Report #2 - Mobilizing for Impact: Lessons from Global Movements and Strategies for UNPO Members

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Introduction

This report offers a comparative study of grassroots advocacy efforts among underrepresented and marginalized groups worldwide, highlighting both the challenges they face and the tactics they employ to drive change. It focuses on six key case studies: the Sindhis in Pakistan, the Nagalim in India, the Haratin in Mauritania, the Iranian Kurds, the Catalans in Spain, and the Dalit movement in India. This analysis aims to illuminate how shared struggles for self-determination, civil rights, and cultural recognition converge in distinct political contexts. Each case study identifies areas where movements might improve or adapt their tactics by learning from others, emphasizing how the cross-pollination of ideas can strengthen campaigns for autonomy and justice.

This research also provides insights into how political activism, human rights advocacy, and nonviolent resistance intertwine across diverse geopolitical landscapes. In particular, it underscores that despite facing varying degrees of repression, censorship, or economic marginalization, these groups often evolve a robust toolkit of strategies, from political participation and coalition-building to grassroots organizing and mass mobilization. By examining where specific approaches have succeeded, and others have encountered systemic barriers, the report sheds light on the universal challenges of sustaining momentum, coordinating across factions, and amplifying marginalized voices in local, regional, and international fora. Additionally, the inclusion of the Dalit movement, while not directly affiliated with UNPO, illustrates how a relatively successful movement that has leveraged international alliances, reframed grievances in human rights terms, and had widespread public engagement can offer transferable lessons for UNPO-affiliated groups seeking global solidarity.

Ultimately, the findings underscore that no single tactic guarantees success but rather that adaptive, multifaceted strategies, supported by a commitment to nonviolence, provide the greatest potential for enduring impact. More than an academic exercise, this report is intended as a practical tool for UNPO members, offering actionable recommendations to strengthen domestic advocacy efforts and expand visibility within regional and international institutions. It offers recommendations to fortify domestic campaigns and expand their presence in regional and global institutions. In doing so, the analysis highlights how best practices can help movements transcend internal divisions and external constraints. Above all, this report aspires to arm UNPO and its members with practical recommendations for a deeper understanding of how to navigate the complexities of political advocacy while maintaining moral legitimacy, preserving cultural identities, and ultimately pushing for systemic reforms.

Methods & Case Selection

Grounded in primary data from semi-structured interviews, and secondary data from academic literature, and public documentation, this report uses a comparative case study approach to examine grassroots advocacy movements among underrepresented and marginalized communities. Interviews with representatives from each movement explored the groups' goals, core strategies for resistance and the specific challenges they face, both internally and externally. Particular attention was given to how these groups mobilize supporters, respond to repression, and seek to sustain momentum over time.

The cases analyzed were selected in coordination with UNPO, which prioritized a broad geographical spread among its members. As such, the report focuses on five UNPO-affiliated groups: the Sindhis, the Haratin, the Nagalim, the Iranian Kurds, and the Catalans. These cases represent movements in South Asia, North Africa, the Middle East, and Europe, respectively. These groups reflect a range of geopolitical contexts and advocacy experiences that enrich the comparative analysis.

In addition to the UNPO-affiliated cases, the report includes the Dalit movement in India. Although the Dalits are not a client of UNPO, they are in contact with the organization and were included as a reference case due to their relative success in grassroots organizing and advocacy. Therefore, no recommendations have been included for them. Unlike the other five cases, no interviews were conducted with Dalit representatives. Their inclusion is based on secondary literature and public documentation of their movement history and tactics.

Case #1: The Dalits

<u>The Dalit Movement</u>

The Dalits, or "Untouchables," are a minority group in South Asia, comprising 25% of the Indian population.[1] Members of this group experience widespread social, economic, and political exclusion.[2] As a result, the Dalits seek parity in these domains.[3] Central to the Dalit movement is the abolition of the caste system and the pervasive discrimination in education, economic opportunity, prevalence of (gender-based) violence, and political representation. Activists strive to eliminate practices of untouchability, which is a norm that conflates touching a Dalit with inviting impurity, and challenge societal norms that perpetuate caste hierarchies. The movement seeks to transform societal attitudes and structures that sustain caste-based oppression.

When India became a sovereign nation in 1947, it explicitly banned caste-based discrimination in its constitution. To ensure this, 20% of the seats in parliament were reserved for Dalit leadership[4]. Despite this, widespread caste discrimination, both implicit and explicit, persists. To counteract this, Dalits have formed independent political parties and engaged in mainstream politics, with the most prominent group being the Bahujan Samaj Party. The primary goal for Dalits is to gain and maintain political representation to ensure their needs are addressed and equity is prioritized.

Dalits also seek to equalize access to economic opportunity. Historically, they have been relegated to the lowest-paying and least safe jobs, such as managing cremated remains or handling disease-ridden waste[5]. While some Dalits have become business owners or political leaders, economic mobility remains a priority for the community.

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[1] Priyali Sur, "Under India's Caste System, Dalits Are Considered Untouchable. the Coronavirus Is Intensifying That Slur," CNN, April 16, 2020, https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/15/asia/india-coronavirus-lower-castes-hnk-intl/index.html.https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/15/asia/india-coronavirus-lower-castes-hnk-intl/index.html.

[2] Sudeep Khanal, Shiva Raj Pokhrel, and Rebecca Dewey, "Propagation of Inequality: An Analysis of Capability Development Opportunities of Dalits in Higher Education on the Indian Subcontinent," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 55, no. 2 (September 15, 2023): 279–94, https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2023.2254214.

[3] "The Dalit: Born into a Life of Discrimination and Stigma | OHCHR." OHCHR, April 19, 2021. https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2021/04/dalit-born-life-discrimination-and-stigma.

[4] Vina M. Goghari and Mavis Kusi, "An Introduction to the Basic Elements of the Caste System of India," *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (December 21, 2023), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1210577.

[5]Swaminathan S Anklesaria Aiyar, "Capitalism's Assault on the Indian Caste System: How Economic Liberalization Spawned Low-Caste Dalit Millionaires," Cato.org, July 21, 2015, https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/capitalisms-assault-indian-caste-system-how-economic-liberalization-spawned-low.

<u>Resistance Tactics</u>

"Educate, Organize, and Agitate." Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, or B.R. Ambedkar, a Dalit leader, spearheaded the slogan "Educate, Organize, and Agitate," which has become the bedrock of this movement's tactics. The group has experienced varying degrees of setbacks, including inter-group stratification and co-optation, but has still accomplished meaningful successes. For this group, the teachings of B.R. Ambedkar are inalienable. Their mobilization tactics center around these three pillars. They seek to organize interests within the group, increase public understanding of their plight, and gain legitimacy and power through education. This, in turn, allows them to broaden the reach of their message and agitate, to rid themselves of the powerful segregationist systems that seek to limit their freedoms.

Rhetorical framing. Initially, the Dalit movement was fragmented and largely domestically focused. However, by the late 1990s, their strategies changed. Dalit activists began framing caste-based discrimination as a violation of the group's human rights, strategically shifting their rhetoric from domestic caste grievances to language that would resonate with international communities, such as "discrimination based on work and descent."[6] Their tactics included grassroots activism, legal advocacy, media outreach, signature campaigns, and engagement with international human rights bodies like the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR).[7] Engaging with international organizations such as the Human Rights Watch amplified their message internationally. Strategically, they helped propel their message by leveraging the reach and networks of NGOs and international conferences.

Diaspora Mobilization. Dalit diaspora communities in the West have become instrumental tools in amplifying the plight of the group. Through building networks with global human rights organizations and policymakers, diaspora groups have facilitated the inclusion of caste discrimination in international human rights discourse. Countries hosting large populations of individuals with Dalit and, more broadly, South Asian heritage, such as the United Kingdom, have institutionalized caste-based discrimination as a form of prejudice. By organizing and participating in international advocacy, the diaspora has brought global attention to caste-based injustices, thereby strengthening the broader Dalit movement.[8] This has been an effective tool to both pressure the Indian government and create further awareness domestically.

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[6] Clifford Bob, "'Dalit Rights Are Human Rights': Caste Discrimination, International Activism, and the Construction of a New Human Rights Issue," *Human Rights Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (February 2007): 167–93, https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2007.0001.
[7] Clifford Bob, "Dalit Rights Are Human Rights,"
[8] Harish S Wakhande, "The Dalit Diaspora in the US and the Struggle against Caste Discrimination: A Report," Round Table India, March 20, 2023, https://www.roundtableindia.co.in/the-dalit-diaspora-in-the-us-and-the-struggle-against-caste-discrimination-a-report/.

Social Media Usage and Youth Mobilization. In recent years, the Dalit movement in India has witnessed a transformative shift marked by the emergence of a new generation of leaders, strategies, and platforms in a move referred to as the New Wave of Dalit politics.[9] The driving force of this new wave is characterized by unapologetic resistance via social media to mobilize Dalits and non-Dalits alike digitally. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube have become pivotal tools in sharing Dalit voices, exposing caste-related atrocities, and building cross-regional solidarity among Dalit youth and other marginalized groups. Social media is leveraged to emphasize the shared struggle of oppression; Dalit youth are seeking to redefine solidarity between oppressed peoples within the political environment of India.[10] This form of resistance has reframed the Dalit struggle from a fight for representation or welfare to one centered on dignity, justice, and structural transformation.[11] In reclaiming public spaces and media narratives, the new wave of Dalit politics demonstrates that resistance today is not just about making or securing legislative change but about cultural visibility, ideological clarity, and grassroots pressure.

Leveraging Existing Political Parties. Dalit engagement with mainstream political parties in India has been a complex and evolving strategy to secure greater rights and representation. Despite their significant electoral presence owing to constitutional protections, non-Dalit political entities rely heavily on Dalit votes, and they frequently fail to promote Dalit leaders to positions of influence, resulting in a disconnect between the community's support and its political empowerment.[12] However, when analyzing Dalit voting patterns, scholars have found that Dalits do not uniformly support any one political party - not even those that are Dalit-led.[13] Rather, they engage with multiple political entities based on local contexts and the perceived benefits of such associations. Importantly, this approach is also a form of resistance. Dalit elites, once in power, can be susceptible to elite capture, prioritizing their own interests over those of the broader community. In response, the majority of Dalits resist this internal co-optation by diversifying their political affiliations and withholding bloc loyalty, and in so doing, retain influence over mainstream parties who seek out their support.This strategic alignment allows Dalits to navigate the political landscape pragmatically, seeking avenues where the interest of Dalits might best be advanced.[14] Importantly, the movement recognizes that this tool alone cannot account for change-making for the Dalits. While they do organize as Dalit-exclusive political groups, they do not do so as one entity but rather several small ones. They do so with

[9] Bankim Chandra Mandal, "Dalit Politics in India: A Critical Overview," *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, November 24, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328x221131716.
[10] Mandal, "Dalit Politics in India: A Critical Overview."
[11] Harish S Wakhande, "The Dalit Diaspora in the US and the Struggle against Caste Discrimination: A Report," Round Table India, March 20, 2023, https://www.roundtableindia.co.in/the-dalit-diaspora-in-the-us-and-the-struggle-against-caste-discrimination-a-report/.
[12] Rahul Verma, "Dalit Voting Patterns," *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 39 (2009): 95–98, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25663603.
[13] Verma, "Dalit Voting Patterns."
[14] Verma, "Dalit Voting Patterns."

the understanding that working with different political parties while also keeping an independent Dalit presence can still lead to small but important wins at the local level. Over time, these alliances still contribute to a broader systemic change.

Case #2: Catalonia

<u>Movement Overview & the Catalan National Assembly (ANC)</u>

Catalonia is an autonomous region in northeastern Spain with its own language, cultural traditions, and distinct historical identity. Many Catalans seek either enhanced self-rule or full independence from Spain, pointing to unique linguistic and political rights as well as long standing economic grievances.[15] Contemporary support for Catalan independence is rooted in historical aspirations for greater self-governance, but it surged dramatically after a pivotal 2010 Spanish Constitutional Court ruling. This ruling significantly curtailed the region's autonomy the 2006 Statute of Autonomy granted, fueling widespread dissatisfaction among Catalans. In the following years, many municipalities organized grassroots referendums on independence, mobilizing thousands of volunteers and voters. These local initiatives revealed a groundswell of pro-independence sentiment and laid the foundation for a more cohesive, region-wide movement.[16]

Within this context, the Assemblea Nacional Catalana (ANC) was established in 2011. Serving as a coordinating hub for diverse civil society actors, the ANC aims to secure Catalonia's self-determination and, ultimately, its independence from Spain.[17] From the outset, the organization has emphasized a strictly nonviolent path toward independence, thereby shaping the movement's broader commitment to peaceful civil disobedience.[18] To achieve its goals, the ANC relies on a vast network of local and foreign branches that orchestrate protests, demonstrations, and information campaigns. These branches also cultivate international awareness of Catalonia's political situation, engaging both Catalans living abroad and global institutions through advocacy efforts.[19]

<u>Resistance Tactics</u>

Over the years, the ANC's tactical approach has blended grassroots mobilization, nonviolent civil disobedience, and international advocacy.[20]

Protests. Since 2012, the ANC has orchestrated large-scale demonstrations each Catalan National Day on September 11. The 2014 assembly was a notable success, when more than one million people formed a symbolic human chain across the region.[21] These events serve not only

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[15] Marta Pascal, "The Role of Civil Society in the Catalan Political Process (2012–2021)," (2021).
[16] Pascal, "The Role of Civil Society in the Catalan Political Process."
[17] A. Dowling, "La Assemblea Nacional Catalana: Las Limitaciones Estratégicas de un Movimiento Social Sui Generis," (2020).
[18] CIDOB, *Nonviolent Tactics in Catalonia's Independence Movement* (2022).
[19] Catalan activist, virtual interview, March 18th, 2025.
[20] Pascal, "The Role of Civil Society in the Catalan Political Process."
[21] Catalan activist, virtual interview, March 18th, 2025.

to express popular sentiment but also to pressure Catalan political parties to adopt more assertive pro-independence strategies. Beyond its annual mass mobilizations, the ANC has also emphasized smaller-scale yet sustained acts of protest targeting everyday public services. In particular, local branches regularly organize gatherings at Catalan train stations to draw attention to longstanding infrastructure deficiencies and chronic service delays.[22] There, volunteers hand out leaflets and speak with commuters, linking the underfunding of public transportation to broader debates on regional autonomy and the perceived neglect of Catalan needs by the central government.[23] These station-based protests illustrate the movement's grassroots character, as they rely on direct interaction with the public and continuous engagement rather than relying solely on large, centralized demonstrations.

Collaboration with Civil Society and Professional Organizations. In collaboration with other civil society actors, notably Òmnium Cultural, an NGO promoting Catalonian language and culture, and pro-independence labor unions, the ANC amplifies local voices and negotiates with public institutions to advance democratic expressions of Catalan self-determination.[24] The ANC has also strategically bolstered civil society by supporting like-minded candidates in professional associations, including lawyers' and economists' groups. This approach culminated in the 2019 "Eines de País" campaign for the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce, where a pro-independence slate unseated the traditional business establishment.[25] While legal challenges and regulatory crackdowns sometimes hamper such initiatives, these efforts underscore the ANC's aim to embed pro-independence perspectives across diverse societal sectors, such as trade unions, professional boards, and grassroots community assemblies. Through these alliances, the ANC broadens participation in the independence cause and fosters alternative avenues of influence outside traditional party structures.[26]

Escalation Through Civil Disobedience. In moments of heightened political tension such as following controversial court rulings, the ANC and other allied groups have occasionally escalated their tactics by disrupting critical transport networks. Protests that block major infrastructure, including the Barcelona airport and the border crossing between France and Spain, have aimed to capture international attention and signal the movement's determination.[27] Often driven by younger activists willing to face legal risks, these actions reflect a broader strategic commitment to nonviolent civil disobedience, bringing pressing grievances to the forefront by halting the flow of business and travel.[28]

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[22] Catalan activist, virtual interview, March 18th, 2025.
[23] Catalan activist, virtual interview, March 18th, 2025.
[24] Pascal, "The Role of Civil Society in the Catalan Political Process."
[25] Catalan activist, virtual interview, March 18th, 2025.
[26] Catalan activist, virtual interview, March 18th, 2025.
[27] Catalan activist, virtual interview, March 18th, 2025.
[28] Catalan activist, virtual interview, March 18th, 2025.

Referendums. The ANC's involvement in organizing the contentious 2017 independence referendum illustrates its influence.[29] Despite the vote being deemed illegal by Spanish authorities, approximately 90% of participants favoured independence, although the referendum itself was marked by police interventions that drew international scrutiny and condemnation.[30] This watershed moment solidified the ANC's reputation as a linchpin in the push for Catalan self-governance while also exposing the pronounced legal and political tensions between Catalonia and the Spanish state.

Consumer Campaigns. The ANC spearheaded campaigns like the 2019 strategic consumer drive to bolster economic autonomy, encouraging citizens to patronize businesses that uphold the Catalan language and interests. Although legal hurdles such as lawsuits and regulatory crackdowns curtailed some efforts, the intent to strengthen pro-independence sentiment through market-based strategies remained central.[31]

International Engagement. On the international stage, the ANC collaborates with sympathetic politicians, journalists, and human rights organizations to underscore the alleged suppression of peaceful pro-independence activism. Such outreach attempts to broaden awareness among European institutions and global networks, particularly following incidents of police force during referendum-related protests.[32] However, legal actions taken against key Catalan leaders - many of whom were either jailed or exiled - have disrupted the ANC's momentum. Spain's intensified crackdown after 2017 has embroiled the organization in ongoing legal defences while also deterring some public participation.[33]

Challenges to Mobilization

Unfortunately, internal divisions within the independence movement have complicated the ANC's efforts. Fragmentation among political parties regarding the speed and method of achieving independence, as well as declining participation in mobilizations, has dampened the movement's cohesion.[34]Additionally, some critics argue that continued polarization might undermine democratic pluralism, marginalizing voices within Catalonia that do not align with pro-independence objectives.[35]

Building on these internal divisions, Catalan activists currently face three interconnected challenges that hamper cohesive mobilization for greater autonomy. First, legal and political repression from the Spanish government has included arrests and prosecutions of leaders who

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[29] Dowling, "La Assemblea Nacional Catalana."
[30] CIDOB, *Nonviolent Tactics in Catalonia's Independence Movement* (20220.
[31] CIDOB, *Nonviolent Tactics in Catalonia's Independence Movement* (2022).
[32] Pascal, "The Role of Civil Society in the Catalan Political Process."
[33] Dowling, "La Assemblea Nacional Catalana."
[34] CIDOB, *Nonviolent Tactics in Catalonia's Independence Movement* (2022).
[35] Pascal, "The Role of Civil Society in the Catalan Political Process."

organized or supported independence referendums, thereby creating an atmosphere of fear that complicates public mobilization.[36] Second, the broader Spanish media frequently amplifies Madrid's official narrative, often framing independence advocates as radical or unjust, which undercuts the visibility of local perspectives and can discourage potential allies.[37] Finally, despite earlier periods of high engagement, the movement now suffers from noticeable fatigue and a feeling of hopelessness after prolonged mobilizations and political stalemates, highlighting the urgency of innovative strategies to sustain public enthusiasm and organizational cohesion.[38]

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Promoting Robust Direct Democracy Tactics
One key recommendation to strengthen Catalonia's autonomy movement is to employ direct democracy tactics that also minimize legal risk. Rather than relying on a single large demonstration, activists can organize multiple smaller gatherings, allowing broad participation while lowering the chance of any one event becoming a clear target for government reprisal.[39] Encouraging local associations, cultural clubs, and neighbourhood councils to co-sponsor these events enhances grassroots involvement and disperses responsibility, reducing legal vulnerability.[40]

When public mobilization faces potential prosecution, secure digital channels and encrypted platforms become essential tools for planning and communication.[41] Virtual forums can sustain community engagement by enabling citizens to voice concerns, propose strategies, and make collective decisions, even if in-person meetings are legally constrained.[42] Framing these forums around fiscal constraints and austerity policies, which undercut regional self-governance, helps rally support from those who may not identify strictly as pro-independence but value equitable political representation.[43]

Finally, rotating leadership roles, deploying legal observers, and sharing responsibilities across various civic networks can protect individual activists from becoming primary legal targets and bolster the movement's overall resilience.[44] By uniting moderates and more radical factions around the shared goal of the "right to decide," Catalonia's autonomy movement can maintain a clear, cohesive message while adapting to shifting political conditions.[45]

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[36] Andrew Dowling, *The Rise of Catalan Independence: Spain's Territorial Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 2018).
[37] Montserrat Guibernau, "Secessionism in Catalonia: After Democracy," *Ethnopolitics* 12, no. 4 (2013): 368–393.
[38] Dowling, "The Rise of Catalan Independence."
[39] Dowling, "The Rise of Catalan Independence."
[40] Guibernau, "Secessionism in Catalonia: After Democracy."
[41] Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[42] Tarrow, "Power in Movement."
[43] Dowling, "The Rise of Catalan Independence."
[44] Tarrow, "Power in Movement."
[45] Guibernau, "Secessionism in Catalonia: After Democracy."

Recommendation 2: Pursuing International Mediation and EU Oversight
Another essential tactic involves seeking international mediation and EU-level oversight to ensure neutral arbitration in financial and judicial disputes with the Spanish government. Catalan advocacy groups can coordinate appeals to European institutions to oversee budgetary decisions, linguistic rights, and fair judicial practices. Such third-party monitoring may bolster transparency and ensure outside entities take local concerns about decentralization seriously.

Recommendation 3: Leveraging Diaspora-Based Resources
In tandem, reinforcing diaspora-based resources can maintain pressure on how austerity-driven centralization hinders Catalan self-rule. Drawing upon the global Catalan community to share personal testimonies and highlight narratives of structural underfunding, especially in education and health, can amplify grassroots advocacy.[46] This ongoing diaspora engagement demonstrates that calls for independence transcend local concerns, attracting broader attention to fiscal, linguistic, and cultural grievances.

Recommendation 4: Enhancing Digital and Social Media Strategies
Finally, continued adaptation of digital and social media strategies is vital for mobilization and outreach. The Catalan movement can implement secure e-referendum platforms for local consultations, ensuring broader participation and reducing operational hurdles. Short social media threads or TikTok-style clips explaining the economic and social costs of "recentralization" can inform diverse demographics, including younger audiences.[47] Online communities facilitating crowdfunding for legal defence, diaspora activism, and real-time organizing will sustain momentum and cultivate a sense of collective purpose. By systematically combining digital innovation with firmly rooted nonviolent methods, the ANC and allied organizations can advance their goals, preserve unity, and strengthen their cause's legitimacy in the global community's eyes.

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[46] Crameri, "Goodbye, Spain? The Question of Independence for Catalonia."
[47] Pascal, "The Role of Civil Society in the Catalan Political Process."

Case #3: Nagalim

<u>Nagalim Movement Overview & Naga People's Movement for Human Rights</u>

The Nagas are an Indigenous people primarily situated in northeastern India and northwestern Myanmar, with historical claims to autonomy dating back to the British colonial era. Even as early Naga leaders asserted independence at the time of Britain's withdrawal, their homeland was subsumed under India in 1947, igniting decades of organized resistance. In 1980, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) emerged to further mobilize this resistance.[48] In 1988, discord within the NSCN produced two major factions: NSCN (Isak-Muivah) and NSCN (Khaplang), each adopting divergent approaches to the struggle. On the one hand, the NSCN (Isak-Muivah) faction tends to pursue negotiation-based methods, including intermittent ceasefires and dialogue with the Indian government. On the other hand, the NSCN (Khaplang) faction often adopts a more militant line and has historically refused certain dialogue initiatives.[49] Central to both their ambitions is creating a "Greater Nagaland," or Nagalim, which aspires to unite all Naga-inhabited areas in India and Myanmar.[50]

India's approach to the Naga political question is a highly orchestrated strategy of enclosure politics, targeting Naga identity, sovereignty, and autonomy. Redrawn boundaries, enforced militarization under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) which grants security forces near-immunity for actions in Naga areas, and collaborations with Myanmar to halt cross-border unity all create a pervasive occupation. This control extends to legal and administrative tactics, such as indefinite ceasefires that create the illusion of negotiation while suppressing genuine dialogue, as well as legal double standards and a judicial system marked by impunity.[51] Economically, India fosters dependency by controlling infrastructure, resource extraction, and market access, undermining local livelihoods. Culturally, assimilationist policies, internal divisions, and historical revisionism erode Naga identity. Even knowledge production is stifled through restricted research, media blackouts, and criminalizing any call for self-determination.[52] While the NSCN consistently challenges what it views as Indian military occupation and human rights violations, it has intermittently pursued dialogue, both through ceasefires (1964, 1997) and an ongoing process involving government officials and advocacy groups.

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[48] A. Manby, "Archiving and the Aspirational Politics of Self-Determination: Non-State Claims to Legitimacy Amongst the Nagas in Northeast India," *Journal of Historical Geography* (2025). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2024.11.007

[49] South Asia Terrorism Portal, "National Socialist Council of Nagaland—Isak-Muivah." Accessed [date]. https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/nagaland/terrorist_outfits/nscn_im.htm

[50] A. Kolas, "Naga Militancy and Violent Politics in the Shadow of Ceasefire," *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 6 (2011): 781–792.

[51] Representative of the Global Naga Forum, document prepared for UNPO (unpublished manuscript, in possession of the author, March 2025).

[52] Representative of the Global Naga Forum, document prepared for UNPO (unpublished manuscript, in possession of the author, March 2025).

At the forefront of the Naga people's struggle for self-determination stands the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), founded in 1978 amid widespread military repression.[53] Guided by the principle that violation of human rights in any part of the world is a threat to the human race as a whole, the NPMHR aims to expose the occupation and devastation of Naga lands and advocate for meaningful political accountability.[54]

<u>Resistance Tactics</u>

From its inception, the NSCN has relied on a multi-pronged strategy that blends armed resistance, political negotiations, legal challenges, and broad-based nonviolent mobilization.

Armed Struggle. Armed struggle emerged in the 1960s when villagers, confronted by military abuses and village burnings, felt they had no option but to acquire arms, some even trekking to China through Burma to defend their homes.[55] Over decades of conflict, the NSCN leadership has maintained that violence was a defensive measure, not a proactive campaign against civilians.[56] Indeed, both historically and in recent years, the movement has refrained from targeting Indian civilian populations or damaging public property.

Political Mobilization. Equally pivotal are legal campaigns, including public interest lawsuits challenging the AFSPA and other draconian statutes that fuel impunity for military forces. Massive, orderly protests, such as the 1997 "March for Naga Justice" in Dimapur, demonstrate the movement's commitment to disciplined civil action. Women's groups and youth wings, such as the National Socialist Women's Organization, played prominent roles in organizing peaceful gatherings. At the same time, religious institutions (primarily churches) offer moral support and document human rights abuses despite often being targets of government crackdowns themselves. Diplomatic efforts, meanwhile, have seen NSCN representatives engage in international dialogues, aiming to garner global recognition for the Naga people's right to self-determination while negotiating political solutions with New Delhi.[57]

Negotiated Ceasefires. Alongside armed and civil resistance, Naga leaders have pursued negotiations with successive Indian administrations, resulting in multiple ceasefire agreements and renewed talks over the decades.[58] The first major ceasefire was declared in 1964 when efforts by the Nagaland Baptist Church Council facilitated initial peace talks between the Naga National Council (NNC) and the Government of India.[59] Decades later, in 1997, the Government

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[53] Naga activist, virtual interview, March 10th, 2025.
[54] Naga activist, virtual interview, March 10th, 2025.
[55] Naga activist, virtual interview, March 10th, 2025.
[56] Naga activist, virtual interview, March 10th, 2025.
[57] Naga activist, virtual interview, March 10th, 2025.
[58] Kolas, "Naga Militancy and Violent Politics in the Shadow of Ceasefire."
[59] S. Longvah, *Nagas Political Violence: Towards a Solution* (Postdoctoral thesis, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies & Management, Sikkim University, 2022), chap. 2.

of India and the NSCN (IM) entered into a landmark ceasefire agreement, often referred to as the beginning of the modern "Naga peace process."[60] This truce sought to halt hostilities and create space for substantive negotiations on key issues such as greater autonomy, the repeal of repressive laws, and the integration of contiguous Naga-inhabited areas.[61] While the 1997 agreement significantly reduced direct clashes between security forces and the NSCN, intra-factional violence and unresolved questions of Naga sovereignty persisted.[62] Hence, although these talks did not yield a definitive political settlement, the ceasefire underscored the Nagas' willingness to engage in dialogue to address their political aspirations.

The 2015 Framework Agreement. The most recent milestone in negotiation efforts was the 2015 Framework Agreement, signed between the Indian government and the NSCN (IM). Although details remain confidential, the agreement reaffirmed the parties' commitment to a peaceful resolution and emphasized a shared desire for an inclusive settlement.[63] By acknowledging the Nagas' unique historical and cultural identity, the 2015 Framework Agreement has been heralded by some as a potential foundation for ending decades of conflict. However, the pathway toward a permanent solution continues to be challenged by factional divisions, questions of territorial integration, and the complexities of translating broad principles into actionable policy.[64]

<u>Mobilization Challenges</u>

Internal divisions, particularly between NSCN (Isak-Muivah) and NSCN (Khaplang), continue to hamper the emergence of a unified negotiating position.[65,66] Moreover, New Delhi's refusal to accept foundational demands, including a separate constitution and flag, remains a serious impediment.[67] NPMHR activists and UNPO representatives attribute stalled negotiations partly to India's reliance on the AFSPA, combined with what they describe as a pattern of reneged accords, factors that have deepened mistrust and perpetuated the conflict.[68]

Critics charge that armed tactics have sometimes curtailed democratic processes within Naga society. Legal efforts to overturn or limit AFSPA, which have been filed repeatedly in Indian courts, have met with minimal success. Yet, despite these setbacks, the NSCN and allied organizations keep raising the issue, both domestically and on international platforms.

[60] Kolas, "Naga Militancy and Violent Politics in the Shadow of Ceasefire."
[61] M. F. N. Franke, *War and Nationalism in South Asia* (London: Routledge, 2009).
[62] Longvah, "Nagas Political Violence."
[63] Representative of the Global Naga Forum, document prepared for UNPO (unpublished manuscript, in possession of the author, March 2025).
[64] Longvah, "Nagas Political Violence."
[65] S. Konwer and T. Rizvi, "The Church and Peace Process in Nagaland (India)," *Peace Review* 35, no. 2 (2023): 377–390. https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2023.2183078
[66] Manby, "Archiving and the Aspirational Politics of Self-Determination."
[67] Konwer and Rizvi, "The Church and Peace Process."
[68] Naga activist, virtual interview, March 10th, 2025.

Additionally, interviewees claim that the government has exploited the Naga's tribal differences to create splinter factions, further complicating the peace process.

Finally, other challenges arise when foreign allies are discouraged, or outright barred, from engaging with the Naga cause, a phenomenon tied to India's strategic global partnerships and influence within international forums.[69] Although some Naga representatives initially secured United Nations Voluntary Funds to attend global gatherings, the Government of India reportedly pressured fund administrators to withdraw such assistance.[70] One activist invited as a panellist to the 15th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues had to self-fund attendance due to state intervention, underscoring how India's political clout often shields it from scrutiny.[71]

These limitations reflect the larger structural issue wherein major powers rarely challenge India, prioritizing economic and geopolitical interests over Indigenous rights. Meanwhile, the Naga diaspora, though active, remains relatively small and lacks the political sway of larger diaspora groups, further limiting global advocacy efforts.[72] As a result, external funding and alliances, integral to international lobbying, remain precarious and subject to abrupt cancellations. Underfunding compels many activists to rely on personal means alone, curtailing outreach potential and weakening coalition-building at a critical juncture in the movement.[73]

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Faith-Based Mediation and Factional Unity
Building on decades of peaceful mobilization, the Naga people and the NPMHR can further unify diverse factions and reinforce ceasefires through church-mediated peace-building.[74] Such faith-based facilitation draws on religious leaders' strong moral authority in Naga society, even when they face state repression. From a broader strategic standpoint, shifting "from a power disposition to a faith disposition" fosters a more resilient form of resistance that relies on moral authority and cultural cohesion rather than reactive violence. This approach underscores that peace must precede justice, allowing the movement to seize the moral high ground and force the Indian state to justify its militarization in the face of consistent, faith-centered advocacy.[75]

Simultaneously, elevating the role of women's groups in negotiation platforms helps reduce internal division and fosters broader social legitimacy, given that many women already serve in

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[69] Representative of the Global Naga Forum, document prepared for UNPO (unpublished manuscript, in possession of the author, March 2025).
[70] Naga activist, virtual interview, March 10th, 2025.
[71] Naga activist, virtual interview, March 10th, 2025.
[72] Representative of the Global Naga Forum, document prepared for UNPO (unpublished manuscript, in possession of the author, March 2025).
[73] Naga activist, virtual interview, March 10th, 2025.
[74] Kolas, "Naga Militancy and Violent Politics in the Shadow of Ceasefire."
[75] Representative of the Global Naga Forum, document prepared for UNPO (unpublished manuscript, in possession of the author, March 2025).

frontline roles and organizational wings.[76] Moving toward a shared negotiation stance among NSCN factions remains indispensable, especially since India has historically exploited internal weaknesses to create splinter groups; bridging these divides is imperative for sustained momentum.[77]

Recommendation 2: Grassroots Empowerment and Interim Resource-Sharing

Embedding local institutions and youth wings in governance processes, encouraging more formal roles in decision-making can lend grassroots support to any political settlement.[78] However, any governance model that includes partial autonomy under Indian frameworks must be approached cautiously since the NPMHR's position repeatedly stresses rejecting solutions that undermine core sovereignty demands.[79] Even so, incorporating the principle that "peace as a precursor to justice" allows activists to demonstrate moral superiority and practical benefits, such as improved local infrastructure, while refusing to compromise on full self-determination.[80] Exploring interim resource-sharing measures that do not commit to final subordination within the Indian constitution might help rebuild trust on both sides, particularly if it shows tangible gains for education, healthcare, and cultural preservation.[81] Mobilizing community-led structures, such as parallel governance initiatives, can further reduce dependency on the Indian state, giving the Naga movement space to shape its own economic and political futures.[82]

Recommendation 3: Digital Engagement and Secure Communication

In an era where the Indian government intermittently restricts press freedom, securing digital platforms (e.g., Signal) would protect internal communications and unify factional leadership around joint declarations.[83] Likewise, launching publicly accessible channels, such as YouTube content in local languages, can inform communities about the status of ceasefire agreements, amplifying calls for accountability and the narrative of Naga aspirations for dignity and self-rule.[84] This approach ensures that any breakthroughs or setbacks in negotiations are explained candidly to local populations, maintaining clarity in a context often marked by external interference.

Recommendation 4: Economic Self-Reliance and Alternative Governance Structures

The movement must gradually reduce dependency on Indian funding and external donor agendas by cultivating self-sustaining economic models, including cooperative networks and local

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[76] Konwer and Rizvi, "The Church and Peace Process."
[77] Naga activist, virtual interview, March 10th, 2025.
[78] Konwer and Rizvi, "The Church and Peace Process."
[79] Naga activist, virtual interview, March 10th, 2025.
[80] Representative of the Global Naga Forum, document prepared for UNPO (unpublished manuscript, in possession of the author, March 2025).
[81] Arenla Ao, "Local Institutions in Naga Governance Processes," *Northeast Studies Review* 14, no. 2 (2018): 67–80.
[82] Representative of the Global Naga Forum, document prepared for UNPO (unpublished manuscript, in possession of the author, March 2025).
[83] Manby, "Archiving and the Aspirational Politics of Self-Determination."
[84] Ao, "Local Institutions in Naga Governance Processes."

revenue-generating initiatives.[85] If updated to meet contemporary needs, traditional land-based livelihoods, artisanal production, and collaborative resource management offer a strong foundation for Naga autonomy. Developing small-scale "parallel governance" institutions, such as community councils, local administrative bodies, or alternative dispute-resolution systems, can reinforce self-rule. By focusing on independence in agriculture, crafts, and localized trade, Nagas create economic insulation from central government pressures, thereby countering the "NGO-ization" of political struggle and strengthening the movement's long-term viability.[86]

Recommendation 5: Enhanced Nonviolent Tactics and Internationalization
Consistently projecting a peaceful image allows the Naga struggle to disarm claims of militancy, attracting broader international support.[87] Tactically, this can include large-scale civil disobedience, targeted boycotts of Indian goods and institutions, and symbolic protests that expose the stark contradiction between India's democratic rhetoric and colonial practices on Naga lands. In tandem, building alliances with sympathetic states, diaspora communities, and global civil society can generate diplomatic pressure. Systematically preserved and showcased human rights documentation serves as historical evidence and a persuasive advocacy tool in international forums, circumventing India's attempts to dominate the narrative.

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[85] Representative of the Global Naga Forum, document prepared for UNPO (unpublished manuscript, in possession of the author, March 2025).
[86] Representative of the Global Naga Forum, document prepared for UNPO (unpublished manuscript, in possession of the author, March 2025).
[87] Representative of the Global Naga Forum, document prepared for UNPO (unpublished manuscript, in possession of the author, March 2025).

Case #4: The Haratin

<u>Movement Overview & IRA-Mauritania</u>

The Haratin are the largest minority group in Mauritania, comprising approximately 40% of the population.[88] Although slavery was officially abolished in 1981 and later criminalized in 2007 and again in 2015, many Haratin continue to live as de facto slaves and face systemic discrimination. Access to essential services such as healthcare and education remains limited, and the Haratin are significantly underrepresented in political institutions.[89] Many cannot vote due to barriers in obtaining identification and official documentation required for voter registration. The Haratin are also not officially recognized as a distinct ethnic or social group nationally and lack the cultural rights and legal protections needed to self-identify as Haratin.[90]

Founded in 2008, the Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist Movement (IRA-Mauritania) advocates for the social and economic emancipation of the Haratin and the eradication of slavery-like practices in Mauritania.[91] The organization raises international awareness of the systemic marginalization faced by the Haratin while promoting cultural rights, equal opportunity, and full civic inclusion. IRA-Mauritania seeks to challenge both "slave masters" and the state's complicity in maintaining structures of servitude.[92] It also calls for greater political and administrative representation, dismantling the deeply rooted caste-like hierarchy perpetuating Haratin exclusion.

The IRA-Mauritania is governed by a general congress composed of all of its members, which elects a 25-member executive council responsible for overall management.[93] A nine-member permanent committee, drawn from the council and including a president, vice president, and seven secretaries, handles day-to-day operations. Locally, the organization is structured into chapters. It also includes a Peace Committee tasked with maintaining order and discipline during its activities.[94] There have also been IRA groups created in other countries, such as France and Canada.[95]

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[88] "Member Profile: Haratin" (Unrepresented Nations & Peoples Organization, April 2017), https://unpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Haratin-1.pdf.
[89] "Member Profile: Haratin." (UNPO, April 2017).
[90] "Member Profile: Haratin." (UNPO, April 2017).
[91] "Member Profile: Haratin." (UNPO, April 2017).
[92] "Member Profile: Haratin." (UNPO, April 2017).
[93] "Responses to Information Requests: IRA-Mauritania," *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* (blog), November 30, 2020, https://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/country-information/rir/Pages/index.aspx?doc=458347.
[94] "Responses to Information Requests: IRA-Mauritania," Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.
[95] IRA-Mauritania member, virtual interview, March 24, 2025.

<u>Resistance Tactics</u>

Organized resistance began in 1978 with the formation of El-Hor, a social movement founded by young activists advocating for the emancipation of slaves.[96] This section outlines key resistance tactics employed from that early period through to the present day, both before and after the creation of IRA-Mauritania

Politics. Political participation has been a key resistance method for the Haratin, who have sought to challenge their marginalization by forming political parties and running for office. Over the years, prominent Haratin figures have held ministerial posts and even served as the President of the National Assembly.[97] Parties led or controlled by Haratin have secured seats in the legislature, offering modest yet meaningful representation of their interests in national politics.[98] While structural barriers and persistent discrimination have often limited their electoral success and in many cases led to the banning of their parties, political participation remains a vital tool in the broader struggle for rights, recognition, and systemic change.[99]

Sit-ins and Hunger Strikes. To pressure the government on specific slavery cases, activists have staged open sit-ins at police stations, refusing to leave until demands such as the prosecution of slaveholders are met.[100] At times, they have physically blocked authorities from leaving by lying in front of vehicles. When these efforts are ignored, protests are escalated to hunger strikes.[101] Such actions are often deliberately timed to coincide with visits from the UN Special Rapporteur on Slavery, amplifying visibility and international pressure. In 2011, these tactics proved effective, leading to the liberation of enslaved children and compelling authorities to respond under global scrutiny.[102]

Marches & Coalition Building. IRA-Mauritania periodically organizes awareness-raising marches known as "caravans" to spotlight human rights issues.[103] These initiatives also serve as opportunities for community outreach and coalition-building with non-Haratin groups across Mauritania. In 2011, for instance, the organization denounced the crimes committed by Beidane authorities against Black Mauritanians in the early 1990s and led a symbolic pilgrimage to the

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[96] Zekeria Ould Ahmed Salem, "The Politics of the Haratin Social Movement in Mauritania, 1978–2014," in *Social Currents in North Africa: Culture and Governance after the Arab Spring*, ed. Osama Abi-Mershed (Oxford University Press, 2018), 117–42, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190876036.003.0007.

[97] Salem, "The Politics of the Haratin Social Movement in Mauritania, 1978–2014."

[98] Salem, "The Politics of the Haratin Social Movement in Mauritania, 1978–2014."

[99] Nicholas McGeehan and Eric Goldstein, "Ethnicity, Discrimination, and Other Red Lines: Repression of Human Rights Defenders in Mauritania," *Human Rights Watch* (blog), February 12, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/02/12/ethnicity-discrimination-and-other-red-lines/repression-human-rights-defenders.

[100] IRA-Mauritania member, virtual interview, March 24, 2025.

[101] IRA-Mauritania member, virtual interview, March 24, 2025.

[102] IRA-Mauritania member, virtual interview, March 24, 2025.

[103] IRA-Mauritania member, virtual interview, March 24, 2025.

graves of those killed.[104] This action demonstrated the IRA's broader commitment to justice for all marginalized communities, not solely the Haratin. A similar effort occurred in 2014, when activists from seven organizations, including IRA-Mauritania, visited towns along the Senegal River. They spoke with local communities about land expropriation, slavery, and the need for truth and justice for victims of state-led repression.[105] Beyond public actions, IRA-Mauritania has sought to position itself as a unifying force by acknowledging the grievances of Black Mauritanians while reassuring Beidane communities that its mission centers on justice and coexistence, not division.[106] This approach aims to ease fears of political manipulation and present IRA-Mauritania as a credible advocate for national reconciliation.

Book Burnings. IRA-Mauritania has been particularly vocal in denouncing the use of Islam to justify slavery.[107] In 2012, the group staged a public burning of several Islamic legal texts to protest interpretations that condone slavery, sparking widespread outrage across the country.[108]

Publishing Reports. Mauritanian NGOs have been instrumental in exposing the conditions faced by the Haratin, with SOS-Slaves, founded in 1995, emerging as the most prominent among them. The organization has published annual reports documenting 30 to 45 slavery cases each year, detailing abuses such as unpaid bonded labor, escaped slaves, land dispossession, identity theft by former slave owners, and physical violence.[109] Through this work, SOS-Slaves has helped shift both national and international attention toward the systemic nature of slavery in Mauritania. Its press campaigns have led to the resolution of a small number of individual cases while keeping the broader issue in the public eye.[110]

Mobilization Challenges

Haratin mobilization efforts face intense repression from the Mauritanian state. The government has subjected Haratin activists to arrests, surveillance, and legal harassment, including the leaders and members of IRA-Mauritania.[111] In such a hostile environment, organizing openly or advocating for systemic change carries serious personal risk.

Beyond direct repression, Haratin activists encounter entrenched resistance from institutions that should uphold justice.[112] Religious leaders often oppose anti-slavery activism, drawing on interpretations of Islam to legitimize social hierarchies and discourage reform. Within the

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[104] IRA-Mauritania member, virtual interview, March 24, 2025.
[105] McGeehan and Goldstein, "Ethnicity, Discrimination, and Other Red Lines: Repression of Human Rights Defenders in Mauritania."
[106] IRA-Mauritania member, virtual interview, March 24, 2025.
[107] Salem, "The Politics of the Haratin Social Movement in Mauritania, 1978–2014."
[108] IRA-Mauritania member, virtual interview, March 24, 2025.
[109] Salem, "The Politics of the Haratin Social Movement in Mauritania, 1978–2014."
[110] Salem, "The Politics of the Haratin Social Movement in Mauritania, 1978–2014."
[111] IRA-Mauritania member, virtual interview, March 24, 2025.
[112] IRA-Mauritania member, virtual interview, March 24, 2025.

judiciary, many judges own slaves themselves and showed little willingness to pursue slavery-related cases.[113] Although anti-slavery tribunals have been established, they are largely inactive and tend to function only during visits from international observers. In some instances, rulings have been issued against individuals who are already deceased, further undermining the credibility of the justice system.[114] This institutional inaction fosters a climate of impunity and obstructs meaningful progress.

Regional instability, especially the conflict in neighboring Mali, has destabilized Mauritania's eastern border, triggered refugee inflows, and disrupted trade and energy supplies.[115] These pressures have strained Mauritania's limited resources, heightened the vulnerability of marginalized communities, including the Haratin, and reduce the political space and visibility of Haratin advocacy.

Finally, Haratin-led organizations struggle with funding. Given the vast geography of Mauritania, IRA-Mauritania must often rely on member contributions or donations to fund missions and provide assistance to local groups on the ground.[116]

Recommendations

To strengthen their advocacy efforts and expand their political and social impact, Haratin-led movements such as IRA-Mauritania should consider adopting a combination of domestic and international strategies successfully used by other marginalized groups.

Recommendation 1: Strategic Political Engagement through Existing Party Structures
Given the repeated banning of Haratin-led parties, activists should consider working within the existing political system by co-opting or aligning with legally recognized parties. This tactic, used effectively by groups such as the Dalits in India and the Catalans as mentioned above, would allow Haratin-backed candidates to contest elections and advocate for their communities from within mainstream institutions. Sponsoring Haratin politicians within other party frameworks may help sidestep restrictions while maintaining a presence in legislative spaces.

Recommendation 2: Regional Advocacy through the African Union and Related Bodies
Due to the Mauritanian legal system's consistent failure to prosecute slaveholders and the fact that many in the ruling elite continue to benefit from slave labour, there is a need to apply pressure on the government. The Haratin movement can deepen its international advocacy by engaging directly with the African Union (AU) and its human rights mechanisms. A notable

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[113] IRA-Mauritania member, virtual interview, March 24, 2025.
[114] IRA-Mauritania member, virtual interview, March 24, 2025.
[115] Jordana Yochai, "Mauritania Should Mediate in Mali. Here's How.," *The Atlantic Council* (blog), October 11, 2024, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/mauritania-should-mediate-in-mali-heres-how/.
[116] IRA-Mauritania member, virtual interview, March 24, 2025.

precedent was set in 2018 when the AU reprimanded Mauritania for its inaction on slavery and ordered compensation for two child victims.[117] The case, brought before the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), resulted in a ruling that condemned the government's leniency and accused it of fostering a "culture of impunity." Building on this success, continued legal appeals to AU bodies can help sustain international scrutiny and highlight Mauritania's ongoing failure to enforce its anti-slavery commitments.

Beyond the ACERWC, the Haratin should consider engaging with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) by submitting reports and complaints related to slavery, discrimination, and systemic exclusion. Haratin-led NGOs can also participate in the Forum on the Participation of NGOs, a platform within the ACHPR that promotes dialogue on democracy and human rights across the continent.[118] The Forum fosters networking among civil society organizations and encourages regional cooperation. For the Haratin movement, this space offers an important opportunity to raise the visibility of their struggle, engage in formal continental discussions, and build alliances with other African movements. By forming coalitions through the Forum, they can strengthen collective pressure on Mauritania and hold the government accountable for persistent rights violations.

This engagement can also lead to access to the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR). While Mauritania has not submitted the declaration required for individuals and NGOs to access the Court directly, Haratin organizations can route complaints through the African Commission.[119] If domestic remedies are exhausted or prove ineffective, the Commission may refer cases to the Court, providing an indirect but important legal pathway for challenging impunity and advancing justice.[120] This strategy mirrors tactics used by the Catalan movement, which has appealed to European courts in Strasbourg when Spanish courts have failed to address their political grievances, reframing national issues as human rights concerns on the international stage.

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[117] Anne Kelly and Kate Hodal, "Mauritania Failing to Tackle Pervasive Alavery, Says African Union," *The Guardian* (blog), January 29, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/jan/29/african-union-mauritania-failing-to-tackle-pervasive-slavery.

[118] Hassan Shire, "Good Practices for CSO Participation at the African Commission on Human and People's Rights" (Civicus, n.d.), https://www.civicus.org/images/Good%20practices%20on%20CSO%20participation%20at%20the%20African%20Commission.pdf.

[119] "Mauritania Commends Work of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights," *African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights* (blog), August 25, 2022, https://www.african-court.org/wpafc/mauritania-commends-work-of-the-african-court-on-human-and-peoples-rights/.

[120] "Litigating at the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights," *Media Defence* (blog), March 2024, https://www.mediadefence.org/ereader/publications/advanced-modules-on-digital-rights-and-freedom-of-expression-online/module-6-litigating-digital-rights-cases-in-africa/litigating-at-the-african-court-on-human-and-peoples-rights/.

Additionally, the AU's Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy, which prioritizes economic autonomy for women, offers another avenue for advocacy, particularly regarding the structural disadvantages faced by Haratin women.[121]

Together, these recommendations reflect key findings from Report #1, which highlight that international pressure is most effective when paired with strong domestic mobilization.[122] In this case, leveraging the African Union creates pressure from above, potentially drawing greater attention to the Haratin struggle from INGOs, international media, and diplomatic actors. At the same time, strategic engagement with existing political parties would apply pressure from within the regime, helping Haratin voices enter mainstream institutions despite legal restrictions. These strategies complement the continued grassroots efforts of Haratin-led organizations like IRA-Mauritania, which exert pressure from below through demonstrations, sit-ins, and local organizing. Taken together, this multi-level approach offers a coordinated and pragmatic path toward challenging systemic exclusion and advancing lasting change.

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[121] "AU Strategy for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment" (African Union, February 2019), https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36195-doc-52569_au_strategy_eng_high.pdf.

[122] Amanda M. Murdie and David R. Davis, "Shaming and Blaming: Using Events Data to Assess the Impact of Human Rights INGOs," *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2012): 1–16.

Case #5: Iranian Kurds

<u>Movement Overview, the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) & Kurdistan Human Rights-Geneva (KMMK-G)</u>[123]

The Kurdish population in Iran is estimated to be between 8 and 10 million people, making up 15% of the overall Iranian population.[124] They have long struggled for human rights and self-determination, with their mistreatment under Iranian rule amounting to a genocide.[125] In 1945, the PDKI played a leading role in the Kurdish achieving independence in the Republic of Mahabad after the allies and the Soviets invaded Iran during Reza Shah's rule.[126] The weakened Iranian authority along the border with Iraq and Turkey allowed them to create a Kurdish self-governing state.[127] However, Mahabad collapsed in the face of aggression from Iranian authority a year later, due to growing anti-Soviet sentiment among the Kurdish population, which eventually led to a lack of Soviet support.[128]

Today, the Kurdistan Human Rights-Geneva (KMMK-G) plays a vital role in advocating for Kurdish rights. Similar to PDKI, KMMK-G is also advocating for a democratic federal Iran that respects the rights and interests of all its ethnic groups.[129] However, as an NGO it is volunteer-based and it adheres to a Swiss civil code, which implies internal democratic process, transparency, and the rights of its members.[130] Its short-term goal is to have the murder of Kurdish border workers recognized by the UN as a crime against humanity. Its long-term goal is to contribute to the building of a democratic federal Iran that reflects the rights and interests of all ethnic groups.[131]

<u>Resistance Tactics</u>

Over the years, the PDKI and KMMK-G employed a multifaceted strategy to advance Kurdish rights, combining grassroots mobilization, political alliances, armed resistance, and non-violent cultural and civil resistance.

Coalition Building & Solidarity Networks. The PDKI has actively collaborated with organizations representing Azeri, Balouchi, Turkmen, and Arab communities in Iran to establish

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[123] Note that the report is highlighting the PDKI, as they are members of UNPO. However, the interview was conducted with KMMK-G as close partners of UNPO.
[124] Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO). (2024, May). Iranian Kurdistan. https://unpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Iranian-Kurdistan.pdf.
[125] Kurdistan Human Rights-Geneva (KMMK-G) member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.
[126] Roosevelt, "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad. Middle East Journal".
[127] Roosevelt, "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad. Middle East Journal".
[128] Roosevelt, "The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad. Middle East Journal".
[129] Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO). (2024, May). Iranian Kurdistan.
[130] Kurdistan Human Rights-Geneva (KMMK-G) member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.
[131] Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan. 'About', 19 August 2017. https://pdki.org/english/about/.

the Congress of Nationalities for a Federal Iran (CNFI).[132] This coalition-building approach has fostered mutual support among marginalized populations in Iran, reinforcing the notion of a shared struggle for autonomy and democratic federalism.[133]

Multi-Level Outreach. Kurdish grassroots organizations, working in tandem with the PDKI, frequently engage political leaders and international bodies, including human rights NGOs and the United Nations, to raise awareness of ongoing repression. By presenting unified advocacy platforms in venues such as the European Parliament and regional diaspora associations, these groups galvanize international support for Kurdish self-determination.[134] In particular, diaspora-based lobbying has expanded the scope of Kurdish demands by connecting regional grievances to transnational networks and global norms of minority rights.[135,136]

Armed Struggle and "Dual Track" Resistance. In parallel, the PDKI has maintained an armed resistance against the Iranian government, primarily targeting the Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) through guerrilla warfare. In 2016, one such operation led to intense clashes, resulting in the deaths of six PDKI fighters.[137] In response to what it perceived as growing security threats, Iran launched missile strikes on the PDKI headquarters in Iraq in 2018, killing 11 fighters and signaling the regime's determination to suppress Kurdish opposition beyond its borders.[138] Despite these security setbacks, the PDKI's strategy underscores a broader pattern of "dual-track" resistance, in which armed actions are interwoven with grassroots lobbying, media outreach, and coalition-building.[139] Grassroots Kurdish movements have contributed significantly by mobilizing public opinion through strikes, demonstrations, and international petition drives while also offering humanitarian support to families affected by military campaigns. This synergy between armed and unarmed tactics has, in many cases, expanded the visibility of Kurdish claims and lent credibility to broader calls for federalism or local autonomy.[140141]

Civil Disobedience and Cultural Revitalization. Kurdish activists often engage in acts of civil disobedience, such as public sit-ins, coordinated shop closures, and regional strikes to underscore

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[132] Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan. 'About', 19 August 2017.

[133] Nader Entessar, Kurdish Ethnonationalism (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), 44–47.

[134] Entessar, "Kurdish Ethnonationalism."

[135] Entessar, "Kurdish Ethnonationalism."

[136] Chouki El Hamel, Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 92–95.

[137] Rudaw.net.'KDPI: 6 Peshmerga Killed in Clashes with Iranian Army in Shno'. Accessed 30 March 2025. https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iran/18062016.

[138] RFE/RL. "Iran's Revolutionary Guards Confirm Deadly Missile Strikes On Kurdish Rebels In Iraq." Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, September 9, 2018. https://www.rferl.org/a/at-least-11-iranian-kurdish-fighters-killed-in-attack-rebels-blame-on-tehran/29479697.html.

[139] Entessar, "Kurdish Ethnonationalism."

[140] Entessar, "Kurdish Ethnonationalism."

[141] El Hamel, "Black Morocco."

collective grievances and broadcast unity.[142] Particularly notable are the cultural revival efforts that promote the Kurdish language, folklore, and celebratory events like Newroz (the Kurdish New Year). By emphasizing cultural symbols, activists emphasize Kurdish identity in ways that do not rely on formal political channels. These symbolic acts prove effective because they are difficult for authorities to categorize as overt subversion and thus attract supportive attention internationally.[143] Women's initiatives have been crucial in sustaining these cultural forms of resistance. For instance, women-led cooperatives that teach Kurdish embroidery and handicrafts have become rallying points for broader community engagement, which enable families to gather and disseminate information without immediately signalling political activism.[144] Women's associations also run language-training centers in remote areas, capitalizing on cultural traditions to reinforce Kurdish social bonds across multiple generations. By positioning cultural revitalization as central to preserving Kurdish heritage, such nonviolent tactics broaden the struggle's appeal and protect it from repressive measures.[145]

Mobilization Challenges

As a primarily volunteer-based organization, the KMMK-G faces significant financial constraints, which limit its ability to mobilize effectively. Without the resources to hire dedicated personnel, it struggles to manage outreach, social media presence, and engagement with international audiences.[146] Despite strong networks and potential sponsorship opportunities with organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, the lack of funding hinders its ability to pitch and secure support.[147]

These challenges have been exacerbated by recent cuts to US foreign aid, further restricting access to international funding and resources that could have supported advocacy efforts.[148] To adapt and cut costs, the PDKI relies on creative solutions, such as using multilingual colleagues for translation during human rights events.[149] However, these approaches are not sufficient to provide the organization with the international recognition and resources needed to advocate for the Kurdish population.[150]

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[142] Denise Natali, *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 62–65.
[143] David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 275–280.
[144] Kerim Yildiz and Susan Breau, *The Kurdish Conflict: International Humanitarian Law and Post-Conflict Mechanisms* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2010), 118–119.
[145] Natali, "The Kurds and the State."
[146] Kurdistan Human Rights-Geneva (KMMK-G) member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.
[147] Kurdistan Human Rights-Geneva (KMMK-G) member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.
[148] Kurdistan Human Rights-Geneva (KMMK-G) member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.
[149] Kurdistan Human Rights-Geneva (KMMK-G) member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.
[150] Kurdistan Human Rights-Geneva (KMMK-G) member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Establish a Sustainable Funding Model
To begin addressing the organization's long-term viability, it should develop a predictable and structured funding approach. One facet of this involves creating a specialized grant-writing unit staffed by volunteers or part-time personnel with a track record in identifying potential grants and drafting applications. PDKI generally relies on volunteers to carry out operational tasks, such as translation. This approach will engage their volunteers in increasing their funding.[151] Maintaining a live database of funding sources, from philanthropic institutions to international organizations, and rigorously tracking submission deadlines would streamline the process, helping PDKI secure more reliable grants instead of depending on sporadic donor contributions.

Alongside these efforts, the organization could run recurring crowdfunding campaigns aimed primarily at Kurdish communities in the diaspora. Many younger diaspora members, adept at social media and online engagement, could coordinate digital outreach and articulate precisely how each donation fuels key PDKI projects. Ensuring transparency in allocating funds, such as by financing community events or education initiatives, would reinforce trust and encourage repeated support.

Recommendation 2: Develop Volunteer/Internship Programs
PDKI has a large network across the Western world, and it is having difficulties, particularly in staffing. It can leverage these relationships to create internship and volunteering opportunities to encourage young people's activity in Kurdish advocacy. More specifically, by establishing structured pathways and clearly defined roles (e.g., translation, public relations, or policy research), interns and volunteers can gain meaningful experience and professional training while serving PDKI's immediate needs. To sustain engagement, PDKI must offer opportunities for youth leadership, potentially through "lead coordinator" or "team supervisor" positions that confer decision-making authority to younger activists. This approach will help PDKI attract fresh talents that it can use for outreach and campaigning. It can also reduce the burden on senior activists and keep young activists engaged.

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[151]Kurdistan Human Rights-Geneva (KMMK-G) member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.

Case #6: The Sindhs

<u>Movement Overview & the World Sindhi Congress</u>

Sindh is a southeastern province of Pakistan that was formerly part of British India. In 1943, its legislative assembly was the first to formally call for the creation of an independent Pakistan.[152] However, the province's aspirations for full autonomy were never fully realized in the aftermath of independence. This sense of unfulfilled promise was especially pronounced among leaders like G.M. Syed, who launched the Sindhudesh movement in 1972, advocating for an independent Sindhi state.[153] Since then, Sindh has experienced a long and ongoing struggle for human rights, which include forced disappearances, killings, and kidnappings. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), in 2023 alone there were 175 cases of disappeared political workers, nationalists, lawyers and journalists advocating an independent Sindh.[154]

Sindh is also major economic powerhouse for Pakistan, with 27% of its GDP provincial contribution to the nation's GDP.[155] Despite its economic productivity, its population faces significant economic challenges, as it endures a 24.1% poverty rate, compared to Pakistan's national poverty of 21.9 %.[156] Sindh also has a unique social fabric, which is made up of 80% Muslims and 15% Hindus.[157]

The World Sindhi Congress (WSC) was founded in 1988 in London.[158] It has chapters in Canada and the US, and it focuses on the national Sindhi political struggle, women's rights, and Hindu Sindhis.[159] In the short term, WSC aims to campaign for Sindhis' economic rights and participation in the labour force.[160] In the long term, they seek to achieve self-determination and secession from Pakistan.[161] Their leadership follows a parliamentary system with fixed elections

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[152] Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, "A History of Sindh from a Regional Perspective: Sindh and the Making of Pakistan," Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society 53, no. 1 (2020): 16, https://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/history/PDF-FILES/18%20Paper_v53_1_16.pdf.
[153] Saqib Hussain Mugheri, "Voice of Sindh: How GM Syed Advocated for Land, Its People and Their Culture," The Friday Times, January 14, 2025, https://thefridaytimes.com/14-Jan-2025/voice-of-sindh-how-gm-syed-advocated-for-land-people-and-culture.
[154] Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. State of Human Rights in 2023. Lahore: HRCP, 2024. https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2024-State-of-human-rights-in-2023-EN.pdf.
[155] World Bank. "Factsheet: Strengthening Social Protection Delivery System in Sindh." December 19, 2022. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/factsheet/2022/12/19/factsheet-strengthening-social-protection-delivery-system-in-sindh.
[156] Barriga-Cabanillas, Oscar, Shabana Kishwar, Moritz Meyer, Muhammad Nasir, and Maria Qazi. *Poverty Projections for Pakistan: Nowcasting and Forecasting*. Policy Research Working Paper 11010
[157] Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO). (2024, May). Sindh Last. https://unpo.org/member/sindh/.
[158] World Sindhi Congress member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.
[159] World Sindhi Congress member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.
[160] World Sindhi Congress member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.
[161] World Sindhi Congress member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.

held every two years.[162] WSC is an inclusive organization and was, at some point, the only Pakistani social group led by a woman. However, it still faces challenges in ensuring adequate representation of women, Hindus, and LGBTQ individuals within its leadership and broader structure.[163]

<u>Resistance Tactics</u>

Protests, Rallies, and Hunger Strikes. Sindhi grassroots activism utilizes a combination of peaceful demonstrations, public rallies, and hunger strikes to demand regional autonomy and address human rights concerns.[164] These efforts, frequently led by women and youth, underscore a longstanding culture of public engagement and protest in Sindh.[165] In addition, cultural expressions, such as poetry and art, serve as vehicles for documenting resistance and garnering empathy from the broader Pakistani society.

Diaspora Communities & Rhetorical Framing. Activists rely on diaspora connections for financial support, media outreach, and policy advocacy, which helps bring local grievances to global platforms.[166] From within the diaspora, the WSC has worked to shape an international narrative that frames human rights violations not only as moral concerns but also as security threats.[167] By highlighting how these violations could destabilize the region and threaten international peace, the WSC aims to capture the attention of entities such as the United Nations and Western governments, as well as legislative bodies across Canada, the US, and Europe.[168,169] This approach positions localized concerns within global discourses on terrorism, state repression, and minority rights, heightening the urgency and visibility of the Sindhi struggle.

Digital and Media Advocacy. Like many social movements worldwide, Sindhi activists have leveraged social media and digital platforms to broaden their reach and circumvent strict media regulations. Livestreamed rallies and hashtag campaigns expose alleged human rights abuses more immediately, inviting public scrutiny and international solidarity.[170] In turn, diaspora organizations hold webinars and produce online publications to educate global audiences about the political climate in Sindh.[171] These digital strategies complement on-the-ground activism,

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[162] World Sindhi Congress member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.
[163] World Sindhi Congress member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.
[164] Sarah Ansari, "Everyday Expectations of the State During Pakistan's Early Years: Letters to the Editor, Dawn (Karachi), 1950–1953," Modern Asian Studies 48, no. 6 (2014): 1663–1665.
[165] International Crisis Group, Pakistan: Stoking the Fire in Karachi, Asia Report No. 277 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2016), 10–12.
[166] World Sindhi Congress, "WSC 32nd Annual Conference Report," 2020. https://worldsindhicongress.org.
[167] World Sindhi Congress member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.
[168] Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, State of Human Rights in 2021 (Lahore: HRCP, 2022), 54–58.
[169] World Sindhi Congress member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.
[170] "Pakistan: Government Criminalises Activists, Increases Online Controls and Cracks down on Protests by the Opposition and Ethnic Groups," Asian Human Rights Commission. http://www.humanrights.asia/news/forwarded-news/AHRC-FST-001-2025.
[171] World Sindhi Congress, "WSC 32nd Annual Conference Report."

making it harder for authorities to suppress the movement without drawing international attention.

Legal and Policy Engagement. Sindhi activists have also turned to legal channels for redress. WSC members and allied human rights lawyers submit petitions to Pakistani courts and document abuses for the attention of international organizations like the Human Rights Council.[172] By collating case studies and eyewitness testimonies, these efforts aim to prompt formal investigations and influence policy debates both within and outside Pakistan. Advocacy networks also regularly engage North American and European legislators, urging them to introduce resolutions calling attention to enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and cultural suppression in Sindh.[173]

Alliance-Building and Cross-Movement Solidarity. Another factor that shapes Sindhi activism's effectiveness is its ability to form alliances with other marginalized communities, including Baloch, Pashtun, and Gilgit-Baltistan groups. Joint demonstrations and conferences enhance the visibility of their shared grievances, highlighting common themes of dispossession and political underrepresentation.[174] Many activists find that aligning with broader movements for minority rights and political reform not only amplifies their voices but also garners external support from NGOs, think tanks, and rights advocacy groups.[175]

<u>Mobilization Challenges</u>

Several internal challenges have hindered WSC's mobilization efforts. First, Pakistan has constructed its national identity around Islam, which can create the impression that Sindhi advocacy stands in opposition to the religion itself rather than to the state.[176] This framing is problematic, as it risks reframing the Sindhi struggle for human rights as a religious conflict, potentially alienating broader segments of Pakistani society and undermining the movement's core message. Second, WSC has been engaged in 40 years of peaceful advocacy without much progress, which makes it challenging to keep the youth in the movement motivated.[177] Third, Pakistan has sought to advance the narrative that WSC activists are agents of the Indian government, citing the presence of Hindus within the Sindhi population.[178] This has created fear among diaspora activists for the safety of their families in Sindh.

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[172] Asad Hashim, "Amnesty Urges Pakistan to End 'abhorrent' Enforced Disappearances," Al Jazeera, November 22, 2021,https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/22/amnesty-pakistan-abhorrent-enforced-disappearances-human-rights#:~:text=Islamabad%2C%20Pakistan%20%E2%80%93%20Human%20rights%20group,of%20those%20who%20go%20missing.
[173] Asad Hashim, "Amnesty Urges Pakistan to End 'abhorrent' Enforced Disappearances'.
[174] Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2022: Pakistan (Washington, DC: Freedom House, 2022), 5–7.
[175] Christophe Jaffrelot, The Pakistan Paradox: Instability and Resilience (New Delhi: Vintage Books, 2015), 153–157.
[176] World Sindhi Congress member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.
[177] World Sindhi Congress member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.
[178] World Sindhi Congress member, virtual interview, March 9, 2025.

<u>Recommendations</u>

Recommendation 1: Building Bridges with Other Organizations and Ethnic Groups
To counter the narrative that it opposes Islam, WSC can collaborate with other groups facing similar challenges, such as the Pakistan Hindu Council (PHC) or the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM). It could also seek engagement with moderate Muslim organizations, such as the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), though such collaboration may be limited by security risks or reputational concerns for those groups. Regardless of whether these partnerships materialize, WSC would demonstrate its openness to working across religious and ethnic lines. This approach would help reframe Sindhi advocacy around issues of economic and political rights, rather than religious divisions. A comparable strategy was employed by the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (PDKI) in forming the Congress of Nationalities for a Federal Iran (CNFI), which fostered a sense of solidarity among groups confronting similar forms of marginalization.[179]

Recommendation 2: Enhance Security in the Diaspora
WSC indicated significant security threats faced by its activists in the diaspora and fears for their friends and family on the grounds. While such risks cannot be entirely eliminated, they can be mitigated through strategic partnerships and capacity-building. For example, WSC could collaborate with organizations like the Citizen Lab at the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy to provide digital security training, helping activists safeguard their communications and online activity. As noted in Report #1, training is one of the most effective forms of external support for enhancing the success and resilience of grassroots movements. In addition, WSC could strengthen its engagement with international legal organizations to secure legal protection and support for activists facing harassment abroad. These measures would reduce the risks associated with diaspora activism and could help foster broader participation.

Recommendation 3: Youth Leadership Programs
The slow-burning nature of peaceful advocacy has made it challenging for WSC to sustain youth engagement. This issue can be addressed by establishing mentorship programs that connect senior activists with younger generations, offering guidance, skill-building, and a sense of purpose. Additionally, organizing workshops on digital campaigning, advocacy strategies, and the historical struggles of the Sindhi population can help equip young people with the tools and context needed for sustained involvement. Several human rights organizations have effectively implemented similar approaches. For example, Amnesty International offers initiatives such as the Student Group Coordinator program, Youth Leadership in Activism, and the Youth Collective, all aimed at fostering youth participation and leadership in advocacy efforts.[180]

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[179] Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan. 'About', 19 August 2017.
[180] Amnesty International USA, "Youth Leadership in Activism," Amnesty International USA, accessed April 2, 2025, https://www.amnestyusa.org/get-involved/grassroots-activism/youth/leadership/.

Overall Implications and Recommendations for UNPO

Across all interviews, the group observed that political repression, digital surveillance, funding shortfalls, burnout owing to low participation rates, and diminishing international visibility continue to undermine efforts toward self-determination, equality, and justice. At the same time, geopolitical interests often supersede advocacy rooted in international legal principles. As state repression becomes more sophisticated, movements must respond with adaptive, coordinated, and multifaceted approaches.

Based on the comparative analysis of social movements affiliated with or relevant to the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), three core recommendations are proposed to enhance the organization's capacity to support its members in the current global human rights landscape. These recommendations reflect both the shared challenges and distinctive strengths of the case studies explored in this report, including movements from Sindh, Nagalim, Haratin, Iranian Kurdistan, and Catalonia, as well as comparative insights from the Dalit movement. It also brings in insights from Report #1. Broadly, the recommendations are designed to reflect the importance of shared infrastructure, tactical evolution, and deepening the capacity of movements to advocate for themselves effectively across networks.

Recommendation #1: Continue to Promote Multi-Level Advocacy
One of the most significant findings of our study is the effectiveness of multi-level advocacy. Movements that engage simultaneously with local communities, national institutions, and international legal frameworks are more likely to sustain momentum, protect their members, and increase their chances of achieving meaningful outcomes. The Dalits' engagement in domestic electoral politics alongside advocacy in UN forums, the Haratins' appeals to the African Union coupled with grassroots organizing, and the Nagas' coordinated faith-based and legal strategies have each led to concessions from repressive states. These cases demonstrate that movements operating across multiple levels of influence are better positioned to convert moral legitimacy into institutional leverage and secure concrete gains.

To enable this kind of advocacy, UNPO can support member movements in cultivating internal coherence by helping sub-groups align around shared goals, consistent messaging, and a unified commitment to nonviolent principles. This can be fostered through strategic planning workshops, facilitated intra-movement dialogues, and values-based reflection sessions that allow members to clarify priorities and coalesce around a common vision. The Dalit movement offers a compelling model of this approach, grounding its activism in the teachings of B.R. Ambedkar and the guiding slogan "Educate, Organize, and Agitate," which acts as a framework that merges ideological clarity with strategic discipline. Without such cohesion, movements risk internal

fragmentation and message dilution, which can undermine both credibility and impact.[181] A unified internal vision strengthens collective identity, builds trust, and allows movements to shift from reactive protest toward sustained, coordinated political engagement.

Beyond supporting internal alignment, UNPO can play a critical role in institutionalizing multi-level advocacy planning. This includes offering members the tools and training necessary to map their advocacy environments, such as identifying domestic legal avenues, international mechanisms, potential allies, and strategic entry points. Through customized consultations, UNPO can work with member groups to develop campaigns that coordinate pressure across levels of governance at decisive moments. For instance, synchronizing international human rights complaints with domestic legal proceedings, or aligning grassroots demonstrations with diplomatic negotiations can greatly amplify a movement's visibility and effectiveness. By equipping movements with the frameworks and capacity to design and execute layered strategies, UNPO can help reduce activist burnout, foster greater strategic coherence, and maximize political leverage across local, national, and global arenas.

Recommendation #2: Facilitate Sustainable Resource Networks and Standardize Storytelling Mechanisms

A recurring constraint across many of the movements examined in this study is the absence of sustainable and standardized organizational infrastructure. While some groups remain active through extraordinary volunteer commitment, others suffer from burnout, slowing participation, and diminishing momentum. These challenges are compounded by the increasingly difficult landscape for securing long-term funding, leaving many UNPO members vulnerable to stagnation.

To address these systemic challenges, UNPO can facilitate the gradual development of a cooperative resource-sharing network among its members. This shared infrastructure could offer access to centralized grant databases, standardized funding application templates, legal aid contacts, translation services, and media outreach tools. Equally important, it should function as a collaborative space where members can exchange ideas, strategies, and advocacy materials. Through this platform, movements could share lessons learned, campaign toolkits, and best practices in nonviolent resistance to be adapted to diverse political and cultural contexts. Not only would this network strengthen the operational capacity of member movements, but it would also create efficiencies for UNPO itself by reducing duplication of effort and consolidating institutional knowledge.

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[181] Olga Lavrinenko, "Fragmentation of Women's Transnational Social Movement Organizations and Women's Political Empowerment Worldwide, 1990–2021," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, September 26, 2024, 00207152241279299, https://doi.org/10.1177/00207152241279299.

This digital hub could also translate into regular virtual or in-person peer-to-peer learning circles and facilitated exchange sessions. Such forums would create opportunities for movements with successful models—such as the Catalans in fundraising or the Dalits in grassroots organizing—to mentor newer or less-resourced groups while also benefiting from the fresh insights those newer actors bring. As mentioned in Report #1, scholars find that peer networking and capacity-building among activists strengthens resilience and improves strategic coordination and tactical innovation. By fostering a culture of horizontal learning, mutual support, and strategic solidarity, this network would enhance the practical capacity of individual movements and reinforce the collective resilience and cohesion of the UNPO community as a whole.

In parallel with resource-sharing, UNPO should institutionalize storytelling as a core mechanism for mutual learning and advocacy. Capturing member experiences through digital archives, written case studies, or structured interviews enables movements to reflect on their own trajectories, learn from one another's successes and setbacks, and preserve institutional memory. Storytelling also builds internal solidarity and enhances external legitimacy, allowing underrepresented communities to define their narratives on their own terms. These accounts provide valuable insight into tactical decision-making and movement evolution, which can inform more strategic, resilient organizing. Moreover, well-documented stories may resonate beyond the UNPO community, increasing the likelihood of being picked up by media, attracting public interest, and catalyzing support from allies to increase pressure on repressive regimes, as mentioned in Report #1.

By embedding resource-sharing and storytelling into its core functions, UNPO can support member movements to become more connected, adaptive, and sustainable. This integrated approach reinforces the idea that grassroots actors are not isolated but part of a broader advocacy ecosystem. It also positions UNPO firmly as a facilitator, connector, and amplifier of underrepresented voices in international politics, ensuring that even under conditions of marginalization, these communities have the infrastructure and solidarity necessary to endure and effect meaningful change.

Recommendation #3: Encourage Tactical Innovation

As political environments grow more complex and repressive tactics become more sophisticated, grassroots movements must be able to adapt quickly and creatively. Tactical innovation, or the continuous evolution of advocacy methods in response to changing conditions, is vital for ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of nonviolent campaigns.[182] UNPO can support this process by embedding tactical experimentation into its broader network of support.

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[182] Doug McAdam, "Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency," *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 6 (1983): 735–54, https://doi.org/10.2307/2095322.

The first step to encourage tactical innovation is to strengthen the resource-sharing mechanisms outlined in Recommendation #2. When groups have access to each other's experiences, tools, and reflections, they are more likely to borrow, adapt, and improve effective strategies. The cross-pollination of ideas across regions and contexts can spark new approaches to organizing, communication, and resistance grounded in lived experience rather than imported templates.

In addition, UNPO should consider creating opportunities for structured reflection and skill development. Tactical training workshops and scenario-based planning exercises can help groups think strategically about power dynamics, test new methods, and prepare for different political outcomes. If resources allow, small-scale support for low-risk experimentation, such as microgrants for creative campaigns or digital engagement tools, can enable movements to try new ideas without fear of resource loss. Furthermore, building partnerships with legal experts, digital technologists, and creative professionals can allow member groups to access specialized support for developing and executing innovative tactics.

By actively encouraging tactical innovation, UNPO can help its members stay ahead of repressive trends and seize strategic openings. This strengthens their capacity to sustain public engagement, shift power relationships, and ultimately advance their goals for recognition, justice, and inclusion.

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