

TACTIC

PHONE BANKING

Mobilizing the public to call or text a government or corporate target to pressure them into taking an action. It can be a contagious tactic for lobbying decision makers.

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“THE VERY NOVELTY OF THE ACTION IN UNDEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES MAKES PHONE BANKING A MORE IMPACTFUL TACTIC.”

“Thirty people called me since the morning. Please remove my name from the list and add me to those who oppose the deal. My position is clear.”

—A Jordanian member of Parliament

Phone banking is used to draw a decision maker's attention to the interests and demands of a certain constituency. It involves asking your supporters to call or text your target as a means of pressuring or lobbying them to take an action in line with your campaign goal.

Phone banking is a scalable tactic that can be done from virtually anywhere and by anyone, but it can also be done collectively from one location to boost morale. Results of the calls can be announced while the tactic is taking place to keep momentum and engage the wider public, or those results can be announced at the end of the calling day(s).

This tactic was used by Jordan Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) activists to pressure parliamentarians into taking a firm stance against a proposed deal of importing natural gas from Israel (see: STORY: Stolen Gas Campaign). Jordan BDS, under the name of Al'urdun Tuqate', organised a series of tactics targeting the Parliament with the goal of mobilizing parliamentarians to prevent the government from signing the gas deal — a deal that the campaigners believed would make every Jordanian citizen a contributor to the Israeli budget of war and occupation.

Jordan BDS activists issued a call to action asking all their followers and members to phone parliamentarians and demand that they announce their position against buying natural gas from Israel. They

POTENTIAL RISKS

Generally, there are not too many risks in this tactic if it was well organized. However, if the tactic is employed only by a small group of people, then perhaps, in a country with tight security or a constituency with high sense of fear, participants could be identified or targeted. So it is wise to design the call to action in a way that ensures participation of large numbers. This is why gathering in one room and having a strong social media reach are both important.

It is important that phone banking is used with tactical clarity and not merely as a nuisance or a cry for help. A factor critical for the success of the tactic is testing and updating the phone number sheet and maintaining a record of responses. In some countries, the parliamentarians don't even answer their phones, so testing

published the parliamentarians' names and numbers with a suggested script and a ten-point factsheet. BDS Jordan members gathered in one place and together started making calls over five days. On the first day, live results of the phone banking sessions were being updated online. As for the remaining days, names of parliamentarians who took a stance against the deal were published at the end of each evening. The tactic was concluded when activists secured pledges from the majority of the house to oppose the deal. As a result, a public hearing was scheduled that took place over two days in the presence of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Energy. Eventually, the Parliament adopted a majority position against the government's attempt to import natural gas from Israel.

In many democratic countries, phone banking your representative or government is a standard practice. In fact, in some countries the representatives' offices use the number of calls for and against to inform their decision on a particular matter. In other countries, however, phone banking is a novelty not just for the citizens engaged but also for the decision-maker receiving the call. The very novelty of the action in undemocratic countries makes phone banking a more impactful tactic (see: PRINCIPLE: Know your community).

In a campaign in which Jordanian teachers are organizing for fair pay, phone banking was used as a powerful tactic to educate teachers about their rights and how to handle employers' manipulation. In this context, phone banking was a safe tactic (see: PRINCIPLE: Foster safer spaces) because other awareness-raising tactics that required teachers to be physically present had failed due to fear of being fired.

LEARN MORE

تحرك معنا واتصل
حركة الأردن تقاطع #غاز العدو احتلال, 2014
http://jordanbds.net/?page_id=367

كيف تصبح قضية ما قضية رأي عام؟
<http://bit.ly/1QrbSr2>

BDS: Freedom, Justice, Equality
Jordan Business, 2015
<http://www.jordanbusinessmagazine.com/features/bds-freedom-justice-equality>

Lobbying 101: Lobbying Techniques
National Trust for Historic Preservation
<http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/law-and-policy/lobbying-101/Lobbying-Techniques.html?referrer=https://www.google.jo/#.Vv5t9xN95E4>

the tactic before publicizing a phone bank is necessary.

RELATED TOOLS

Stories

- #GambiaHasDecided
- Harry Potter Alliance
- Stolen Gas Campaign

Tactics

- Distributed action
- Jail solidarity
- Phone blockade

Principles

- Anyone can act
- Choose tactics that support your strategy
- Create many points of entry
- Focus on basic needs
- Foster safer spaces
- Know your community
- Personalize and polarize
- Seek safety in support networks
- Seize the means of communication
- Simple rules can have grand results
- The price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative

Theories

- Participatory democracy

Methodologies

- Peel the onion
- Pillars of power
- Points of intervention
- Power mapping
- Spectrum of allies

TAGS

Action design, Colonialism, Communications, Community building, Democracy, Elections, Education, Movement building, Policy