

Insurgents

*Inside a new generation
of progressive leadership*

Edited by Matt Browne



“All of us might wish at times that we lived in a more tranquil world, but we don’t. And if our times are difficult and perplexing, so are they challenging and filled with opportunity.”

Robert F. Kennedy

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Finally, and most of all, thank you for reading this volume. I hope the stories here will inspire you to get engaged and fight for a fairer, more inclusive, tolerant and sustainable world.

Matt

PREFACE

Neera Tanden

We live in turbulent times, and the importance of sharing progressive ideas globally has never been greater.

The rapid global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has shown how interconnected our world is. It has also exposed the persistent economic inequalities that continue to plague our societies, as well as the threat that long term underinvestment in public health systems pose to us all. And in the midst of these economic and public health crises, the heartless murder of George Floyd has demonstrated that deep racial inequality is a systemic problem. Indeed, beyond this act of police brutality, people of colour have suffered disproportionately from the economic and health impacts of the coronavirus.

As we think about how to channel the growing demand for justice and for change, there is much we can learn from the new generation of leaders whose stories are told in this collection. A common thread running through these accounts of progressive renewal — whether that is Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand, Justin Trudeau in Canada, Emanuel Macron in France, Matteo Renzi in Italy, or Gergely Karácsony in Budapest — is that empowering ordinary citizens to become change makers in their own communities is an important first step towards a new progressive politics. In addition to traditional politics, we are witnessing a rise of activism to tackle injustice against the backdrop of opposition to authoritarian leaders: in the United States, the recent national protests against the unjust treatment of Black people are the largest in our history.

This is a moment of transformation that calls for new ideas to tackle racial injustice, create inclusive economic prosperity and prevent catastrophic climate change as the public is newly open to more transformative change. And, in this moment, we also see the seeds of a renewal of politics itself, as more and more citizens engage in protests of policies they consider unjust. While authoritarian and illiberal leaders across the globe will use the current crises to further divide us and undermine democracy, progressives can defend democracy effectively from the authoritarian threat by renewing democracy's institutions and practices.

The lessons in inclusive politics contained in these pages, I hope, can help inspire a new generation of progressive leadership everywhere to rise to today's challenges. The need for a progressive response to today's challenges has never been more urgent, nor our work more important. Democracy itself is at risk. The question is whether we will rise to the challenge to save it.

INSURGENCY WITH PURPOSE: TOWARDS A NEW PROGRESSIVE POLITICS

Matt Browne

In the decade since the global financial crisis, progressives have been on the back foot. Austerity has become the economic norm, allowing inequalities to grow and leaving many frustrated that those who caused the crash went unpunished. Meanwhile, the rise of social media has increasingly disrupted our democracies in both good and bad ways, transforming how we campaign and organize, but also how we see our neighbours and fellow citizens. While acts of police brutality against Black men and women or the #MeToo movement would have been unlikely to penetrate our mass consciousness without smart phones with cameras, or social media platforms and hashtags, it is also clear – as the ease with which disinformation is spread online illustrates; that the social media platforms are concerned primarily with profit, even at the expense of liberal democratic values.¹

In this context, a wave of new nationalism, illiberalism and right-wing conservatism has come to the fore, reshaping politics globally, stoking fears and anxiety, and promoting hate and division. So powerful has this wave seemed that many progressives have spent most of their time trying to reposition themselves within the political frame it has set. While there are lessons in the political innovation inspired by 'resistance' to populism, it is high time for progressives to focus less on responding to populist frames and to spend far more time thinking about how to proactively promote their own visions, values and agendas. Progressives, in other words, must act on their own terms.

“In the future, how progressives do politics will be as important as the agenda we wish to pursue.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has given us all a moment of pause. The enormous loss of human life, the disruption to our very ways of life, and the need for government action to protect public health, jobs and businesses is unprecedented. In a few short months, COVID-19 has ruthlessly exposed the array of inequalities – some in plain sight, others hidden – that plague so many western societies including the disproportionate impact the virus has had on Black and ethnic minority communities as well as the fragility of public services decimated by a decade of underinvestment. Somewhat ironically, it has also pushed some of the most conservative governments to aggressively intervene in the economy to protect jobs, incomes and businesses. As the infamous conservative strategist Lyndon Crosby has noted, the state is back but it is still contested.² Now is the moment for progressives to make a fresh case for a renewed interventionist state shaping the future.

Whilst the full scale of the human, social and economic impact of the pandemic is still unknown, so too is the nature of the type of state and society that we will rebuild after all this

is finally over. The future, then, is still ours to make. At no time in the last century has it been more important that a politics prevails that can heal, unify and rebuild a better, more equal, tolerant and sustainable society. To ensure this, we as progressives will need to profoundly rethink our economic, social and democratic agenda. We will need to support and empower individuals and communities in new ways, including renewing our democracies and the institutions of global governance. Such a task falls way beyond the limitations of the collection of essays contained within these pages. Fortunately, with the revival of the Progressive Governance network, the emergence of the Recovery Project, alongside a host of other new initiatives aimed at bringing progressives together to help shape a new agenda, the green shoots of policy renewal are already emerging.

While a renewal of the progressive policy agenda is a necessary condition for making our societies stronger and more equitable, more work will still need to be done. If progressives are to recover electorally as well as ideologically, we must now fundamentally rethink how we conduct politics itself. Propelled by modern technology, our progressive dream of empowered citizens being able to speak to power and demand a role for themselves in decision-making has finally become a reality. An important assignment for progressives is to chart out the path along which to take participatory democracy to the next level, to the benefit of all of society - we can create a system that allows for participation without populism.

The question of how we do politics must become a central tenet of the new progressive agenda. It was with this in mind that the contributions in this volume were first commissioned last autumn, long before the coronavirus pandemic emerged and the latest *Black Lives Matter* protests which have sent shockwaves around the world. The hope was that by bringing together insider accounts of successful progressive campaigns in Italy, Canada, France, New Zealand and Hungary, we might distill some key lessons of interest to all who seek to advance the progressive cause. Looking ahead, deeper analyses of new social movements like *Black Lives Matter* and *#MeToo* that are inspiring unprecedented global change will also teach us an enormous amount about channeling the energy of citizens, and are long overdue.

“Authentic leadership, insurgency with a clarity of purpose, and a willingness to innovate are the keys to successful campaigning.”

Each reader may take something different from these essays, but I would suggest that four key elements underpin successful campaigns: *authentic leadership, a sense of insurgency with a clarity of purpose, the ability to unify, and a willingness to experiment with organisational innovation.*

Authentic Leadership

By far the most striking example of the impact of leadership is the case of Jacinda Ardern. The story is well known. When she took over from the previous leader of the party, there were just eight weeks until the election, and no time to modify the party's manifesto or change its organisational model. Yet her emergence as leader, helped by her performance during her first press conference, transformed the way the nation felt about the Labour Party overnight. Ardern's relentless positivity and determination came to define the campaign, just as her compassion and kindness would shape the way she has since governed. This compassion and kindness, empathy if you will, would prove critical as the Prime Minister brought the nation together following the Christchurch terrorist attack — something her most ardent political opponents admire her for. Moreover, her ability to bring a range of voices to the table to formulate policy has been credited by some as helping her emphatic response to the coronavirus itself.

In a similar manner, Justin Trudeau had earlier come to embody the renewal of the Liberal Party of Canada. Without his leadership and vision, it would have been impossible to transform a party infamous for backroom deals into an open movement that belonged to supporters. Trudeau, despite his political heritage, was an outsider when he ran for the leadership of the party. Many of the old guard of the party were, and remained, deeply skeptical of his bid and subsequent leadership. During the leadership race itself, Trudeau was often criticised for being light on policy. What he and his team realised however, was that the most important first step in renewing the party was to re-establish bonds of trust between the leader and supporters - as well as citizens at large. It was an essential first step in illustrating that Trudeau had acknowledged the mistakes of the past — backroom deals and intra-party factions —and insisted on replacing them with a new culture. Moreover, re-establishing this connection allowed the party to authentically reinvent itself as the party focused on the advancement of the middle class, a mission which gave clarity of purpose both in the campaign and the first term of government.

Ardern and Trudeau share an ability to tell and embody a story about their country and its future that not only resonates with people but also elevates governing above the hue of partisan division.

Insurgency with Purpose

The rise of Matteo Renzi provides the quintessential case of an insurgent campaign with purpose. Renzi had built his local reputation as Mayor of Florence on a willingness to take on and replace the party establishment and the institutionalised vested interests they often represented. Renzi took control of the *Partito Democratico* from the outside and sought to bring a new generation of leadership to power with a sense of urgency. Adapting the impact-focused approach to governing he had developed as Mayor, he pursued a national agenda focused on addressing problems in a way that would have real and immediate impact on the lives of Italians. Indeed, it was not until this link between this agenda and its real-life impact became less clear or was broken that his premiership began to fade. As Renzi sought to

reform Italy's democratic institutions and replace the Senate, the country came to view this reform as alien to their day to day lives, and about political power. It was the first step in a tragic transition that saw Renzi evolve from being an insurgent, eager for change, to an explainer of the status quo who seemed preoccupied with justifying his record.

Emmanuel Macron's rise to the French Presidency followed a similar path to that of Renzi. Frustrated with the unwillingness of Francois Hollande's presidency to undertake the suggested structural reforms to the labour market, and having resigned his position as Finance Minister, he founded *En Marche!* with a vast listening exercise, *La Grande Marche*. Macron and his team built a new political movement from the ground up, bringing into politics a cohort of people previously marginalised by or disinterested in the established parties.

What *La Grande Marche* revealed, most interestingly, was that fixing France's broken or dysfunctional politics was a top priority for millions of people. This would come to define the strategy for the presidential election and help them channel frustrations with the status quo, so often harnessed by populists, towards a progressive end instead.

Renzi and Macron shared an understanding that in order to change their countries and to tackle its challenges with new and effective policies, first the political establishment itself needed to be changed. For both, this was not simply disruption for disruption's sake, nor was it a destructive desire to throw things up in the air because of a misplaced belief that things could not get any worse. What they sought was a constructive rising against the status quo to deliver a clearly defined progressive agenda.

“Progressives in Europe need to build a new progressive alliance, an alliance that would bring together liberals, social democrats and greens.”

Unity and Inclusion

If it is a truism that progressives lose when they are divided, nowhere is this more so than in Hungary. Indeed, prior to Gergely Karácsony's candidacy for the Mayor of Budapest, divisions amongst the Hungarian opposition had handed ever more power to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to enact his illiberal agenda. Having participated in the committee that drafted the new electoral law, Karácsony understood that the only way to beat incumbents was to unite those opposed to the current leadership, and began a process to democratically elect a unified candidate. Unifying progressives around a common candidate and a shared agenda is no easy task, but it is one that has become ever more important for progressives in Europe and beyond.

Indeed, as early as 2013, Ruy Teixeira, John Halpin and I argued that progressive parties in Europe should look to build new progressive alliances — alliances that would bring together liberals, social democrats, labour, and greens. What we labelled as a 'traffic light coalition'

now seems more relevant than ever.³ At times, progressives seem more interested in scoring points against one another than forging a shared agenda — yet the creation of liberal, tolerant and sustainable societies that create economic opportunities and decent work for all its citizens is surely a goal we can all coalesce around. And if it isn't currently, then it most certainly will need to become so in the future. Progressives of different hues and traditions share the same values and visions, even if our hierarchies of choices may be different. It's time that progressive parties with different traditions and cultures accept that what they have in common is now more important than what distinguishes them.

Organisational Innovation

Fortunately, we now live in an era where technology can help us forge these new coalitions.

In Budapest, Karácsony's campaign was able to use a combination of ChatBots, Facebook ads, and other social media tools to create an integrated online and grassroots campaign able to unite citizens around an agenda to defend democracy and ensure the city was run in the interest of all. Matteo Renzi, too, drew on new ways of doing politics. He regularly used social media to talk directly to citizens and build new coalitions around both his candidacy and later his agenda for reform. Where Renzi failed, however, was in not using these tools to build a proper movement. In the final analysis, everything he created was forged around his own force of personality and momentum, and when that broke, there was no army to support him.

This was a lesson that Trudeau's Liberal Party learnt, and which has been developed by Macron's *La République En Marche!*. Since he became leader of the party, Trudeau's Liberals have built an open, inclusive and participative movement that uses the latest technology to empower supporters, engage them in policy debates, fundraise, and coordinate a host of activities. Moreover, the party used the data garnered to ensure their efforts and engagement are channeled in the most effective way where it matters most. As a consequence, when the Liberal campaign was hit with a series of scandals that brought the Prime Minister and the government's character into question, the party was able to maintain direct contact with supporters, make amends, and to continue to prosecute the case for its future agenda.

En Marche! has benefitted too from these lessons. The fundamental principles of Macron's campaign were to trust supporters, be honest with them and to empower them. This was the case when things were going wrong, when they couldn't initially recruit enough women to run

“In a post-pandemic politics we will need to find new ways of organising and communicating online, as door-to-door canvassing and mass rallies will be less attractive and effective.”

as parliamentary candidates, and when deciding who should be allowed to organise a local chapter. Despite critiques that Macron's administration has been too centralising, *En Marche!* continues to innovate, most recently calling on local chapters to use national resources to become change makers in their local communities, proactively asking supporters to work to change peoples' lives where they live. What the example of *En Marche!* brings home is that a willingness to learn from the opinions and expertise of supporters and citizens helps improve policies when campaigning and in government.

Looking ahead, continued experimentation with new technologies and new ways of doing things will become ever more important. As we move to a post-pandemic politics, the old ways will, at least for the foreseeable future, be inappropriate. It is very doubtful, for example, that people will welcome random strangers knocking on their doors and canvassing them on their doorstep, nor should we be encouraging people to attend mass rallies. In their place, new virtual opportunities for engagement are already emerging, along with real ways to empower those who support us and share our values and ambition to organise and communicate on our behalf. Yet the use of such technologies will not only improve how progressives go about their campaigns, but also how they formulate policy and engage with citizens while governing. Indeed, campaigning, governing and policy making have increasingly become integrated. Across established democracies, there is a growing demand on the part of citizens to be consulted in the formulation of government policy. And, as the example set by *En Marche!* illustrates, such technologies can also be used to empower people to become change makers in their communities and produce their own public goods.

I hope the contributions to this volume go some way to inspiring progressives to rethink how they do politics, how they might seek to empower their supporters, and tell the stories of our common future together.

ROTTAMATORE: THE RISE AND FALL OF MATTEO RENZI

Giuliano da Empoli

From the very beginning, the rise of Matteo Renzi was based on two elements: the commitment to renew an incompetent and self-serving ruling class, and the grassroots, no-nonsense approach of a local administrator that was used to dealing with concrete issues and who believed he could apply them on a wider national scale.

The first component was a populist one, linked to the powerful anti-establishment wave present in Italy since the beginning of the 90's. From the start, Matteo Renzi adopted a populist style with the objective of riding the anti-establishment wave and using some of its energy to reform the country. His bet was that the rage and dissatisfaction which are fuelling the rise of populist movements in Italy and elsewhere can be harnessed by progressives bold enough to address people's grievances by embracing an agenda of radical change.

The second component of Renzi's project was a municipal one, aimed at making Florence a possible model for a different Italy. In 2010, the contrast between Florence and the Late Roman Empire atmosphere in the capital could not have been more distinct. On the national stage, Berlusconi's rule was paralysed by conflict and scandal, and the Opposition was anaemic and incapable of building an alternative political platform. While in Italy public works were blocked by a backlog of bureaucracy and a basic lack of funds, in Florence building sites remained open throughout the night, as in Singapore. While Berlusconi quickly regularized illegal constructions, in Florence Renzi adopted a development plan to protect the environment and the quality of urban life. While national taxes rose, in Florence they started to fall. While everywhere else cultural sites shut their doors for lack of funds, in Florence, new initiatives popped up throughout the city; municipal museums and libraries now remain open until midnight.

“Renzi adopted a populist style to ride and harness the anti-establishment wave for progressive ends.”

By the fall of 2010, Matteo Renzi's political project was ready to go national, with the organisation of a huge political rally held in Florence's old railway station "La Leopolda". For over three days, more than ten thousand young people from throughout the country participated in a unique event aimed at spotting and connecting individuals involved in the renewal of Italian society. The heralds of a new political season took to the stage for the first time, and voiced their concerns, their desires and their vision for a possible future.

One hundred and forty-four people gave TED-like speeches during the first edition of “La Leopolda”. Most of them were first-timers, who never thought they would participate in a political rally at all during their lifetime: entrepreneurs, researchers, community organisers and recent high-school graduates. Over the next few years, “La Leopolda” became a vibrant meeting place and the symbol of a large movement of opinion that enabled Matteo Renzi to seize control of the Democratic Party (*Partito Democratico*, PD) through the 2013 primary elections, and to become Prime Minister in February the following year.

Renzi’s approach as mayor – which he brought to the Prime Minister’s office – was to present concrete solutions to old problems, solutions that are formulated in order to produce an immediate visible impact on people’s lives. During the first months of his national government, Renzi repeated that the most important thing is not just the program proposed, but its timing as well. For him, promptness is an important part of the decision, one of its qualifying elements.

On April 18th, 2014, Renzi announced significant tax cuts for companies as well as for low-income earners. The tax reform included an 80 euros monthly bonus for low-income earners: a simple and concrete measure, the amount indicated on the payroll, and above all, it was immediate. Only six weeks passed between the announcement of the measure and its actual implementation: over 10 million workers got the 80 euros bonus with their paycheque.

Implemented by decree at around the same time, the Jobs Act was Renzi’s second major reform: a new law conceived to remove the barrier between insiders and outsiders that had plagued the Italian labour market since the early seventies. The new labour legislation created a single, uniform, permanent contract that provided gradually increasing job protection. Thus, it eliminated the jungle of precarious contracts that were renewable without limit, and that had kept an entire generation at the margins of the job market. During its first year of implementation, the reform produced 221,000 new jobs and almost half a million temporary contracts were converted into permanent positions. Young people were able to enter the labour market with better conditions, gain access to gradually increasing job protection and were finally able to get credit from banks.

A majority of the Italian public seemed to approve of this first wave of reforms, allowing the *Partito Democratico* to carry the European elections later that year. On May 25th, 2014, Renzi’s party earned 40.8% of the votes – a 15% increase from the previous year’s election, and the highest score registered by a political party in Italy since 1958.

“Renzi’s approach was to present concrete solutions to old problems that produced immediate visible impact on peoples’ lives.”

This result encouraged Renzi to keep at it. His system seemed to be working. While he had begun by breaking taboos on the Left with his initiatives on the tax system and labour law, he now turned to the most entrenched taboos of the Italian Right. For instance, he changed the nationality law to allow children born to foreign parents to acquire Italian nationality under certain conditions. Next, and against the will of the Catholic Church, he tackled divorce, making it simpler and faster. He also allowed for same-sex unions by introducing the civil union law, an old promise of the Left that had never been carried out due to the Vatican's strong opposition.

“Renzi began by breaking taboos on the left, then turned to the most entrenched taboos of the right.”

In addition to these reforms, Renzi, who did not forget he was supposed to be the *“rottamatore”*, launched a series of measures to undermine the privileges of the State's coddled and overprotected bureaucracy. For example, he established a new salary limit: a civil servant could not earn more than the President of the Republic, who earns 240,000 euros per year. For some public servants, the measure cut their salary in half overnight. Moreover, the administration reform introduced the possibility of firing public employees: not only were they no longer untouchable, they could now be quite brutally sent home. At the same time, the government cancelled state funding for party newspapers, which began to close one after another. It reduced the number of days of vacation for judges from 45 to 30 days per year and created a High Authority against corruption with pervasive powers.

When it came to institutional reform, Renzi's focus was the abolition of the Senate. It was supposed to be a popular reform that simplified and made the extravagant Italian institutional system more stable. That's why, when the time came, Renzi invested his entire political capital on the subject by calling a referendum on this very question. What happened next, though, is best said using Pascal Perrineau's words: *“with a referendum one knows the question voters are asked, but no one knows which question they will answer”*.

During the referendum campaign, the focus of the debate shifted from Senate reform to the government's overall performance. Moreover, the discussion started focusing on Renzi's personality and style, which many considered arrogant and out of touch. In less than three years, the Prime Minister had made enemies within the ranks of the traditional supporters of the Left, starting with unionized public servants and teachers. Even some prominent members of the Democratic Party end up joining ranks with all of the other parties in campaigning for a No vote. This meant that Renzi was practically left alone in defending his reform. Unsurprisingly, on December 4th, 2016, the abolition of the Senate was rejected by 59% of voters and Renzi was forced to resign as Prime Minister.

While the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paolo Gentiloni, took over as Prime Minister - and kept many of the same ministers on - Renzi reaffirmed his leadership within the Partito Democratico. A new round of primary elections was held that led to his re-election as Secretary of the party with 69.2% of the votes.

Despite this victory, it was during this period that the weaknesses of Renzi's political project became evident. First, the *Partito Democratico* (PD), abandoned to itself during Renzi's government, had become a centre of internal opposition and the main arena for a series of polemics that started topping the political agenda. This in turn gave the impression that the governing class was more committed to fighting for power than solving the country's problems. As head of the *PD*, Matteo Renzi had to deal with the rebellion of the old party leaders he once wanted to oust, and as a result public opinion no longer saw him as the transgressive "rottamatore" he swore he was. Renzi had become "a politician like any other" who had to, quite visibly in this case, bite his tongue and use a more shrewd and tactical manner in order to achieve what he wanted. It was a disastrous metamorphosis in a country whose distrust of the political class had reached sky high levels.

What's more, because of the referendum's defeat, Matteo Renzi ceased to look forwards, or to discuss the future at all. Instead, he found himself continually defending his record as head of government. He believed the media and public opinion had treated him unfairly and, instead of proposing a new project for the future, the Partito Democratico's leader continued emphasizing the good results of his government and how it had put the country back on track. By taking this position, Renzi became the man who defends the status quo and no longer the man who wants to, or knows how to, reinvent it.

His attitude was that of a brave man who had been "wronged" by his party and "abandoned" by his people. Renzi, the hero turned victim, was no longer seen as an outsider but instead became the epitome of an insider. A quite unpopular one. It could be said that it was inevitable, after almost three years in power, to eventually be perceived by the general public as an insider. Let's not forget though, that Italy is the country where Berlusconi always managed to remain an outsider, even as he dominated Italian politics for a quarter of a century.

In addition to this structural positioning issue, several political and communication errors were made. The first was a vast underestimation of the impact of the refugee crisis (starting in the summer of 2013 in the Mediterranean Sea) on public opinion.

“After the referendum defeat, Renzi ceased to look forwards and found himself continually defending his record.”

From the beginning, the Partito Democratico adopted an inconsistent strategy that opened up space for the most radical ideas of its opposition parties, in particular for Matteo Salvini's Lega. The second, was an inability to take advantage of the new digital infrastructure. Losing out to the *Five Star Movement* and its '2.0' approach which consisted of profiling users, targeting messages, and starting disinformation and re-information campaigns that the PD was not able to properly understand, let alone counteract.

Finally, the Partito Democratico during the first months of 2018 led a very weak, unfocused electoral campaign. To fight against the simple slogans of Matteo Salvini, who promised to stop immigration and implement a Flat Tax, and the *Five Star Movement* which promised a universal basic income, the PD proposed a baroque list of no less than 100 policy proposals without stating any clear priority. For the voters, the PD was in this way assigned the definitive role of an out-dated party, unable to deliver an intelligible blueprint for the future.

“As nationalists and populists become the new establishment, progressives must adopt an insurgent mentality.”

Under these conditions one cannot be surprised that the opposition forces, the *Five Star Movement* and the *Lega* in primis, carried the 2018 general election, with the *Partito Democratico* falling from its towering 40% to a measly 18%. A year and a half after this defeat and the subsequent formation of the national-populist government in Italy, the PD had still not recovered.

The Renzi season ended with the Secretary's resignation and with the victory of the President of the Latium region, Nicola Zingaretti, during the subsequent primary elections. Zingaretti has been able to reduce, at least in part, the level of conflict within the Partito Democratico: a fundamental first step because there is nothing that irks voters more than constant, visible fighting within a party. It is far from clear though, that Zingaretti will be able to leave his mark on the new political season that was inaugurated by the recent break-up of the national-populist majority formed by the *Five Star Movement* and Matteo Salvini's *League*.

By putting Renzi's errors to one side, there are lessons to be learned from his experience as head of the *Partito Democratico*. His initial approach to the challenges he faced are still relevant. In a world where nationalists and populists have become the new establishment, the only way for progressives to regain any initiative is by adopting an insurgent mentality. Of course, as we have seen with Renzi, this strategy is not without risk and is far from ensuring long-term success. But the opposite option, which consists of defending an increasingly fragile status quo that is threatened by the "barbarians at the gate" is doomed to failure.

Renzi tried to ride the populist wave, but he was toppled off. With a new platform and political style, he tried to deal with the escalating anger of his country, a rage and overall dissatisfaction that has become common to most European societies over the last years. If progressives want to challenge the national-populist leaders' vision, they need to start building a narrative that is at least as compelling as theirs.

REAL CHANGE:
**HOW AN OPENNESS TO NEW SUPPORTERS BUILT A
FOUNDATION FOR PROGRESSIVE SUCCESS IN CANADA**

Anna Gainey & Braeden Caley

At the outset of this past decade, the Liberal Party of Canada's electoral results strongly portended the devastating shortcomings that so many other progressive western political parties would quickly experience in the years ahead. The party that had governed Canada for most of the twentieth century had quickly lost its footing in the twenty-first century — losing a sizable number of seats in four straight election campaigns, swiftly shuffling through a series of leaders. By 2011, Stephen Harper's Conservative Party had won three consecutive federal elections for the first time since 1962 and won its first majority government since 1988. The Liberal Party's membership rolls had dwindled, and the party had fallen to a distant third place in Parliament for the first time in Canada's history, largely written off by pundits and the press.

“By signaling that the party was more than the back rooms it had been maligned for, Liberals began to transform an old party into a modern movement.”

In the wake of the 2011 election, many grassroots Liberal activists and senior campaign veterans alike began to understand that the party's survival as a viable political option — and certainly as a contender for government — would require experimenting with bold and urgent proposals for its renewal and modernization. Old tactics and more closed approaches began to receive critical re-examination in a party that had once been widely referred to as “Canada's natural governing party.” Many Liberal members saw an important opportunity to broadly open up the party to a new generation of supporters, volunteers, grassroots donors, policy advocates, candidates, and even leadership.

Highly controversial in the party at the time, the first major organizational leap was to open up an entirely new category of Liberal ‘supporters,’ who could register at no cost and participate in the building of the party from the ground up. Debates quickly turned to the idea of whether these new low-barrier supporters — who simply had to register for free with their basic information and affirm their support for the party's values — should have the right to vote in the upcoming 2012-13 Liberal leadership contest. In a party that had long been the domain of tightly-controlled delegate selection processes for both leadership selection and policy development, this was seen as a new approach that could drastically lower barriers to involvement. This was particularly the case for young people, women, people of colour, and other groups who hadn't typically been represented in such an important part of Canada's democratic process.

After extensive consultations and debate within the party across Canada, Liberals at the January 2012 national convention (the first that followed the precipitous 2011 defeat) voted overwhelmingly in favour of the reform. The ‘Supporter category’ was born, and its success would soon highlight the pivotal organizational impact of that decision at an existential moment for the Liberal Party of Canada.⁴ By signaling that the party was bigger than the back rooms it had become maligned for, and by taking a chance on inviting in more Canadians who shared its values, Liberals began to transform one of the oldest political parties in the world into a modern and broad-based progressive movement.

Soon after, in the fall of 2012, Justin Trudeau entered the party’s leadership race with an approach that made the most of inviting more Canadians to get involved, and nearly 300,000 Canadians would join the party as supporters and members in the 8 months that followed.⁵

The combination of Justin Trudeau’s forward-looking, progressive, and inclusive leadership with a newly-open, innovative, and fast-growing Liberal movement in Canada meant that a fast-paced evolution could take place. Liberal teams quickly welcomed tens of thousands of new volunteers and grassroots donors across Canada, owing in large part to the twin engines of innovative new digital, data, and analytics programs and an entirely new network of well-trained and motivated field organizers to lead local teams in connecting with more voters on the doorstep. *Liberalist*, the party’s voter engagement database, became a celebrated part of the party’s organizing and digital campaign culture – with posters in campaign offices proclaiming that “*If it’s not in Liberalist, it doesn’t exist.*”

“The combination of Trudeau’s forward-looking leadership with a newly open movement meant a fast-paced evolution could take place.”

By the last day of the 2015 election, which saw the Liberal Party of Canada win a majority government from third place for the first time in Canadian history, the party had achieved all-time highs for grassroots fundraising. Moreover, more than 80,000 volunteers had started more than four million conversations with Canadians about their ideas for a better future and their commitment to vote.

The new and open approach to movement organizing that the Liberal Party of Canada had undertaken was also uniquely well-suited and complementary to Justin Trudeau’s progressive policy priorities. The party became increasingly nimble both online and on the doorstep. This was crucial in building and activating new coalitions to support Trudeau’s increasingly bold platform commitments – such as taking action to confront climate change with a new price on pollution, lowering taxes for the middle class and raising taxes on the wealthiest one percent, legalizing and regulating marijuana, unprecedented new investments in new transit infrastructure and affordable housing, advancing reconciliation

and the rights of Indigenous peoples, and welcoming more than 40,000 Syrian refugees.

As important as a commitment to openness and innovation had been on the road to victory in 2015, Justin Trudeau and the leadership team at the party also felt strongly that a single successful election campaign was no reason to slow down that new approach.

While the Liberal Party had now done away with closed-off leadership selection and made important strategic investments to re-tool the party for open engagement both on the ground and online, many in the party felt that there were still important further changes to consider. Members were still being charged fees for their involvement, and the party's long history had piled up more than eighteen different operating party constitutions (national, regional, and commission-oriented) — often with overlapping authorities and limited operational flexibility. The need to fundamentally transform the party in just three years before the 2015 election had underscored the need for flexibility to build a party that was driven by insights about hard work on the ground, and to allow for openness to new people and ideas.

There was a recognition that part of the Liberal Party of Canada's victory in 2015 had been achieved in spite of some significant structural barriers that would need to be resolved to ensure the resiliency of the large new movement of volunteers. So, with just weeks having passed since earning a four-year majority mandate from Canadians, the Liberal Party once again set about transforming and renewing itself for the opportunities and challenges of progressive politics in an era with polarization otherwise on the rise.

Dubbed the "One Party" initiative, Justin Trudeau and the National Board immediately began another renewal consultation exercise. This led to the proposal of an entirely free membership (free registration to join the party, unique among Canada's major parties), a more open, digital, and continuous policy development process, and a drastic streamlining of the party's governance. The goal of this further round of reforms was to focus the party on direct engagement with Canadians and constant election readiness.

As Trudeau championed the proposed changes at the party's first post-election National Convention in Winnipeg in May 2016, he stated that the party constitution of the day was "A product of the era we worked so hard, together, to put behind us: The era of factional battles and hyphenated Liberals, of regional chieftains and behind-the-scenes power-brokers, of the closed, insular thinking that almost killed this party."⁶ He added that the reforms on the table with the new "One Party" constitution for the Liberal Party of Canada were an opportunity to "finally and firmly close the book on a painful era in our party's history."⁷

As important as they were, the new constitutional changes were always a leap of faith. Eliminating all party membership fees meant foregoing nearly \$1 million in predictable revenue each year (and more growth in election years), for instance, just as legislation from the previous Conservative government had eliminated per-vote public funding for

political parties between campaigns. Nonetheless, the party organization started to see impressive new signs of strength on the road to the 2019 election as yet another wave of grassroots supporters once again took up the invitation to get more involved at no cost and with fewer barriers. While three years may still be a short timeline to evaluate the new constitution's full effects and impacts, more than 250,000 Canadians registered as new Liberals in between mid-2016 and the 2019 general election campaign — the kind of rapid growth that is normally only observed by Canadian political parties in opposition during a protracted and hotly contested leadership race.

Building this much larger base would become an essential condition for the party's organizational success as it moved toward a re-election campaign where nothing could be taken for granted. Indeed, for most of the lead-up to the campaign in 2019, the Liberal Party of Canada was behind the Conservative Party in nation-wide public opinion polling,⁸ and there had been a nearly-unprecedented wave of Conservative parties replacing sitting Liberal and NDP provincial governments across Canada.⁹ Even in Ontario, a progressive stronghold, the populist Conservative Doug Ford had prevailed in provincial elections.

Yet the federal Liberal Party was able to withstand that apparent rightward shift. On the road to Election Day in October 2019, the Liberal Party of Canada was able to launch its largest-ever volunteer mobilization and digital engagement programs. Before and during the campaign, more than 90,000 Liberal volunteers made more than 21 million knocks and calls to start new conversations with Canadians. Once the campaign began in September 2019, that was the best such month for grassroots fundraising in the party's history – beating the surge during the 2015 election that saw the party rise from third to first.

It's no secret however that the early part of the 2019 campaign had also been highly tumultuous, and on the Liberal side this would come to include the need for Prime Minister Trudeau to offer thorough apologies for having appeared in brownface earlier in his life — even as he had gone on to dedicate so much of his career to ending racism and steadfastly promoting diversity.

In addition to Trudeau's strong closing arguments on the campaign trail for a "strong progressive government" (with stops in three dozen communities across Canada in the final week), the long drive to open up and build the party's new mobilization capacity would also need to pay heavy dividends in the campaign's crucial closing days.

It proved to do exactly that, with both a well-honed digital campaign and an insight-driven field program that were able to closely target grassroots volunteer resources to where they were needed the most. Of the 18 ridings ultimately decided by less than 2 percent of the vote, Liberal candidates were successfully elected in 14 — all helping

“A large base was essential to the Party's electoral success.”

to achieve a crucial progressive re-election amidst an era of anti-incumbency both in Canada and throughout the democratic world.

These are the kinds of numbers and results that a movement-oriented progressive campaign can achieve. They highlight one way that an open, accessible, and innovative approach to politics can help make progressive policies and victories possible, even in the face of conservative opponents who have been consistently better-funded, backed up by substantial third-party spending, and supported by an array of allies in other levels of government. In 2020 and beyond, as the world contends with the tragedy and altered campaign circumstances of a new global pandemic, winning real progress for people will also depend more than ever on open, online organizing by progressive movements everywhere.

To be sure, the Liberal Party of Canada still has no shortage of important challenges to face. The western provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan did not elect a single Liberal Member of Parliament in 2019, and the Bloc Québécois, which has long sought the separation of Québec from Canada, made substantial gains in that province.

However, Canada's 43rd Parliament was nonetheless elected with important potential to achieve real progressive results for Canadians, whether it's by investing in the middle class and the most vulnerable, fighting climate change, strengthening public healthcare, building affordable housing, or so much more. In 2011, after a stinging defeat and before the Liberal Party undertook a decade-long push to develop a new and open approach to Canadian progressive politics, this progress would have seemed remote to impossible — just like the two consecutive successful federal election campaigns that are now making it achievable.

“A movement-oriented progressive campaign can help deliver progressive policies, even in the face of a well-funded conservative wave.”

As the Liberal Party's 2019 National Campaign Director Jeremy Broadhurst told the Toronto Star shortly after Justin Trudeau earned this new mandate, “This campaign, even more than 2015, was a validation of the decade since 2011, the transformation of this party ... This election was the payoff for all of that hard work.”¹⁰ In a time when far-right populism seeks to transform western democracies away from progressive values and liberal principles, the Canadian example provides hope that openness and inclusive movement-building can be an effective catalyst for moving forward with real progressive change.

ONWARDS: HOW EN MARCHE! WAS SET IN MOTION

Ismael Emelien

Exactly one year prior to the French presidential elections of May 2017, political experts and politicians of every chapel were arguing with one another about what the focus of the campaign would be. Some were expecting it to run around terrorism and immigration, hoping they'd be able to link those two issues. Others seemed sure that no one could win without campaigning on unemployment and purchasing power. All of them believed it would be a run off between the left and right. The people of *En Marche!* already knew they were wrong. The campaign would be won – or lost – on one critical point, and one alone: *politics*.

This was not an educated guess, nor the expression of some kind of arrogance: we knew because we had asked the French people. Not through the usual filters of pundits and pollsters, not with social network listening tools, but directly, and scientifically. We had launched *En Marche!* only a few weeks earlier, driven by the ambition to reconnect with what politics once was. What it had stopped being a long time ago; a means to transform reality by the people. Not without them, or worse, against them.

“The purpose of En Marche! was not the empowerment of its leaders, but the empowerment of its supporters.”

From day one of *En Marche!*, everything was about our members, our supporters, our “*marcheurs*” as we called them. That should perhaps be obvious for any political movement, but it marked a significant cultural change in French political life. Until then, in France, everything in politics used to be about the leaders, from the smallest level to the top. Activists used to be nothing more than foot soldiers, the unit of measurement of internal power balances. Traditionally the aim of French politics was, at the lowest level, to control the section, the local committee; whatever was the nuclear cell of the party. From there, parties would back a potential candidate from local politics to regional, then to Parliament, and eventually, for the supreme honour of the presidency. As a consequence, everybody inside the party looked up. It is no wonder that regular citizens felt discarded: they were. And it is no wonder that activists felt exploited and manipulated: they were. Supporters were only of use when elections were approaching – the rest of the time their sole purpose was to wait for the next campaign to start.

We reversed that philosophy. Everybody was asked to look down. The purpose of *En Marche!* was not the empowerment of its leaders, but the empowerment of its supporters. The unprecedented approach worked amazingly well during our campaign, though in

truth, we had no other choice. We started with no money, no elected officials, no local structures and not a single activist. The only way we could see our goals achieved was to build and strengthen an asset nobody else had: a tsunami of citizens engaging in politics for the first time. We spent every hour of every day of the campaign making sure our top priority – if not our only priority – was to make their job easier. We provided them with better tools, better ideas, better arguments; an organisation that was as flexible as possible.

In politics, everything must be about your supporters, even after winning power. This was one of the most painful lessons we learnt in *En Marche!* since winning the election. That is not to say our supporters wanted to cash in on their investment through policies which benefited them directly. On the contrary, they are held accountable for everything we do in power by everyone that matters to them: their family, friends, colleagues and all the people they convinced to vote for us during the election. For that, we owe them a real-time explanation of everything we do, and ways of demonstrating its purpose.

If you sincerely want to make sure everything is about your members, then the internal culture, the way everyone behaves, needs to be radically different to traditional parties. You need to trust your members. That is a very big deal. It means that we were straightforward with them all the time, even when things were not going well – indeed, especially when things were not going well. We acknowledged everything. We admitted fault during two big controversies, one on gay marriage and another on colonialization. The crises happened during the same week, but were unrelated. As the media obsessed with our loss of momentum, we didn't try to pretend we were not facing difficulties or deny the challenge, as would have been the norm in traditional campaigns. Instead, we told our supporters to expect that polls were likely to continue decreasing for a week or so. We also told them that it was our fault, that we were sorry for having rendered their task tougher, but also explained that there was a way out of the crisis, thanks to them. And our people came out of that week more fired up than ever.

“We knew the campaign would be won or lost on one critical point, and one alone: politics.”

Trust also meant freedom of organisation, and we never interfered in the way our members decided to create or join one of our 4,000 local committees. Instead, we spent a lot of resources designing a website that made organising effortless. Trust also meant kindness. That too was a very big deal for our people, who were above all sick of politicians calling each other names all day long. And trust meant *fun!* We tried to make sure everything we suggested our members do would be enjoyable for them. Nowhere is it written that things as serious as politics can only be boring and sad.

Second, in a country where defiance towards politics and politicians had only grown stronger over the previous two or three decades, where populism seemed to benefit from an unstoppable momentum, we needed to get on speaking terms with the country before

the election. The country did not want to hear about politics and elections because it had been disappointed and deceived countless times before. The only way we could connect was to do everything in our power to demonstrate beyond doubt that we were what we promised to be: *different*. We had the privilege to be led by a man that was exactly that: different. Emmanuel Macron was and still is more interested in the issues at hand than in attacking his opponents, he cares more about the truth and his convictions than about winning, more about his country than about his party, and more about the people than the system. Of course, that made everything else much simpler for us.

But the rest was still of the utmost importance. We campaigned for what we really believed in, rather than for what people were thought to be asking for. For instance, we made a strong case for the EU throughout the campaign, even distributing European flags at our rallies. That was perceived as political suicide in France, where the European issues were considered doomed since the referendum in 2005. As a consequence, anti-Europeans had been free to attack the European project on a daily basis. Pro-Europeans spent their energy avoiding the subject, fearing that it might cost them some votes. We did the opposite, and not only did it resonate with the people in favour of the EU (a majority in France), but it also sent the message we were not afraid to speak our minds. It told the public we were not engaging in a campaign of communication and manipulation, but rather of authenticity and true commitment.

We also decided to do things in the right order. That again sounds like something that is simple and obvious, though in politics it isn't always, and it proved critical. We launched our movement with a countrywide listening campaign – *La Grande Marche*. Our members knocked on hundreds of thousands of doors all across France (especially in areas abandoned by politics a long time ago) with the sole mission of listening. That also appeared to most of the commentators as a dumb move: why undertake such an out of date exercise if not to talk about your ideas and your potential candidates? By doing the exact opposite we were able to get valuable answers to very important questions, such as *"In your opinion, what is not working in France?"* It brought us to where I started: we knew beforehand that the presidential campaign would be about politics. *Politics* was not something monitored by polling companies. We also got the scent of important issues that were either absent or underestimated in the national political discourse. For example, the public's concern regarding violence towards women, drove our candidate to make it his first national cause when elected – a year before the Weinstein scandal and #MeToo.

"You need to trust your members. We never interfered in the way they decided to create or join a local committee."

Only after we had listened did we start to speak, hoping that paying attention would allow us to be heard. Our platform and proposals came after the first phase of diagnosing the

country. We focused on everything related to work, even though the country was described as having been traumatized by the labour market reform of 2016. In some ways, that is why it was surprising to be attacked exactly on that ground by the *Gilets Jaunes*.

Two of the main characteristics of the *Gilets Jaunes* movement have gone unnoticed, although they explain why no opposition party benefited from their protests, and also why and how the President could recover from the crisis. The first was that the *Gilets Jaunes* rejected all forms of political organisations and were not looking for any traditional political outlet. That is why none of the opposition parties gained an electoral advantage from the protests. The second, and most important, was that the core claim of the movement was the willingness to be able to make a decent living out of one's job. That was precisely the core of our campaign. The problem was not the direction of our policies, it was their effectiveness. That is why the President decided to go back to the public again, launching *Le Grand Debat*. He and the government then took extra care to ensure that the bills passed during the first two years of the mandate delivered the results they were designed for, and reassured the French people about his determination to pursue the right course.

Re-engaging with the French people also helped meet other communication challenges. To clarify our ambition, the President announced the frontloading of many policies that were in the pipeline, but had been sliced into a series of measures for budgetary reasons. The crisis is not over yet, the anger is not extinguished. But the wake-up call has been heard, and before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the results of our early policies were starting to be seen – never in twelve years has unemployment been so low, and for the first time since the early 2000's we had in 2019 more industrial plants opening up than closing down.

Finally, we submitted ourselves to the standards we were fighting for. For instance, every presidential candidate agreed during the campaign that there were not enough women in Parliament. So every other candidate endorsed a bill which would make gender parity in parliament compulsory - but this would not happen until 2022. We were the only party committed to having an equal number of men and women as soon as 2017, before the bill was even passed. However, that turned out to be more difficult than we thought. After making a call to every interested male and female citizen to apply to become one of our MP candidates in their respective constituency, we ended up with more than 85% male applications. There was an internal debate on whether we should go public with the knowledge. Some argued there was nothing to expect but downsides in doing so (that it would expose the imbalance of our process) and that, in absolute terms, we had enough female applicants. That was true, but it meant that just by applying, female applicants. That was true, but it meant that just by applying, female

“Macron was more interested in the issues than attacking his opponents, he cared more about the truth than winning.”

applications would have a 50% chance of securing a nomination.

Emmanuel Macron chose a different approach. He recorded a short video in which he said that he was both disappointed and surprised by the low number of female applications. He explained that he had called women whom he thought would not hesitate to apply, and they all gave him the same answer: *“I did not even think about it, I did not think I could apply.”* He finished by saying that he was asking women everywhere to really think about it. And, overnight, the ratio rose to 45% female applications. As a result, 46% of our MPs are women, which raised the general percentage of women MPs in the French National Assembly from 26% to 39% in one go. This was not only important in itself, but it also proved that we really were willing to keep our word, and be honest about the difficulties we faced in doing so.

That is how hundreds of thousands of average citizens decided to actively commit to *En Marche!* and made wonders. A country that voted against Europe in 2005, bathed in anti-elitist populism, and ruled by the same two parties for 60 years, elected a pro-European former investment banker with no electoral experience. And that is why voters agreed to listen to, and then consider, our candidate – and eventually elect him President of the Republic.

The challenge is now to keep nurturing this movement and its members in a way that goes above and beyond electoral politics. We believe it is both necessary to achieve the change we seek, and to live up to the hopes of the people invested in *En Marche!* The challenge is a tough one. It is why we launched within *En Marche!* what we call *Citizens Projects*, one of our most promising innovations. It encourages all local committees to build one project together. The project can be whatever they choose it to be: it could be the installation of an urban shared vegetable garden; or weekly initiations to the Internet for the elderly; elsewhere, a series of conferences on climate change. The headquarters in Paris will have no say, instead acting only as a back office, helping as much as we can, and distinguishing and disseminating the best achievements. This has many advantages: it proves to our members that they are truly useful, in the most concrete possible way. It opens our movement to a variety of new associations, experts, and outside citizens who might not otherwise engage with us. And it demonstrates to everybody that we are truly committed to change, and especially not to occupying power with the sole concern of keeping it.

“Our Citizens Projects encourage local committees to build community initiatives that demonstrate and help deliver our commitment to real change.”

**LET'S DO THIS:
PURPOSE, OPTIMISM AND THE REVIVAL
OF NEW ZEALAND LABOUR**

David Talbot

The New Zealand Labour Party approached the 2017 election having spent almost ten years in opposition. Throughout most of that time, National Party leader John Key had dominated, popular with swing voters for his compelling rags-to-riches backstory. Labour were onto their fourth leader since their last prime minister, Helen Clark, and still struggling for traction.

Given the relative fortunes of the main parties since 2008, Prime Minister John Key's resignation in late 2016 took most by surprise, though was possibly related to his gradual slide in popularity over the course of his premiership and an acknowledgement that his party needed to appear refreshed heading into the 2017 election. His deputy and long-time finance Minister, Bill English, assumed the role of PM largely unopposed - considered by the electorate "dull but competent," and with favourability numbers that put him in what looked like a strong position electorally.

Labour's prospects appeared to dip further when a series of events in mid-2017 (including the admission of the co-leader of their natural coalition partner, the Greens, that she had committed benefit fraud in the early 1990s) precipitated a sharp decline in the polls. When a series of polls showed Labour's support dropping further, the then-leader, Andrew Little, resigned. Jacinda Ardern (then deputy) assumed the leadership in what was widely seen as an amicable transition. She was Labour's youngest leader ever. At this point there were just seven weeks until the election.¹¹

“Ardern’s commanding performance at her first press conference set the tone for what was to come: relentless positivity.”

Ardern's commanding performance at her first press conference as leader set the tone for what was to come. Suddenly, what looked like a 'status quo' election felt like it could become one of 'change'. She was seen by the public and many in the commentariat as a breath of fresh air: direct, principled, the embodiment of a renewed Labour confidence. On the back of Ardern becoming leader, internal polling showed Labour immediately up from 23% to 36% and in the hunt. While there was little immediate change to the National Party vote, the centre-left vote consolidated around Labour. Party donations and membership numbers surged. It was around this time that the phrase 'Jacindamania' was coined.

Her assertion that Labour's campaign would be "relentlessly positive" drew some criticism but was instrumental in signalling a new way of doing politics: inclusive, energetic, and forward-looking.

Unexpectedly, Labour had a renewed public credibility and one of the most crucial of campaign ingredients - momentum. Ardern proved to be a staggeringly popular leader with favourability numbers quickly into the 70s. It wasn't uncommon for some polls to show a majority of National Party voters holding a favorable view of her. She almost immediately tied Bill English as preferred Prime Minister (26%/28%: Newshub-Reid Research, August 2017). Focus groups were for the first time in nearly a decade replaying verbatim comments from a Labour Party leader. The resonance of Ardern's communication was helped immensely by her ability to plainly and compellingly articulate her views, notably at this point her directness in confronting a prominent TV host over his assertion that women have a duty to disclose their plans to conceive to their employers. She was almost impossible to miss.

Alongside the changing 'feel' of the campaign there was considerable public pressure for change developing on a range of social issues. For some time, unfocused discontent had been growing around housing affordability, environmental degradation, growing child poverty, and increasing inequality. Ardern gave voice and visibility to these issues. Any real pressure for the government status quo was grounded in perceptions of National's economic competence, and a desire for electoral and financial 'stability'. It was fairly common for critics to claim that: "Ardern is inexperienced and that Labour represents an economic risk". Nevertheless, early in the campaign, the Labour Party's internal polls had them tied with or leading National for the first time in a decade.

National, now in its third term and with a well-drilled campaign team, had taken the odd decision to run what looked to many like a complacent rehash of their 2014 campaign. There were two central propositions: that they were "*Delivering for New Zealanders*" and that the alternative "Chaotic coalition will take NZ backwards". This approach may have been sufficient to counter the 'old' Labour Party they faced, but more was clearly going to be needed in light of Labour's renewed leadership and momentum. The contrast between the parties was further heightened with the launch of Ardern's catchy campaign slogan: "*Let's do this*". National's initial response to their rejuvenated opponent was clumsy and flatfooted. They appeared to have been caught completely off-guard.

It didn't take long for National to recalibrate however, jettisoning much of their original campaign and pivoting to a strongly negative position focused on tax and economic risk. As they had in previous campaigns, they cleverly tempered negative messages with

“There was considerable societal pressure for change brewing around a range of social issues: Ardern gave voice and visibility to them.”

humour. Their first suite of new ads was a play on Labour's slogan: "Let's tax this". Right wing channels amplified memes around "Taxcinda". Disinformation played an important role in destabilising potential swing voters with National's finance minister (and campaign manager) Steven Joyce running hard on the unsubstantiated (and later discredited) allegation of an "\$11 billion hole" in Labour's policy costings. This 'defensive offence' worked. It put the brakes on Labour's ascendancy and National edged back in front.

It's fair to say that through this time, Labour didn't help itself with campaign commitments around tax. Labour had campaigned on the introduction of a Capital Gains Tax since 2011, though this was diluted mid-campaign to implementing a tax review post-2017 with findings to be implemented prior to the 2020 election. The public were rightly anxious at what they might be voting for. Labour's proposal for a tax on commercial water use of "between one and two cents" per thousand litres sparked widespread farmer protests and claims that family food bills would rise sharply as a result. The "\$18 cabbage" became a meme. National's ads were focused and unrelenting. They included claims of new: water tax, land tax, fuel tax, income tax, and an agricultural emissions tax. Labour managed to shut some of these down, but the cumulative effect unnerved many swing voters.

The countervailing force with these voters was the sentiment that despite the risk inherent in a switch to Labour, the status quo - "business as usual" - simply wasn't an option. There was just too much that needed fixing. Labour's final campaign pivot gave voice to this in the line: "We can't wait any longer".

As it turned out, under New Zealand's proportional voting system (Mixed Member Proportional or "MMP"), Labour had done just enough. While Labour achieved a smaller vote share (37%) than National (44%) they were judged in subsequent research to have run the stronger campaign and to have focused on the most important issues. Labour's eventual election to government was precipitated by Winston Peters, leader of the party New Zealand First. It was Peters who held the balance of power once all votes were in. His choice to support Labour rather than National evidently came down to the desire to breathe life into a new government, rather than be seen to resuscitate an old one.

Government though, has not been without its challenges. Campaigning is by its nature wholly different to governing. Some have argued that from the start there has been a tension between the 'passion and vision' required to win a campaign and the arguably less sexy 'discipline and focus' needed to deliver on those commitments. The reality is somewhat less clear-cut than that, with expectations (particularly on the political left) often not well-calibrated to the political realities of both three-party government and uncertain international economic conditions.

When questioned on impressions of 'government performance' early in the term, swing voters invariably reply with reference to Ardern. They were often short on policy detail but motherhood, her appearance at the UN General Assembly with tiny daughter Neve, and a number of other high-profile international engagements had made elements of her

premiership visually and emotionally memorable.

However, the high recall and resonance of these events frequently overshadowed the considerable behind-the-scenes policy work in train. Perhaps politicians will never get credit for such efforts. Over her first two years in office, Ardern has sharpened up a focus on holistic wellbeing - promoting measures that go beyond simple economic indicators and take into account broader living standard measures across human, social, and natural capital. In her second budget she and her finance minister released the world's first "Wellbeing" budget focused on five key areas relating to long-term intergenerational change: mental health, child wellbeing, supporting the aspirations of (indigenous) Māori and Pasifika people, productivity, and economic transformation (including low-carbon transition). In her campaign Ardern embodied positivity and inclusiveness, and in government she quickly sought to inject "kindness" into the broader economic narrative too.

In fact, those who know Ardern well will no doubt cite 'kindness' and 'compassion' as two of her defining characteristics. The world got to see these first-hand following the horrific Christchurch mosque terrorist shootings on March 15, 2019. In the aftermath, Ardern exerted an innate moral leadership and drew a grieving nation together. In both words and actions, from wearing a hijab, refusing to name the accused, her verbal embrace of the Muslim community with the powerful "they are us", to the almost immediate ban of semi-automatic weapons, she showed a unique and to some, unexpected strength. It is undoubtedly an event that for many will come to define her premiership. Even her detractors tend to give her credit for her response to these events, and she remains personally popular across the political spectrum.

Popularity though, is perhaps not a comprehensive defence to perceptions of a lack of delivery. And it was "delivery" that began to emerge as the battleground of the 2020 election prior to the Covid-19 crisis. Key to the charge of "non-delivery" was the government's failure to meet its promised targets of building affordable houses. "Building 100,000 homes over ten years" was a cornerstone of Labour's 2017 campaign. Two years in, they've completed only a few hundred and abandoned the overall target. There are many reasons this policy hasn't delivered as expected but the public now suspect that insufficient work had been done in opposition, and for some this has cast serious doubt on Labour's overall ability to deliver.

Impatience is another challenge, both for the politicians of government (who are sometimes at risk of failing to 'take the public on the journey'), as well as for the voters

“Over the first two years in office, Ardern has a sharp focus on holistic wellbeing and injecting kindness into the broader economic narrative too.”

themselves (who often expect unreasonably rapid results). Some of the government's most ambitious and transformative ideas will take considerable time to implement and, in some cases, much longer than that again to register statistically.

Ardern's response to this range of challenges has sometimes been to characterise the purpose of the government as 'tackling long term problems' and she frequently refers to her government's particular focus as: "Looking ahead thirty years, not just three". While this is entirely reasonable, conveying concrete progress on a few key indicators of importance to voters looked to be absolutely crucial in terms of the perceived credibility of future election commitments. Ironically this may now be less of a demand given her government's widely perceived success in tackling the unexpected threat of Covid-19. On this, the public undoubtedly saw determination, focus, and delivery.

In early 2020, Ardern also began to face renewed opposition from National, who pivoted to a more focused negative message on tax. They began to run almost every political issue through this frame. Evidently buoyed by having found an area of weakness, the opposition became emboldened to personally attack the Prime Minister. The first real attempt was the dog-whistle "Part-time PM" in which the Prime Minister's four-day official visit to Tokelau (a small, remote island territory of New Zealand at extreme risk from rising sea levels) was characterised as a holiday. While it was not clear that this attack stuck, it signalled the prospect of a combative and highly negative campaign. With such high unfavorability numbers, the leader of the opposition had little to lose by playing dirty.

Connected to these personal attacks is a challenge around perceived government "focus". In terms of Ardern's personal brand, "reliability", "compassion", and "positivity" are firmly embedded. In addition, her progressive policy positions, relative youth, her gender, and more recently, motherhood have been of significant interest to the international media. This unsought international attention did risk becoming a double-edged sword. The opposition were keen to promote the narrative of a PM focused on what they would characterise as "trivial" international issues rather than the immediate domestic interests of families struggling with challenges like rising costs of living. While baseless, there did appear to be political risk in this attack.

It has perhaps been blunted by Ardern's decisive response to the Covid-19 crisis. It seems likely that the public will have recognised the way in which her international expertise, awareness, and connectedness have been put to use for the national benefit. As a trading nation set to embark on a journey of economic recovery these international relationships will be more important than ever.

While New Zealand's isolation has often been an impediment to travel and trade, in an international pandemic it may literally be a lifesaver. Ardern's government went, in their own colloquial words, "hard and early" in their response to Covid-19. Relative to other nations, restrictions of all sorts tended to be advanced sooner relative to the confirmation of the first Covid-19 case, and were often stricter. The numbers appear to bear out the

success of this approach, and the country now looks to have eliminated the virus.

Having the advantage of time, even if not much, to see alternative (and in many cases less effective) strategies play out elsewhere no doubt helped. But there was more to the success than that. As she had before, in the midst of the crisis Ardern rose to the challenge. Her decisiveness, her clarity of communication, her willingness to seek expert scientific and domain advice, and the sense of unity of purpose she conveyed all proved (and are proving) instrumental.

The public seem in little doubt that her leadership saved lives. Her strong performance was acknowledged in a late-May Newshub-Reid Research poll putting Labour on 56.5% (up 14%) and National on 30.6% (down 12.7%). Labour's figure is the highest of any party ever in that poll. Reporting of preferred Prime Minister numbers from the same study labelled Ardern "the most popular Prime Minister in a century". A few days later this shift was confirmed in a 1 NEWS Colmar Brunton poll putting Labour on 59% (up 18) and National on 29% (down 17). Ardern achieved 63% as preferred Prime Minister, the highest that poll has ever recorded. National is now in disarray and a leadership change seems inevitable.

Two and a half years into a three year term then, and with attention increasingly focused on election day 2020, there is a lot to be encouraged by. A popular Prime Minister, strong party vote, stable governing arrangements, an economy well-positioned to bounce back, and an increasing voter acknowledgement of leadership, progress, and delivery. Labour would certainly appear to have the upper hand.

“In the aftermath of the horrific Christchurch mosque terrorist attack, Ardern exerted an innate moral leadership and drew a grieving nation together.”

UNITY IN OPPOSITION: GERGELY KARÁCSONY AND THE BUDAPEST MODEL

David Dorosz

The 2019 Mayoral election in Budapest was a crucial victory for the defenders of democracy in Hungary. To achieve this victory, Gergely Karácsony, the eventual unified opposition candidate for Mayor, had to define a strategy able to unite the fractured opposition and present a progressive vision for Budapest and Hungary capable of mobilizing a broader political base. This was no easy task. Viktor Orbán has been in power since 2010, and during that time has sought to consolidate power. His government has targeted opposition groups, journalists, universities, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) who don't align with his politics.

Prior to his election as mayor, Gergely Karácsony was a member of the Parliamentary Committee that prepared Hungary's new electoral law in 2011. A former political scientist, he understood how the government's reforms would create a majoritarian electoral system that would allow Fidesz, Orbán's political party, to cement its position as the dominant party within Hungarian politics. This is perhaps why Karácsony was the first Hungarian politician to call for cooperation among the fragmented opposition. 'Traditional'

programme-oriented cooperation among parties seemed impossible in a climate of distrust and deep ideological cleavages. Karácsony understood that a more technical and candidate-centered approach was needed to unify the opponents of Orbán's illiberalism.

“Karácsony understood the only way to defeat Orbán's illiberalism was to unify the opposition.”

Over the preceding decade, the Hungarian opposition had lost several important elections (the parliamentary elections in 2014, and municipal and European Parliament elections in 2014 and 2019) before they accepted Karácsony's idea that in a majoritarian system only one candidate of the opposition has a real chance to win against a candidate of the government. However, it was one thing to agree theoretically to this strategy, to put the idea of primaries into practice was quite another challenge. Given that there was a need to introduce the very idea of primaries to Hungarian society and the voters of Budapest, we decided to start the campaign very early – over 10 months before the election.

Challenging István Tarlós, the incumbent Mayor of Budapest, within an illiberal political system where democratic values, the rule of law, checks and balances are not respected was our biggest concern and most important challenge. Illiberal actors in this system had not only initiated a “distrust-populism-distrust” loop but also a process of democratic deconsolidation. A major transformation had taken place in the media, guided by the

interventions of Orbán's government and their economic allies. As a result, a large segment of the offline media, including the public service broadcasters, directly served the government's goals and those of its allies and representatives. To level the government media-dominated playing field, we would have to use whatever resources were at our disposal, and experiment with new forms of communication and organization.

Another striking phenomenon of the Hungarian context was the polarization of the electorate and the collapse of political satisfaction and trust. Fidesz, along with other opposition parties, had built trust in a selective manner, concentrating only on holding their supporters together. They widened and deepened the gap between their own camp and their opponents. To overcome the growing polarization of Hungarian society in general and in Budapest in particular, Karácsony decided to campaign on a message of unity. He would mobilize citizens through a positive campaign, running on the slogan "*Budapest belongs to everyone*".

Our first step was fixing the technical details of the primaries – in Hungary, there are no regulations around primary participation, and no prerequisite for people to vote in them. Here, we were provided with technical support by an NGO (*the Voice!*), focused on addressing everyone – online, on-air and in the streets.¹² Free and fair elections, and an impartial and non-discriminatory procedure for the registration of voters was supervised by the Civil Election Commission. The first round of primaries was held between 27 December 2018 and 23 January 2019. During this round, Karácsony defeated the Hungarian Socialist Party's candidate, Csaba Horváth, winning over 80 percent of the vote (27,000 of the 34,133 valid votes cast). Throughout the primary, we were pleased to see that citizens were interested in the contest and active in the process. Moreover, fears that the vote might be manipulated did not come to fruition. The first round of primaries was an important step, proving that the process could be trusted. However, it was still a long way to go until all parties of the opposition would truly join forces.

A second round of primaries became necessary in the summer of 2019. Beyond the campaign goal of keeping Karácsony's candidacy on the political and media agenda, a seismic change occurred in Hungarian party politics in the aftermath of the European Parliamentary elections in May 2019. Following their success in these, two leading parties of the opposition, DK and Momentum, decided to challenge Karácsony and nominate their own candidates. This was a low point for the campaign, triggered by the catastrophic result of Karácsony's party, Dialogue for Hungary. Partnering with the Hungarian Socialist Party, they won just 6.6% of the vote in the European Parliamentary elections.

The campaign team needed time to regroup, but was saved by one of the most beautiful moments of the campaign. A video recorded in the Hungarian Parliament Director of Communications giving an inspirational speech, and telling Karácsony

that he could still win, so he should go on and take the challenge. Karácsony was reborn, and with him the campaign too. The video was immensely popular and went viral, and he built on its success with a great performance in the pre-election debate.

Throughout June, the primary candidates took their campaigns to the streets of Budapest and took part in three official debates. When the votes were cast, Karácsony not only managed to beat the two new candidates from the larger opposition parties (receiving almost 34,000 votes, just under 50 percent of those cast) but the turnout was higher than expected. Indeed, the total number of voters cast had doubled to over 68,000.

Following the second-round result, leaders of the Hungarian Socialist Party, Dialogue for Hungary, DK and Momentum agreed to establish a joint political body and a joint operational campaign corps for the duration of the municipal election campaign. By winning the second round of primaries, Karácsony has successfully forged unity among the fractured opposition parties and gained their support for his programme.

“In Hungary, a large segment of the media, including public service broadcasters, directly serve the government’s interests.”

The official opening of the campaign at the end of August was an ecstatic moment. Thousands of people gathered at Szabadság tér (Freedom Square) to listen to his speech and when the official song of the campaign (*The song of change*) was presented, Karácsony played his guitar together with the famous Hungarian actor and singer, Tamás Szabó Kimmel. This was an important moment. Out of fear of a backlash from Fidesz, Hungarian celebrities hardly ever endorse opposition politicians. The appearance of one of the nation’s most popular

young stars was a symbolic breakthrough that was followed by a wave of other celebrity endorsements.¹³

Following this launch, we focused our campaign on corruption, highlighting Karácsony’s determination to challenge the clients of the government who received billions (using the so-called “Tiborczt Tax”, named after of the son-in-law of the Prime Minister). We campaigned to stop public funds being spent on the Prime Minister’s hobbies (sports stadia) and embraced positivity through our candidate’s “Green Budapest” agenda. We also sought to build connection with the voters by emphasizing Karácsony’s similarity to them. He was presented as a regular guy, not a snarling political animal. A well-prepared, principled leader, a thoughtful, emotional figure – in short, a decent and nice guy from the neighborhood. After a while, however, as the campaign got harder, we also advised him to be tougher.

The campaign also had to face the disinformation coming from government-owned media outlets. To overcome the media pressure from the governing party we used several grassroots rallies to meet and mobilize citizens directly. To address citizens of Budapest more effectively and on an individual basis, we also build the largest call-center campaign in the history of Hungarian democracy. Perhaps more importantly, social media was essential to connecting with and persuading citizens of Budapest. Karácsony's Facebook page had 200,000 followers in a city of just two million inhabitants. We also leveraged the latest online technologies. Chatbots and targeted advertisements were used to reach younger voters. Countless posts were shared on social media and almost 300 live broadcasts were produced. On the Saturday before the election, Karácsony visited all 23 districts of the capital – campaigning from 7 am to 10 pm – and shared 33 posts on his Facebook page. This was an intense, integrated online and offline campaign.

By communicating Karácsony's record as mayor of the fourteenth district, the campaign was able to build trust in his abilities as a local politician. His local reputation indeed helped him to deflect repeated media attacks claiming he was unfit to become mayor of Budapest. Similarly, we overcame polarization by campaigning on a message of unity and through a relentless effort to run a positive campaign. As a result, the campaign energized many formerly apathetic citizens of Budapest and we saw voter turnout increase (from 43% in 2014 to 51.4 % in 2019).

Data strategy and digital organizing for the Budapest elections

Adam Fiscor, CEO of Datadat

An important factor in the success of progressives in municipal elections in Budapest was the systematic voter engagement with strategic data acquisition (focused on the Facebook Messenger channel of the mayoral candidate – Gergely Karácsony) and the targeted re-engagement of voters.

The novel tool in the digital toolkit of the campaign was a Facebook Messenger channel for the candidate. The Gergely Karácsony chatbot was launched in June 2019, four months before the election. In the first period, it was used mainly for signing up and energizing potential supporters. The campaign ran Facebook ads on the most prominent campaign issues and used traditional landing pages and the Messenger channel as a landing platform for these ads.

“To counter disinformation, we launched a series of grassroots initiatives and used the latest social media tools.”

The Messenger channel was used for data acquisition by registering activists for a variety of issues and tasks. Supporters could volunteer for phone banking and p2p messaging and express their support for causes like a special tax on oligarchs or the “Healthcare Instead of Stadiums” initiative.

As the campaign progressed, the emphasis on the Messenger channel grew because the average data acquisition cost on Messenger was 56% lower compared to traditional landing pages. For the same amount of money, the campaign could reach twice as many supporters. Leading up to the election, the campaign was able to gather more than 50,000 voters in the Messenger channel of the candidate. Given the nature of Messenger, the campaign could instantly reach them with engaging messages and content.

In the second stage of the primary, the campaign segmented the audience and engaged the voters in the database in a targeted way. If the candidate had a new video about the healthcare issue, it was sent to those voters who signed the “Healthcare Instead of Stadiums” petition and so on. The campaign used traditional methods like email, phone, and text message in parallel with the novel Messenger channel. 58 broadcasts (Messenger conversations) were sent during the last 50 days of the campaign, totalling more than 1,350,000 messages. The best broadcasts had an open rate of 90%, with an average open rate above 75%. In many cases, subscribers were asked to share a Facebook post or video: these broadcasts resulted in a tenfold increase in the number of shares compared to traditionally advertised content.

Messenger outperformed every other tool for connecting with voters. With GOTV messages, in the days leading up to the election day, the campaign was able to reach 50,000 supporters and mobilize their supporters’ friends and family on Messenger.

On election day, Karácsony received 350,000 votes and the campaign was confident that the vast majority of their 50,000 subscribers were among them.

As the race between Karácsony and Tarlós became tighter, the campaign also focused on winning over undecided voters by illustrating that Karácsony was the only viable alternative to the incumbent. While two further opposition candidates who had not run in the primaries— Róbert Puzsér and Krisztián Berki – had entered the Mayoral race, they were unable to attract a significant number of voters. Defection to third party candidates had been a critical factor in previous election defeats. On election day, Karácsony won 50.8% of the vote, while Tarlós received only 44.1%. The third-party candidates received just 4,5%.

Thanks to this victory, Budapest now has the opportunity to become the springboard for nationwide change. Our challenge now is to work together with all progressive parties to deliver results on climate change and social equality for all in the city. Establishing good governance in Budapest, we hope, will provide a blueprint for overcoming the illiberalism of the current national government. We can also illustrate that cooperation rather than conflict with our European neighbours is the best way to solve many of our challenges. Budapest can now partner with other "Visegrad" capital cities (Warsaw, Prague, Bratislava) to solve problems that cannot be met by nationalism, protectionism or illiberalism. This, we hope, will allow us to illustrate that there can also be a national alternative too.

“We focused our campaign on tackling corruption and delivering a Budapest that belongs to everyone.”

ENDNOTES

1. This is why, for example, the recent Berggreun Institute report on the Renewal of Democracy for the Digital Age (March 2020) recommended a legal “Duty of Care” be applied to social media platforms to help reform the online public square. <https://www.berggreun.org/activity/renewing-democracy-in-the-digital-age/>
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11. Incidentally, the proximity of Little’s resignation to the date of the election meant that the Labour caucus was able to elect Ardern to the leadership without the input of the Party membership and unions
12. theVoice!, *aHang*, <https://ahang.hu/en/about-us/>
13. Karácsony Gergely, “A változás dala”, *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=464113161098607>

ABOUT GLOBAL PROGRESS



Global Progress is an international network of progressive foundations, think tanks and leaders committed to the exchange of ideas, research, and best practices that help promote an economic vision for shared prosperity and an inclusive approach to politics. Over the last decade, Global Progress has convened workshops and seminars in over twenty countries across four continents — from Santiago to Sydney, Montreal and New York to Madrid and Berlin — and hosted an annual summit that brings together progressive leaders from across the globe.

