

Making strategic choices

Context and history

The politics, history, culture, and society of any given place are critical, as they determine how the government functions and who it serves, who has economic power and who is most affected by inequalities. The social fabric – cohesiveness and community connections – also shape choices about organising and social conflict. Given a history of colonialism, imperialism and globalisation, many decisions inside a country may be controlled by outside governments, banks, and corporations – and this creates both challenges and opportunities. .

Civic space

What is the degree of political openness and basic freedoms and rights? Where are state repression and social violence happening, and misogyny tolerated and promoted? How do censorship and surveillance affect public discourse, expression, and activism and who do they affect?

Entry points

Some issues are more controversial than others. Those that generate the most conflict are often perceived as cultural – centring racism, religions, sexuality and gender – as well as economic access and the demands of the working class, poor, and marginalised. In an era of extremist and authoritarian politics, the state itself is highly contentious. In the PEKKA case study, Marginalised women organise in Indonesia, basic needs provided a less directly conflictual entry point for a strategy that eventually challenged patriarchy and capitalism and the cultural beliefs that sustain them.

The moment

Crises, scandals, natural disasters, and pivotal events (such as a pandemic or military coup) change the terrain. They may create even bigger possibilities to shape what's on the agenda and challenge dominant power or they may shut down or refocus other strategic possibilities. In the short term, major events like the sports events, concerts, a visiting dignitary, or a national holiday can create opportunities for visibility and attention.

Narratives, media, and freedom of expression

Popular culture shapes politics and beliefs and is central to messaging, narratives and outreach strategies. However, the degree of access and surveillance determines

how useful social media and digital platforms will be for connecting, educating, and mobilising. Since sports, music, and popular shows shape perceptions and public discourse, they offer possibilities for change strategies.

Capacity, resources, clout, and reach

The size, scope, reputation, relationships, and reach of an organisation or network obviously determine many strategic choices. These determine how much clout an organisation can leverage to draw attention and open doors. 'Resources' refers to both funding and people – although more funding and more people do not automatically translate to greater capacity. A movement that relies on vast active constituencies though sparse funding may have far more reach than a large well-funded institution.