more protested in other cities. They revived "We see you," the slogan of Romania's 2017 anti-corruption protests. President Nicușor Dan invited magistrates to submit evidence and [announced an investigation](#).

After the 2017 protests, [Viorel Miclesu](#) described the emergence of "a whole new generation of alert citizens." Eight years later, journalists, magistrates and protesters recognized the renewed risk of

political control over the judiciary and brought it back into public view. That was a real form of capacity. But the [European Commission's 2026 Rule of Law report](#) found no progress on stronger protections for senior prosecutors or the judicial police, and no further measures to improve investigations of corruption within the judiciary. The people and networks built through earlier mobilization had endured. The safeguards they had demanded had not.

MAKING MATTERS WORSE

Authorities used force, detention, or restrictions in 126 of the 215 cases reviewed. In 99, states' conduct became part of what the movement challenged. Governments could call on police, prosecutors, and courts immediately. Movements, by contrast, had to keep pressing the original grievance while also responding to arrests, restrictions, or force.

Ghana's [#FixTheCountry movement](#) began in 2021, linking rising living costs, unemployment, and weak public services to failures of government accountability. Young organizers later joined campaigns against illegal mining, known as *galamsey*, which had polluted rivers and damaged forests. Democracy Hub and allied groups called for stronger enforcement and action against officials who enabled the industry.

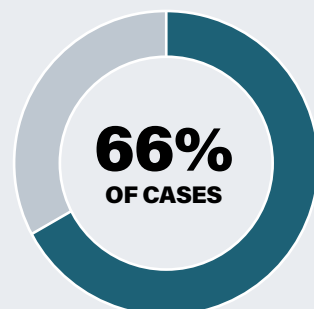
Police arrested more than 50 people during a [three-day anti-galamsey protest](#) in September 2024. Many were charged and brought before the courts. A subsequent [#FreeTheCitizens](#) protest demanded their release while renewing calls to stop illegal mining. By arresting protesters, authorities created a new grievance on top of the original dispute.

Ghana [repealed regulations permitting mining in forest reserves](#) more than a year later. The decision strengthened legal protections for forests and water sources, but it did not end *galamsey* or repair the damage already caused. Protesters faced immediate legal action. Progress on environmental harms has taken far longer and remains incomplete.

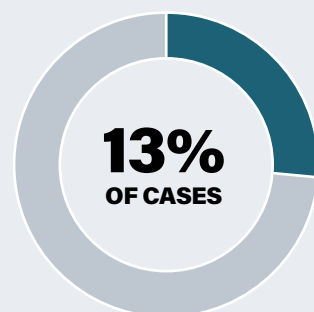
[Maame Efua Addadzi-Koom and Richard Obeng Mensah](#) found a broader pattern across five Ghanaian protests between 2021 and 2024. Although the Supreme Court had ruled that people could protest without police permission, officers continued to seek injunctions and use large deployments, arrests or force. Restrictions could begin before police had established any threat to public safety.

This produced a stark imbalance. Police, prosecutors, and courts could impose immediate costs on protesters, while the institutions responsible for the original grievance often moved far more slowly. Movements were left pursuing two claims at once, both a remedy for the failure that brought them into the streets and accountability for the state's response.

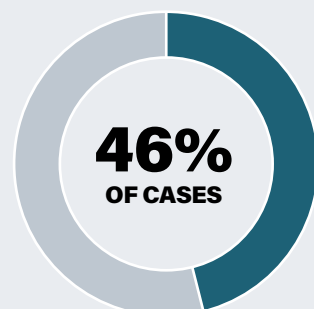
ACCOUNTABILITY CHALLENGES



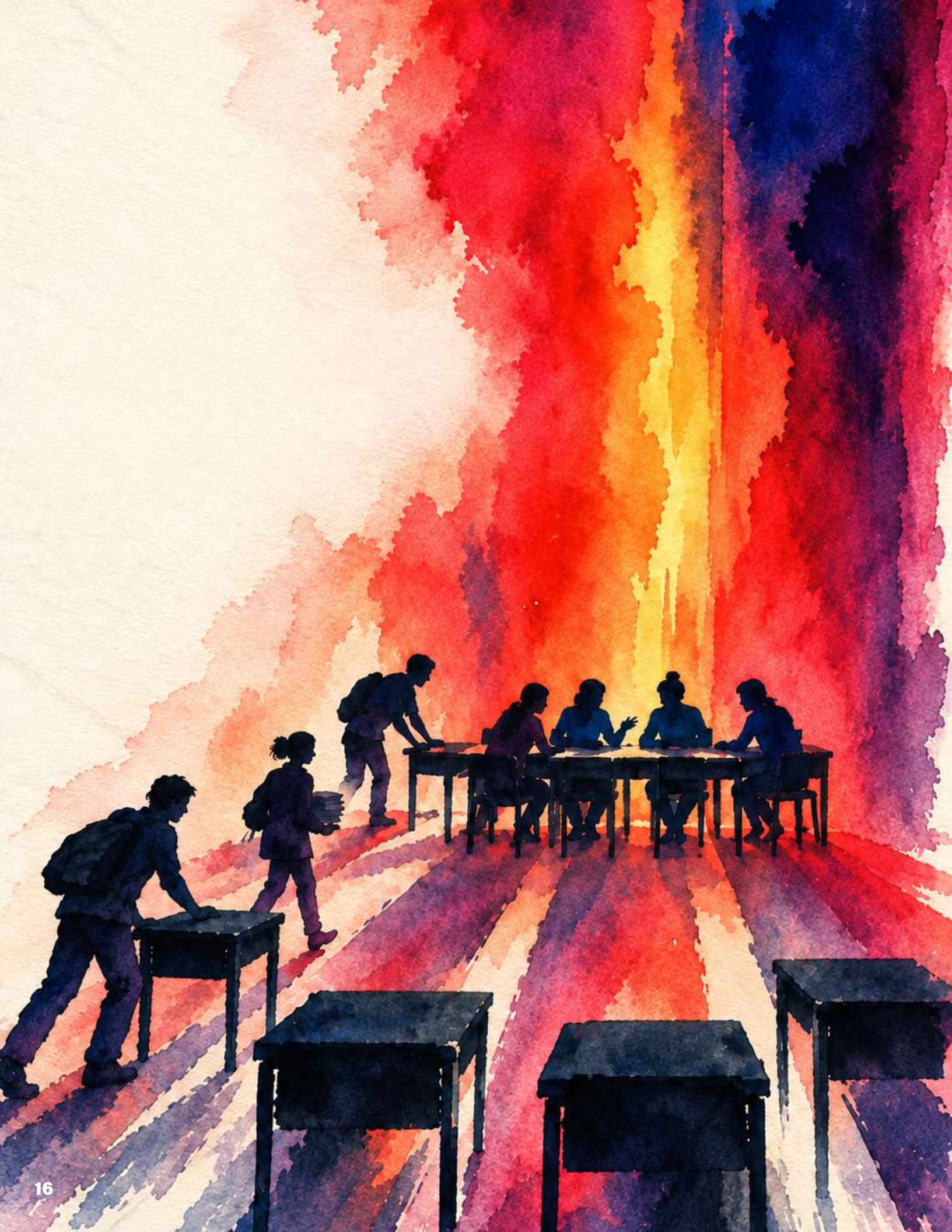
DEMANDED INVESTIGATION, ACCOUNTABILITY OR REMEDY



SOUGHT EVIDENCE NEEDED TO CHALLENGE AN OFFICIAL ACCOUNT



SAW THE STATE'S OWN CONDUCT BECOME PART OF WHAT THE MOVEMENT CHALLENGED



CHAPTER 4

MAKE THE FUTURE GOVERNABLE

Aragalaya, Sinhala for “struggle,” grew out of Sri Lanka’s 2022 economic collapse. Shortages, power cuts, and rising prices drove protesters to demand President Gotabaya Rajapaksa’s resignation. They connected the crisis to corruption, impunity, and concentrated power, widening the call to “system change.”

Although the uprising forced Rajapaksa from office, his parliamentary party retained control of the succession by backing Ranil Wickremesinghe to complete the presidential term. Under Wickremesinghe, a four-year International Monetary Fund (IMF) program lowered inflation and rebuilt reserves while utility and tax changes squeezed household budgets. The World Bank found that food prices had more than doubled between 2021 and 2024, poverty remained twice its 2019 level, and real wages had not recovered.

Amid this hardship, Anura Kumara Dissanayake won the presidency in 2024 after campaigning against corruption and promising to change how the country was governed. His National People’s Power coalition then secured a two-thirds parliamentary majority. Carnegie’s study argues that the uprising helped clear the way by weakening the old parties. The new administration nevertheless retained most of the IMF program and did not enact the broader constitutional changes called for during the uprising. A narrower amendment concerning the higher courts was pending at the time of writing and has itself prompted protests over judicial independence.

Vincent Bevins’s review of the mass uprisings of the 2010s explains the broader gap. A mass protest can create a real political opening by uniting people around what must end, even when participants have not agreed on what should follow. Unless they act through an organization capable of deciding, governing, and holding representatives to a mandate, parties and officials are better placed to use that opening. Mobilization can reshape an election without giving those who took part continuing influence over the government that emerges.

WINNING ISN'T EVERYTHING

What survives after a mobilization depends not on continued public attention, but on whether protesters can sustain the networks they built.

[Kenya's Gen Z movement](#) used digital coordination and street protests and crowdsourced legal, medical, and information support against the 2024 Finance Bill. President William Ruto withdrew the measure, while arguments continued over taxes, public spending and the cost of government. Nanjala Nyabola's [Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics](#) provides the longer history of Kenya's digital politics. The movement demonstrated how digital networks can bridge historical ethnic and gender divides. During the 2024 protests, participants used those spaces to coordinate their own legal help, medical care, and information. A [later study](#) of the uprising describes these networks as civic infrastructure that extended beyond the fight over the Finance Bill.

Students at Hungary's University of Theatre and Film Arts occupied their campus in 2020 to resist a state-directed change in its governance. They organized through assemblies and working groups, but the takeover went ahead. Participants, faculty, and workers then created the [FreeSZFE Association](#); continued classes through the Emergency Exit programme; and secured recognition from European universities.

The withdrawal of Kenya's Finance Bill left the wider fiscal dispute open. In Hungary, the university takeover proceeded while participants created another structure through which part of its work could continue. In both cases, participants created capacity they could use to organize, support people, and carry their work forward.

USE IT OR LOSE IT

Across the 215 cases, collective capacity deepened significantly in 37 cases and partially improved in another 69. In almost half, public reporting confirmed that an organization or wider network remained but did not show further

growth. Survival is therefore a low bar. What matters is whether people can use organizations, relationships, and knowledge built before or during a protest when the next political opening appears.

[Million Moments for Democracy](#) began as a student-founded petition in the Czech Republic. A [2025 comparative study](#) traces how it connected activists across 150 cities and towns, then recruited nearly 1,000 volunteers for its 2021 voter campaign. Those connections remained available when Andrej Babiš returned to office. In March 2026, Million Moments for Democracy mounted the country's largest [anti-government demonstration](#) since 2019 and later led another campaign against changes [threatening the independence](#) of public broadcasters. The immediate issue had changed. Its local contacts and ability to coordinate across the country did not have to be rebuilt.

India shows how political capacity can be rebuilt outside traditional organizational lines. Student groups mobilized in 2024 over alleged irregularities in the National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET). In 2026, the [Cockroach Janta Party](#) formed in response to remarks comparing unemployed youth to 'cockroaches,' turning the earlier NEET grievance into a wider campaign about fair access to work. This translated into policy outcomes: examination reform, compensation, the withdrawal of police cases, and the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. New organizers had built on infrastructure that outlasted the original protest and successfully used it for a broader campaign for public fairness.

[Hahrie Han, Elizabeth McKenna, and Michelle Oyakawa](#) locate political power in the relationship between a constituency, its leaders, and their strategy. That relationship must be maintained and adapted. An organization can retain its name and staff while losing the connections needed to act. A movement can disappear while participants take its knowledge and contacts into later work. Earlier organizing

matters when it changes who can respond to the next issue and how much they must build again.

REFUSAL IS NOT THE END

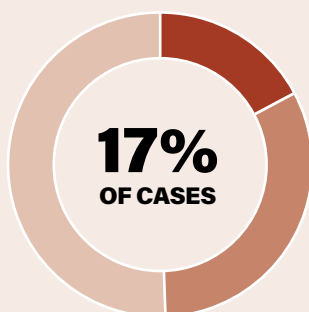
While a movement's ability to organize does not make its demands legitimate, dismissing a protest for its political stance does not erase the underlying grievance. When governments fail to address root causes, established networks carry their unresolved anger into the next confrontation.

In Aceh, Indonesia, students [stormed a temporary shelter](#) in December 2023 and demanded the deportation of Rohingya refugees. They forced 137 people, including women and children, onto trucks and took them to the regional Ministry of Law and Human Rights office. [Local reporting](#) confirmed that the protesters sought deportation. The refugees were forcibly displaced from the shelter, but the government did not deport them.

A [University of Indonesia study](#) later found that Indonesian news and social media had increasingly presented Rohingya refugees through narratives of threat, illegality, and conflict—with each reinforcing the other. Refusing deportation was therefore only part of the response. Authorities also had to protect the refugees and counter the false claims sustaining hostility.

Following the murder of a 16-year-old in Crépol, France, [far-right networks](#) used the tragedy to claim that immigrants and Muslims posed a collective threat. Borrowing tactics from the Dublin riots, they attempted to march on the Romans-sur-Isère neighborhood where the suspects lived. Although police stopped the march and policies towards immigrants remained

A MOVEMENT'S STRENGTH ALSO LIES IN WHAT PEOPLE CAN DO TOGETHER LATER



SAW COLLECTIVE CAPACITY DEEPEN SIGNIFICANTLY AFTER PROTEST, WHILE 32% CASES SAW PARTIAL IMPROVEMENT.

ORGANIZATIONS AND LOCAL GROUPS

BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER WHEN THE ISSUE RETURNS.

LEGAL, MEDICAL AND SUPPORT NETWORKS

HELP PARTICIPANTS STAY INVOLVED AND WITHSTAND PRESSURE.

EVIDENCE AND SHARED KNOWLEDGE

REOPEN CLAIMS AND TEST OFFICIAL ACCOUNTS.

SKILLS AND WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

PREPARE PROPOSALS, NEGOTIATE AND ORGANIZE AGAIN.



unchanged, the mobilization achieved its primary goal: using staged provocations to capture media attention and mainstream an anti-immigrant narrative from outside the traditional party system.

CHAPTER 5

WHERE GLOBAL COMMITMENTS MEET DAILY LIFE

Every multilateral commitment eventually comes home. A climate ruling informs a planning decision. An IMF loan affects national budgets, public service costs, and household bills. A treaty shapes daily life as a government changes its laws or practice. Movements confront what global commitments mean for their lives and how they build a future.

More than half of the movements reviewed had some international connection, including support from diaspora groups, funders, lawyers, campaigners, or media outside the country. 63 cases used a diplomatic or multilateral process. These connections matter for multilateralism because governments face demands at home that shape how they act abroad. Movements can defend international commitments, challenge their effects, or press institutions to go further.

The same holds for ideas and symbols that cross borders. Young Italian activists joined established feminist and LGBTQI networks to form Non Una Di Meno. In Italy, young activists joined established feminist and LGBTQI networks to form Non Una Di Meno, adapting the name of Argentina's Ni Una Menos and drawing on Latin American strikes and participatory organizing. Their first national demonstration brought about 200,000 people to Rome. Over the following year, assemblies developed a feminist plan linking violence against women to inequalities in work, welfare and public institutions in Italy.

During Indonesia's 2025 protests, a shared visual symbol bridged the gap between striking truck drivers and student groups: the flag from the popular manga One Piece, a story about rebels fighting a corrupt regime. The symbol spread across Asia, but demands remained rooted in the country's own political process. Shared symbols helped people recognize a common struggle. They did not create a shared global agenda on their own.

MOVEMENTS IN A DIVIDED GLOBAL ORDER

After Myanmar's military seized power in 2021, opponents of the coup sought to turn international condemnation into coordinated pressure. ASEAN pursued dialogue under its Five-Point Consensus. United Nations bodies addressed representation and accountability. But [Lina Alexandra and Monalisa Adhikari found](#) that ASEAN members disputed its mandate, while other international actors backed competing mediation efforts with no common direction. The junta could therefore reject ASEAN's demands for an end to violence, dialogue and humanitarian access while retaining support elsewhere.

[Pacific climate campaigners](#) made separate institutions reinforce one another. In 2019, law students at the University of the South Pacific began pressing governments to seek an advisory opinion on climate change from the International Court of Justice. Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change built a regional campaign. Vanuatu carried the proposal into diplomacy and assembled a coalition of states. In July 2025, the [Court](#) provided a unanimous, if non-binding, opinion on state obligations. The [UN General Assembly](#) followed up with a resolution on implementation In May 2026, while young campaigners developed resources for governments and future litigation.

As geopolitical rivalry widens the gaps between international institutions, governments under pressure can turn to partners that will protect them or demand less from them. However, movements and smaller states can use those same divisions to combine political, diplomatic and legal authority around a claim. Cooperation in a divided order is built case by case. Its force depends on whether the institutions involved still support one another when a government is asked to act.

WHEN GOVERNMENTS PULL BACK

Across the movements reviewed, some member states weakened global commitments without leaving the institutions behind them. They retained the benefits of membership while [obstructing particular decisions or rejecting selected obligations](#).

EXAMPLE: FROM A CAMPAIGN TO A WORLD COURT OPINION

THE PACIFIC ISLANDS STUDENTS FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE

2019

PACIFIC STUDENT CAMPAIGN

BUILDING SUPPORT FOR A LEGAL OBLIGATION ON CLIMATE ACCOUNTABILITY



2022

VANUATU-LED COALITION

LED THE CALL FOR PACIFIC LEADERS TO FORMALLY ENDORSE THE PROPOSAL



2023

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

MEMBER STATES UNANIMOUSLY REQUESTED THE OPINION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE



2025

INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

CLARIFIED STATES' LEGAL OBLIGATIONS TO ENSURE THE PROTECTION OF THE CLIMATE SYSTEM

Robert Fico returned as Slovakia's Prime Minister in 2023, ended state military aid to Ukraine and opposed European sanctions on Russia without taking Slovakia out of the European Union or NATO. After he met President Vladimir Putin in December 2024, Peace for Ukraine and allied civic groups organized [protests in more than 20 cities](#). Young people were prominent. European Union and NATO membership no longer settled the argument over Slovakia's direction. Fico presented closer relations with Moscow as compatible with those ties, while protesters argued that his administration was abandoning the direction the country had chosen for its future.

Türkiye went further. It withdrew from the Istanbul Convention in 2021 while remaining in the Council of Europe and retaining Law No. 6284 on violence against women. As the Government recast women's rights around a conservative program, young women, students, LGBTQI activists and established organizations opposed the withdrawal through protests and litigation, keeping the convention's protections in national debate.

Withdrawal ended Türkiye's obligations under the Istanbul Convention, but campaigners continued to submit evidence to the [United Nations committee](#) that reviews countries' records on women's rights and to the [Council of Europe body](#) monitoring Türkiye's compliance with European Court of Human Rights judgments. These channels preserved some international scrutiny, but they could not restore the Convention's protections.

This is characteristic of a [pattern](#) where movements raise the domestic cost of retreat and use other international obligations where they can, but cannot restore the full force of an agreement once a government withdraws.

KEEPING A CLAIM ALIVE

Multilateral institutions work on a slower clock than movements. Their records and standards can keep unresolved claims alive between protest cycles, even when they cannot enforce a remedy.

Colombia's National Strike joined demands over inequality and public services with calls to end police violence. After mass protests subsided, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights carried the accountability claim forward. Its [2021 visit](#) set standards for investigations, reparations and protection of the right to protest. The strike's wider economic programme remained outside the Commission's mandate.

[Early follow-up](#) found little implementation. The Commission then [created a joint mechanism with Colombia](#), allowing the Government, civil society, and victims to keep supplying evidence. In its [September 2025 review](#), the Commission found that only two of 33 priority recommendations had been fully implemented. New rules on police conduct and oversight marked progress, but investigations and reparations still lagged. Four years after the protests, campaigners could still use the Commission's process to press the government for action.

[Gabriela Kletzel's research](#) shows that influence also runs from movements to the regional system. Civic organizations from several countries pressed the Commission to examine how states police and criminalize protest, and why abuses go unpunished. Their work helped shape standards later applied in Colombia. Continued monitoring then tested which measures changed state practice and which left the underlying problem intact.

WHERE MULTILATERALISM EARNS TRUST

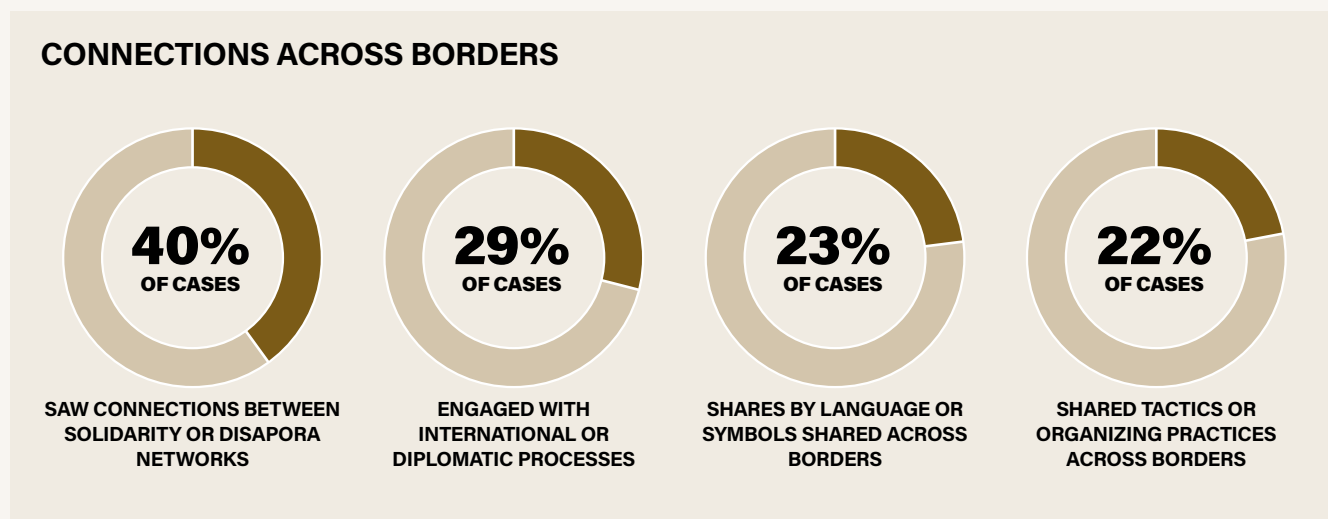
Citizens may support the principle of international cooperation while distrusting the institutions that execute it.

In early 2022, students joined unions, social movements, and piquetero organizations as [thousands protested](#) against Argentina's proposed debt agreement. Congress approved it, and the IMF Executive Board approved a [US\\$44 billion arrangement](#). The IMF set program targets, while the Government negotiated the terms and chose how to meet them.

Public opinion was less settled than either approval or protest suggested. IMF staff cited polls showing that [more than 70% favored reaching an agreement](#), while civic groups challenged the legitimacy of the debt and feared the agreement's effects. [Public opinion research](#) found limited understanding of the deal and negative views of the Government's communication. People could support an agreement while distrusting how the debt arose, what had been negotiated, and whose account to believe.

In Ukraine, European pressure backed a demand already being made inside the country. Parliament and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy curtailed the independence of two anti-corruption agencies in July 2025, prompting protests led largely by young people. The agencies' independence formed part of European Union conditions, while joining the European Union received [wide public support](#). The European Commission [withheld a payment](#) until independence was restored, and Parliament [reversed the measure](#) on July 31. European leverage protected a standard that protesters already treated as part of Ukraine's political future.

Global polling supports these findings. In a recent [Rockefeller Foundation](#) survey across 34 countries, 55% of people support international cooperation, but only 42% believe current arrangements serve their interests. When governments and international institutions blame each other for painful political decisions, formal cooperation may survive, but it [loses public legitimacy](#). Multilateralism only earns trust when citizens can see who made the decision, what it changes, and how they can contest the outcome at home.







CONCLUSION

This report finds a thread running from the street to the international system. Young people may get their demands heard, only to lose influence over what happens next. In one-quarter of the cases studied, institutions made clear changes without leaving people better able to act together.

International institutions can help carry those demands further, but cannot guarantee that governments will follow through. What multilateral cooperation delivers depends on domestic struggles over implementation, accountability and who has a say.

There is no simple return to the mass organizations or more settled global order of an earlier period. Institutions must follow through on their decisions and give people a sustained say in what happens next. That means focusing on four priorities.

WHAT COUNTS AS AN ANSWER

1. RESPOND TO THE BROADER DEMAND

Four in five movements connected an everyday grievance to a larger claim about how power was exercised. Institutions often split them apart, treating the immediate symptom without making more fundamental changes. Authorities should state what they accepted, rejected, and left unresolved. The test is what changed in people's lives, not what was announced.

2. ESTABLISH CLEAR ACCOUNTABILITY ACROSS INSTITUTIONS

In almost half the movements reviewed, the response crossed several institutions. Each should state what it controls, what it has done, and who acts next. Harm caused while policing a protest needs its own investigation without displacing the original demand.

3. BUILD POWER BETWEEN PROTESTS

Movements retain power when people can continue to use the relationships, knowledge, and strategy built during a campaign. Public institutions cannot confer that authority, but they can protect the peaceful political space in which movements build it. Funders can help by supporting coordination across organizations and keeping grant requirements flexible for informal groups led by young people.

4. ANCHOR GLOBAL COMMITMENTS IN DOMESTIC ACCOUNTABILITY

International commitments matter when people can use them to shape national decisions and hold governments to what they agreed. International bodies should preserve evidence and track implementation, while governments should explain how their choices meet those commitments and who bears the cost. Cooperation gains staying power when that result gives people both a stake in defending it and a standard for judging governments that retreat.

THE INTERGENERATIONAL TEST

Future comparative research should follow a set of countries over a period of time, extending when governments change. It could explore whether state practice changes and whether movements retain their organizing capacity when national leadership changes.

Young people already supply the world's political energy. What is often missing is the capacity to carry that energy into decisions and across time. The intergenerational test of any policy response is whether political change accumulates. If institutions repeat old failures while citizens must continually rebuild the capacity to challenge them, each generation is forced to start from scratch.

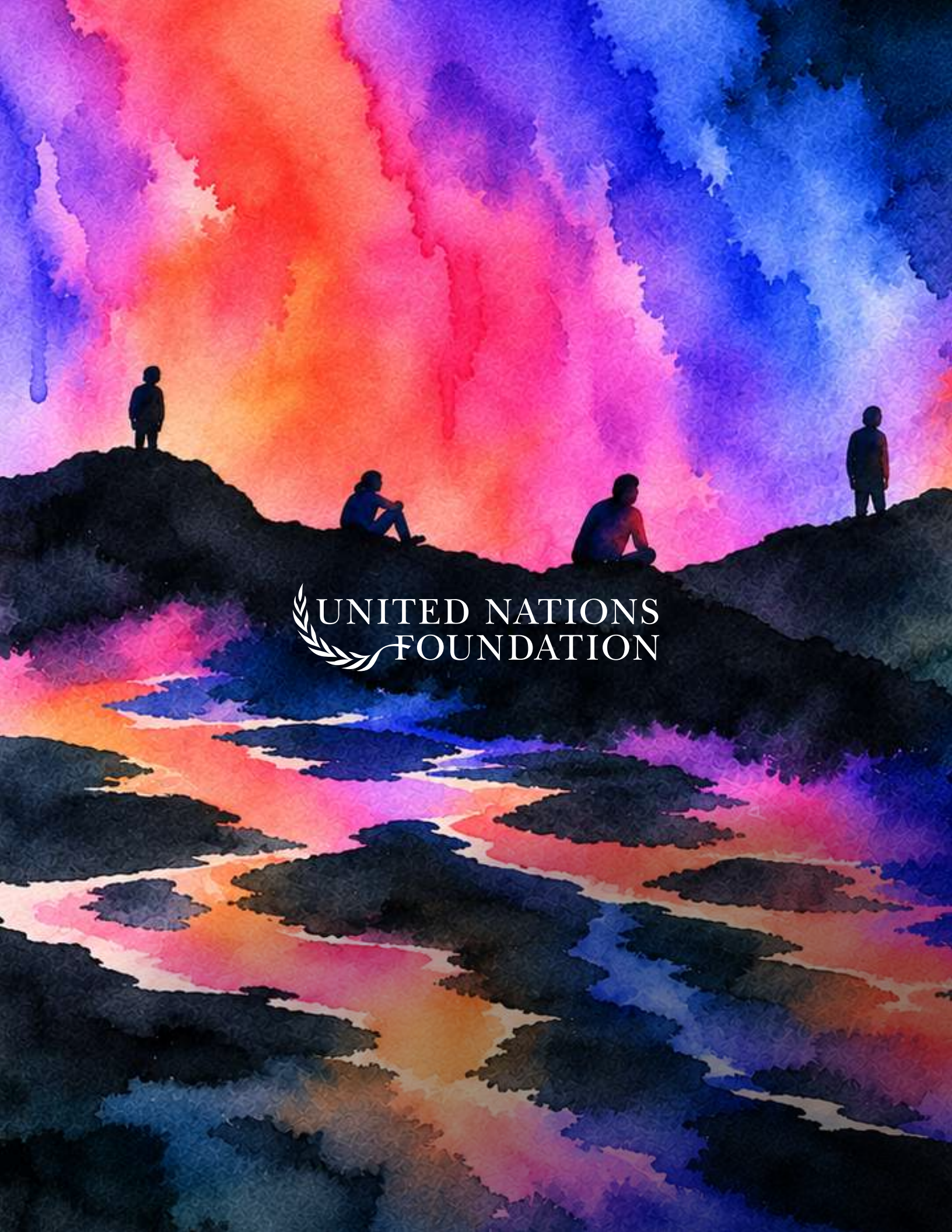
The next generation should inherit more than the record of a movement. They should inherit public institutions that learn from each protest, and international commitments with the power to shape how governments act at home and how they work together.

**COOPERATION GAINS FORCE WHEN
GOVERNMENTS CHANGE WHAT THEY DO AT HOME.**

**NATIONAL CHOICES SHAPE WHAT GOVERNMENTS, UPHOLD TOGETHER.
INTERNATIONAL RULES ALSO SHAPE THOSE CHOICES.**



**MOVEMENTS CAN DEFEND A SHARED COMMITMENT WHILE
CHALLENGING HOW THEIR GOVERNMENT APPLIES IT.**



UNITED NATIONS
FOUNDATION