

Practicing Democracy: A Conversation with Hahrie Han

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Bardeesy: [00:00:12] Welcome everybody. As people start to join this video town hall, brought to you by DemocracyXChange with Professor Hahrie Han of Johns Hopkins University, in conversation with Dr. Sanjay Ruparelia, Democracy Chair at Ryerson. Let me know when you're ready for us to start.

Bardeesy: [00:00:47] Welcome everybody to our first Discussion & Design session for DemocracyXChange, Canada's democracy conference. My name is Karem Bardeesy, I'm one of the co-chairs of DemocracyXChange, the Executive Director of the Leadership Lab at Ryerson University, and one of the founding partners of DemocracyXChange along with the open democracy project.

We hope that you and your loved ones are staying healthy in this time of distancing and solidarity. Before we begin, I would like to give the land acknowledgement to the land that I'm on and the land Ryerson is on. We do this as a symbolic and restorative act, one of many acts we hope to follow in part of a wider, more transformative reconciliation project here at Ryerson University. We are mindful that next week we celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day in Canada. Ryerson, as well as with the territory I'm on, is on the territory of the Anishinaabe, and Haudenosaunee and Wendat, it's covered by the "Dish with One Spoon" treaty and the Williams Treaties.

We're committed to honoring our obligations to these nations treaties and to justice for Indigenous peoples more generally. In this project, we hope to do that by bringing in more Indigenous voices, to help co-create our program and create space at DemocracyXChange 2020 to discuss reconciliation and colonialism in Canada and beyond.

I'll note that this video town hall is being recorded and will be shared along with a summary of the events. Today's the first time that DemocracyXChange has gathered together on an online platform, but definitely not the last. As I mentioned, DemocracyXChange is the annual summit for the Canada and emerging democracy sector to connect, learn, and share. In addition to the Ryerson Leadership Lab and the Open Democracy Project, the key partners in this project are co-founding partners The Morris J Wosk Centre for Dialogue, Simon Fraser University, Ryerson Democratic Engagement Exchange, the Jarislowsky Chair at Ryerson, Toronto Public Library and the Samara Center for Democracy. We bring leading thinkers and practitioners together to discuss the most pressing challenges and opportunities

for democratic engagement and how we can come together to build change in our community, in our institutions, in our world.

We recently announced that we'll be convening in an online format on October 13th to 15th for a week-long democracy festival. I cannot think of two better people to help set the stage for the kind of work we're going to have to do and the kind of work that has changed or has had some people double down on the work they were already doing since the pandemic started.

Since we've been living in the pandemic, we've seen the power of collective action in our institutions and in community with the new waves of organizing and solidarity. We have seen this with the Black Lives Matter movement, with Indigenous peoples in Canada, in the new ways of mobilizing internationally and how institutions are responding more quickly than many people could have often could have ever imagined whether it was to provide wage subsidies and benefits for those in need or to step into the space to provide needed equipment to help respond to the pandemic. At the same time, we've also seen institutions not being as flexible as they need to be and often not providing leadership that we need.

We're hoping to use some of the space today to discuss these issues and to discuss them with an expert practitioner, someone who's looked at movements across the United States to understand what makes them tick and what lessons we can learn from movements from a variety of political perspectives.

The design part of today's discussion will focus on how we can reimagine the DemocracyXChange summit itself. So after our conversation, after Hahrie's remarks and the conversation with Sanjay, we'll be going to breakout rooms to help the DemocracyXChange planning group better understand how we can proceed with the design of the summit.

Now to open it off, I'm really happy to introduce our moderator Sanjay Ruparelia. He's inaugural chair, the Jarislowsky Democracy Chair at Ryerson University. He looks at the politics of democracy, inequality, and development focusing on India, China, and the global South. He has started the Frontlines of Democracy, a public lecture series at Ryerson and joined Participedia, a global crowdsourcing platform to share our knowledge of democratic innovations and civic participation and institutional reform with that.

Welcome to all of you and Sanjay, please take it away.

Ruparelia: [00:05:15] Thanks. Well, it's great pleasure to introduce our guest today, Professor Hahrie Han who is the Inaugural Director of the SNF Agora Institute at John Hopkins University, where she's also a professor of Political Science. She is a very prolific scholar, the author of several books on the topic we're discussing today,

and our areas of expertise are really civic participation, action, social movements, and particularly, this concern about how do you revitalize democracies through greater civic engagement?

I'll just mention a few of her books. She's the author of three in recent years. *How Organizations Develop Activists: Civic Associations and Leadership in the 21st Century*; *Groundbreakers: How Obama's 2.2 Million Volunteers Transformed Campaigning in America*; and, *Moved to Action: Motivation, Participation, and Inequality in American Politics*.

She's also published in some of the most prestigious journals in the American Academy, including the American Political Science Review, the American Sociological Review, the American Journal of Sociology and also premier media outlets, such as the New York times and the Washington Post. Her latest book, which will be out fall 2020, has a really intriguing title: *Prisms of the People: Power and Organizing in the 21st Century America*.

We're really delighted to have you here. We're just going to start with offering an overview of some of the work she has done and how she got into this sort of field. Then, we'll have a conversation and open it up to the audience.

Thanks very much for joining us.

Han: [00:06:50] Thank you. Thank you, Sanjay for that very nice introduction and thank you Kareem and the whole team for inviting me to be here with you all today. I'm only sorry that it's not in person that I'm on zoom, but it's wonderful to see everyone I thought that I would start just by offering a little bit of an overview about how I got into this work and then some of the broad questions that I've tried to focus on. I'm really happy to take the conversation in whatever directions people want to go.

By way of introduction, so I grew up in Texas and the southern part of the United States as a daughter of Korean immigrants. My parents had immigrated from Korea in the early 1970s and I was born in the United States. You know, I think that my parents come from very well established families in Korea but when they immigrated to the U.S., Korea was still a developing economy at the time so their money didn't go very far. A lot of what I experienced growing up was the experience of watching my parents try to figure out, how to make it economically and financially in the United States, but then learning what it meant to be American. What did it mean to raise kids in America?

They used to take us during summers into the car and they would drive us around the United States to national parks. They would take us to Mount Rushmore because they felt like that's what Americans did - you know? There are these

pictures of me wearing a Mother Goose sweater in front of Mount Rushmore, because it felt like that was what we were supposed to do. As kids, politics was not something that we talked about at the dinner table at all because my dad is still not a citizen and My mom didn't get naturalized until I was older.

Getting involved in their political community was not something that was part of my parents' experience. Instead, the kinds of things that we would talk about would be things like, how do you butter your bread? For people that grew up in cultures that eat bread it seems like a very natural question, but for people who don't it was like this kind of puzzle. When do you rip it and when do you slice it? When do you butter the top of the bread and when do you butter to the side? What do you do with all the crumbs that fall everywhere? There are all these questions that we would talk about and have these really intentional conversations to try to understand what that meant.

I give you this background only by way of saying that, even though I grew up in a family where politics was not a big part of my experience or the conversations that we had, I think what was a big part was this idea that transformation is fundamental to the human experience. The experience of being the child of immigrants, no one ever had to tell me it but I sort of felt like part of what we do as humans is try to remake ourselves so that we can remake the family and therefore we make the world around us. That was a lot of what I saw my parents trying to do when I was growing up. When I went to college as an undergrad, I got involved in student activism more by happenstance and accident than anything.

It was through student activism that I landed in a class on community organizing, not because I knew what it was but because someone told me that I could get class academic credit for doing the work that I was going to be doing anyways. I thought, well, that sounds great. I took this class on organizing and it just opened up this world of imagination for me that I had never really understood. I think for the first time it felt very resonant with a lot of the things that I experienced as a kid, as a sort of Asian immigrant in Houston, Texas growing up. It helps speak to a lot of things that I felt were true but never knew that there are people out there who had an analysis around it. When you're a kid, whatever you've experienced is just what you think the world is and you just accept it. All of a sudden I realized, wow, there's people out there who have an analysis on it, and are working on it, and are trying to change it in a different way. That's really how I got interested in politics.

After college, I went and I worked in the kind of practical mainstream U.S. politics for a few years and then eventually decided I want to go back to grad school. I think I went to grad school as I really just wanted a break. I'd been working on some political campaigns and I kind of wanted a break from the daily hurly burly of being involved in politics and to have the opportunity to sort of step back to reflect a little bit. I always thought that I would go back into politics after grad school but once I

went to grad school it turned out that I really loved the research and the teaching more than I thought I would. I ended up staying in academia and one thing led to another and here I am 15 years later still doing the same thing.

I started to give you that background by way of saying that I think that a lot of those experiences that I had really informed the way that I approached the work that I want to do. The research lab that I run, I call it the “P-Three Lab” and the reason why we call it the P-Three Lab is because it's dedicated to trying to understand how you make the participation of ordinary people possible, probable and powerful.

People have to be able to participate, they have to want to participate, and then it has to matter. I think increasingly over the past decade or so, our work has really increasingly fallen into the last two buckets which is how do organizations, movements, or networks pull people off the sidelines into public life? Especially the people that are historically marginalized who are the hardest to reach. How do they engage them in the sustained ways that we know are really necessary to remake a democracy and a society that we want? That's the kind of probable bucket, but then the second bucket really is this question of, how do we make it matter?

I think that one of the things that we're seeing increasingly all over the world is that people can pour into the streets. People can take all sorts of actions and then the government doesn't necessarily respond. This question of how you create the vehicles and the scaffolding through which the participation of ordinary people gets translated into the power and influence over the things they care about has occupied more and more of our work in recent years.

All the work that we do, we do it in partnership with movements on the ground. Most of the movement organizations that we work with are in the U.S., although not exclusively, and are focused on questions having to do with racial justice, economic justice, trying to understand how we essentially create the vehicles and the scaffolding that we need to remake a pluralistic multiracial democracy. Which, in a way, I think is the promise of what the United States and so many other countries around the world need to confront in the 21st century.

This history, does it give us a lot of examples for how that can actually work? I come into this conversation keenly aware that even though we had scheduled this, I can't remember exactly when we scheduled it, but certainly it was before George Floyd and all the kinds of protests that've been unfurling over the past couple of weeks. We didn't know exactly what we'd be facing when we came into this conversation but you were coming into this conversation about democracy in a moment when it feels like you have this, and not only the United States but all over the world, outpouring of people's unrest and anger.

In some ways that withdrawal of public consent around the systems that we've created raises this new question I think of not only vital questions around policing and everything that's at the center of the debate right now but also I think this bigger question for all of us which is, how do we reimagine the democracy that we want? What are the kinds of vehicles of civil society and of collective action that we need to help realize that new vision?

I'll just say a couple of thoughts that I have on that front and then maybe I'll shut up for a few minutes and see what questions you guys have [laughs]. The work that we've done, I started to use this analogy of prisms as a way of thinking about the sort of vehicles that we want to create for people. The reason why we think about it in terms of prisms is that if you think about it, usually you have some sort of box and white light in turns into white light out. Right? But what a prism does is it takes white light in and then instead of projecting white light out, that prism converts the white light into the rainbow or a vector of light that carries out.

Those are the kinds of organizations or movements that we need, the ones that can take people and their actions in and then convert them into vectors of power and light that carry as far out as they can go. The vital question I think for all of us to be asking then is, what is the design at the heart of that prism that makes that conversion possible or that transformation? You know, making white light into a vector of power.

As I look around in the U.S. and at what's happening in cities across the United States in response to George Floyd, these movements that have been on the ground for years now are able to not only harness those relationships to generate all this outpouring of action into the streets, but also to be simultaneously moving a political process that is forcing elected leaders and institutions of government to rethink what relationship they want to have with the public. What does it mean in the U.S. context to have a police force that actually is accountable to the community?

What does it mean to reimagine the ability of people to hold leaders accountable to a multiracial majority or something like that? I think that as we watch these processes unfold, we're in this moment right now where we're not just tweaking the opera, we're not just tweaking democracy at the edges, we're fundamentally remaking the way that our politics works. We are trying to rethink what it means for people, regular people in their everyday lives, to have the opportunity to do public life, to not just be consumers of democracy but actually to be agents of it. How do they do that in a way that's grounded in their own experience, that's connected to each other and where they have ownership over the process of change?

In order to make that a reality, which I think is fundamentally what democracy is ultimately about, we have to remake what democracy is. We have to take that experience that so many people are having right now where they cross that bridge

from just being a consumer to becoming an agent of democracy, to seeing their voice being enacted in the public sphere, and then put them at the center of a new politics that we want to create. We have to make that experience that some people are having the experience that everybody has. That's the kind of re-imagining that we need to do. I think a lot of the lens that I bring into this is trying to think about what are the kinds of spaces that we need to create to enable more and more people to have that kind of experience?

Maybe I'll pause there, I think I said lots of words for a long time, then see what questions or discussions that you'll want to have.

Ruparelia: [00:18:52] Well, thank you so much. You have raised a ton of really important questions. Let me start by asking you two broad questions. One is really about trying to understand what's happening in the United States in terms of political participation and civic action. The other is about how your scholarship and how your work tries to understand those changes as there is something quite distinctive about the way you approach these questions.

One way you could frame what's happening in the U.S., I think many of our listeners may be familiar with this, is a book that made a lot of waves in the Academy in 2000 by Robert Putnam, a political scientist, called *Bowling Alone* where he sort of tracked the decline of civic participation and civic engagement in American public life in the 1960s. Hence, the title of the book *Bowling Alone*. We no longer join bowling leagues to go bowling but we are bowling by ourselves. We weren't joining PTA clubs, we weren't joining neighbors associations, we were voting less. It was sort of a general malaise, a civic malaise, in American public life.

If you take that as a starting point, maybe it's not the right one but just for the sake of an argument, in 2000 there is a real sense of disaffection and this cynicism in American public life and in many established Western democracies. If you take from that period to today, these two decades, you do see these sort of movements that are crystallizing at various points.

The invasion of Iraq in 2003/4 is a certain antiwar movement that begins to mobilize, of course, something you've written about is Barack Obama and his incredible campaign which really began to mobilize a whole new generation of people into politics, but also inspired a backlash and the Tea Party movement. Then you have the election of Donald Trump and we galvanized as a women's movement and many other movements and of course Black Lives Matter.

One thing is to try to understand that trajectory and how does your work and what you studied situated within that sort of trajectory of developments and events? The second is connected to that, which is something very distinctive about your work, is

the focus on the organizations. This high level, one of your books really speaks to this, in how organizations develop activists.

In the literature on social movements and civic action, typically there are these debates on what really matters? What really draws people into movements and what makes your movement successful? As we know, some people say it's about changes in politics, new opportunities, new openings that are created. You could say negatively also crises that push people from being passive spectators to active citizens. A second would be the organizational resources, and what resources an organization has to deploy. The third would be cultural frames. How is it that movement leaders and movement activists themselves try to frame their arguments? What narratives do they use to resonate with a broad public?

A lot of your work really focuses on the characteristics of the organization and how those organizational characteristics do two different things it seems. One is to compel a certain kind of leadership which has committed and passionate engagement, and the second is to both invite and recruit citizens into those organizations and movements but then also keep them there and help them stay.

I was wondering about any sort of general reactions to that and to thinking about how we think about this moment in American politics today? In the context of the last two decades and not least we haven't mentioned it yet, the pandemic and the severe institutional political crisis that has been revealed at the heart of the American democratic Republic and in many other countries around the world? So I was wondering if you could say a little bit more about that.

Hahrie Han: [00:22:55] Okay, so big questions.

Let me offer a few thoughts that came to mind as you were talking. So certainly like the work of Robert Putnam and the notion of social capital and the declining connectedness of people is definitely foundational to the kind of work that I do.

Sometimes I'm in conversations with people and the reaction will be like, oh, you're just saying that we need more social capital, we need more people pulling together? And I think my answer to that is that is yes.

Yes, we need people to be more connected together. That social fabric of our communities does absolutely matter. But I think that to stop there is also fundamentally one of the problems that we have faced in our democracy. To mistake social capital for power is to misunderstand democracy as being about connectedness and not about people being actual agents of change - I think that is one of the struggles that we're seeing in a lot of the protest movements that are

unfolding not only in the United States in a response to George Floyd, but in Hong Kong.

These big protest movements that we've seen around the world are people trying to sort of reclaim their ability to have a voice and to hold the government accountable to their interests. The pandemic really brought that to a head because any democracy or government that forces people to make the choice between hunger and health is not meeting its most basic responsibilities as the government, right?

The government's most basic responsibility is to solve problems in people's lives and if people have to choose between hunger and health, I think it raises a lot of questions about the legitimacy and accountability of government. To me, I think that the social capital piece is definitely fundamental to what we need to be thinking about. The question that we're grappling with in this moment, that we see people grappling with, is this question of even if I create these civically or socially connected communities, how do I draw power from that community? That question of how you draw power is a really tough question in this current moment that we're thinking about.

To tie that to the trajectory that you described of Bush to Obama and the backlash to the Tea Party, and then now to Trump, is certainly a real one. We're in this moment right now in the 21st century of tremendous change, economic change, technological change, globalization, climate change, and all of these different forces are coming together. It's creating a moment of real uncertainty where I think in America, at least, and certainly in a lot of other countries around the world, what we're seeing is this fundamental grappling with who do we want to be as a society?

That swinging back and forth that you described in the U.S. is part of that grappling with this question of who we want to be which we also saw at the turn of the 20th century in the U.S. at the end of the industrial revolution. Not the end, sorry, but we had this kind of transition to the industrial revolution and a changing information environment with the spread of mass media through newspapers and other things like that. Also the kind of urban migration and increasing diversification of different communities. There were these questions raised about who we want to be in the United States. Now, that conversation ended in a world war, which we hope that we do not get to now, but there's this similar moment of uncertainty and grappling.

I think all these political, economic and social forces are coming together but the point that you raised at the end, you know, I think it is true. Often when I talk about my work, especially to other political scientists, one thing that's different about the approach that we take to our work compared to other scholars might be that we do have a really strong organizational focus to it.

I'm using the term organization loosely here, I should say that I don't necessarily mean a bureaucratic nonprofit organization that could also be a movement. It could be a network but vehicles or scaffolding through which collective action is channeled is what we're interested in.

The reasons for that are twofold that I'll give you. The first is that I think a lot of studies of social movements and collective action, as you point out, will look at things like what are the kinds of political opportunity structures that make social change more likely and the narrative frames that movements can use or what are the resources they can mobilize to make change happen?

As we were looking around and thinking about where the movement in the organizations that are most powerful in this 21st century moment, the thing that was most common across all the movements that we were looking at is that they were all operating in environments of tremendous uncertainty.

The only thing that's certain is uncertainty. Right? The only thing that's certain is that if you're trying to make change, at some point someone's going to try to check your power. It could be an establishment political party, it could be an elected official, it could be the opposition. It could be any number of different players, but someone's going to push back on your attempts to make change at a certain point. The question really is that when movements and organizations get that pushback, which is inevitable in my mind, how do they respond? And what are the tools that they have at their disposal to be able to respond?

The reason that I'm framing it that way is that if we understand that the goal of these movements is to build political power, then power has to be understood as a dynamic exchange between movements and their targets. It is this ongoing back and forth about what they want.

To that end, that's why these kinds of vehicles of collective action, these organizations and movements, become so important because those are the vehicles through which movements develop and protect the resources that they need to respond in those moments of uncertainty.

If you're operating in a more certain political environment, then yes maybe there is a chance where you can get a 100, 10,000 signatures on a petition, go deliver it to the elected official and they're like, "great - we'll do what you want," but that's just not how it works most of the time these days.

So the question is you get those 10,000 signatures, you go to the elected official, and they say, "no thank you," - then what do you do? If you don't have this infrastructure of collective action to fall back on then I think the resources that the

organizations have are really, really limited. That's part of the reason why we have that view of organizations.

The second is, there's an economist from the mid 20th century who I cite all the time and it's a guy named Albert Hirschman who wrote this book called Exit Voice and Loyalty. I love it because I think it's really relevant to this moment and his argument, which Cindy I know that you know, but I'll just rehearse it here quickly.

It is that if we think about all the organizations that structure our economic and political and social lives, there's certain organizations that operate with a logic of exit. Which is the idea of if I decide I don't like your product, then I'm going to exit. So if I don't like the Ketchup that you make, I'm going to buy someone else's Ketchup. If I don't like your cereal, if I don't like Cheqs, I'm going to go buy Cheerios. Right. It's essentially the logic of markets. The idea that if I don't like what you're offering me, I'm just going to vote with my feet. I'm going to go somewhere else. His argument is that's how markets work and how market organizations work, but political organizations should really operate not with the logic of exit, but they should operate with the logic of voice.

The logic of voice is this idea that if I don't like your product which could be a policy or a candidate or a statement of something, then instead of exiting and saying, "forget you, I'm going to go buy my cereal somebody somewhere else", I stay and I exercise voice. I stay and fight for what I think is right.

Within the organization and the extent to which people are willing to do that work of exercising voice is a function of what Hirschman calls loyalty, hence the title of the book, Exit, Voice, and Loyalty. I would use the term commitment. What do you know, do people have a commitment that they need to stay and grapple with the questions of what it means to exercise voice?

I think that, to me, those questions of commitment and voice are fundamental to the moment that we're in because in any kind of pluralistic multiracial democracy, there is this question of how do we come together as people who have very different lived experiences, some of whom those experiences are very structured by institutions of power in our society, to create a different kind of solidarity? One where we have the commitment to stick with each other even in moments of uncertainty of dynamic change to figure out how we each exercise our voice to create a new key source of power from below? To me, that's the piece that I feel like that we've lost so much that we need to kind of remake in a way.

Ruparelia: [00:32:33] That actually was, as you were speaking, a question I wanted to ask you if you could say more for us. In using that rubric of voice and loyalties, how do you inspire an organization? Both in the work that you've done and then in the

movements and organizations you've studied, what makes them successful and inspiring?

Well, I suppose there's two questions. What is it that they're doing as an organization in terms of how the organizations are designed or structured or how they function that both inspires people to participate and to express their voice and then, what generates and inspires that loyalty or commitment that you're talking about? You've been alluding to that. You frame it in lots of different ways that people can be connected but what makes them feel empowered and in turn, what is it that organizations do that empower those citizens? So you can tell us a little bit more and then we're going to open it up.

I'm sure there are lots of questions from people who are joining here. Tell us a little bit more about getting inside those organizations, what is it that they're doing? The ones that are very successful as that's what we're trying to also learn here. What is it that they're doing that makes them successful? You can think of lots of different types of movements that do this. As you were speaking I thought about Occupy Wall Street. Now that was a very important moment, but a lot of commentators might say it didn't have an organizational frame to really empower it.

So there was expression, there was voice, there was probably a lot of commitment, but did it empower the movement to make the demands that were there, did it even set coherent, concrete demands and so on? The big debate about that is if you compare it to something like the Tea Party Movement or now the Black Lives Matter.

These are quite different movements and part of what makes them very distinctive are their organizational forms. I'm assuming from what you were saying that it's not the only thing that matters, but it's a very important factor in determining why they were more or less successful in achieving whatever goals they had.

Han: [00:34:41] Let me answer that a couple of ways.

To start with the more tactical answer to start with the practical and what we found in our research, which I think is consistent with what a lot of other people who study this have found, is that when you think about bringing people off the sidelines and engaging them in public life, basically if I were to sum up a lot of things, there's lots of ways that you can get people in the door.

If you were to ask me, "if I'm just trying to get people to get off their butts to take that first action, what's the best way to do that?", I don't know that I've seen any one study that says email is better than an in person event or a phone call is more effective than this or that message was, is that kind of me? Basically, I think that if

you're a movement and you're trying to get lots of people involved, what you want to do is have lots of opportunities for different kinds of people because then they're going to access you in lots of different ways.

You have to have lots of different doors and those doors have to be easy for people to push. And essentially, I don't know that any one kind of door is any more effective than others. I mean, certainly in a moment like we're seeing right now where George Floyd is a match that lit this fire where you want to respond to that particular political moment, but you can't necessarily predict that ahead of time. So I think there's lots of ways to get people in the door.

The tougher question is how do you get people to stay? To me, answering that question of how you get people to stay, I don't know that I've seen any data that replaces the fundamental importance of the social connections that people have with each other. I want to be very careful with this, when I'm talking about the relationships that people construct with each other within the movement or organization or whatever it is that your con can that you're talking about.

And I actually don't know that I necessarily have strong feelings or have seen data that says that they have to be face to face versus digital or something like that. I think it is true that people tend to construct relationships more face to face than they do digitally but that's not to say that we don't have evidence that there are really deep socially connected communities that are constructed online.

To me, it's fundamental. It's not so much the tactic or the way in which the relationship is constructed but the fact that when I don't want to show up to that meeting on Thursday evening because I'm tired and I've had a long day, my kids are cranky, that I go not because I really committed to the issue but I show up because I don't want my friend to get mad at me.

That's what we find again and again is that with people, when the going gets tough, the thing that keeps them connected is their commitment or their ties to other people. The movements that I see as most effective are ones where if we were to draw a picture of the social network, it's not just that I come from the outside the organization and I come into the organization and I bring my 10 friends with me, which is what, once upon a time, people mistook for relational organizing. It's that the set of relationships and networks in the organization are constantly changing and evolving and growing. What it means is that as I enter into this community, I may not only bring 10 people with me but I'm going to be meeting new people, those new people are then connecting me to new people.

It's this constant building of strong and weak ties throughout the organization that allows it to have the sort of momentum that you need. That's one thing on the

fundamental importance of social connectedness. The second question that you ask, if you look across at all these movements from Black Lives Matter to Occupy Wall Street to the Tea Party, they're all structured in really different ways and they've used a variety of different tactics.

This is the more academic and less practical kind of version of the answer. To me, the answer is that in any given political situation, you're operating in a terrain of uncertainty. Leaders have to act identically in response to whatever the sort of political terrain is within which they're operating. The key question for a movement to ask is, I don't know what the terrain is that you're going to be operating in six months from now. Who knows what will be like in six months from now? We're in such a moment of uncertainty right now but what I know is, am I doing the work right now that cultivates the kind of capacities the leaders need to be able to respond strategically? That's a function, both of the strategic capacity of the leadership but then also of the strength of the constituency that they've been able to build.

When that leader is getting pushed back six months from now, will the constituency be poised and mobilized enough to be able to respond at the turn of a hat? Those are the kinds of questions. The questions about leadership capacity I think have to do a lot with, you know, we're not just waiting around for the next gifted Martin Luther King to come around. Although that would be great, we're asking instead how we create the conditions that make it more likely that the kinds of leaders we need will emerge? Those are the kinds of questions that we can be asking. The connectedness questions have to do with, how do we set up the organization in a way that it's actually accountable to a constituency on the ground?

And I think that if you look at the sort of differences between a lot of the kinds of movements that we've seen in the past 10 or 15 years, those lines of accountability are very different across different movements. That says a lot about whether or not you have leaders that are negotiating on behalf of people or on behalf of themselves, and how that plays out in the political.

Ruparelia: [00:40:37] Okay. I'm going to open it up now to a lot of questions we've gotten. Some of them are quite big systemic questions, the type we have been talking about, and some of them are specific.

Let me start. So this one's on Black Lives Matter and the question is, what do you imagine are the tools and actions needed to sustain the momentum around Black Lives Matter for the long term beyond this current moment? I'm going to just throw in another one because I'm just watching the clock, we'll have time but just in case we run out and this is a more general one. It says our governing institutions are always having to catch up with social change, so that's the premise, how can or should our elected representatives lead the way and reforming democracy? You did

talk about how this, how do we reimagine our democracy or democratic politics?

So the first question is on Black Lives Matter, how do you sustain the momentum about this particular movement which is so vital and important? In the United States, of course, but as Karem mentioned in the beginning, in Canada and around the world. The second is about the relationship between our governing institutions and civil society. And then it's to what extent are they always trying to catch up or not?

Han: [00:42:01] I think the answer to this, in my mind, is that the answers to those questions are linked. In the sense that I've always thought that, and I wish someone would write a piece about this, what does movement leadership look like?

I think that a lot of times, I'll do these kinds of talks and I'll get those kinds of questions and the answer is basically, the best organizers that I know who are leading movements are constantly able to balance a whole bunch of tensions. It's a tension between doing outside politics and inside politics. How do you manage a protest and work in the streets in addition to moving a political process from inside the political system? How do you manage in a way that is both top down and also bottom up?

You have to be responsive to the needs of your constituency but you also, and I think Occupy Wall Street maybe didn't have this, work bottom up in a way so the ships were not all sailing in the same direction, you know? If I'm a movement leader, I have to be bottom up. I also have to have some sort of focus to be able to channel the strategic energy of a movement.

How do you be both innovative and handle all these tensions that you have, I think a movement leader has to balance. The best leaders I know are ones that are really comfortable stepping into that tension and embracing it. That kind of tension is being a part of, of what they need to do, as opposed to being like, I'm going to take an, all this or all that, or only this or only this kind of, um, kind of approach.

To that end, I think we have this enormous opportunity right now with Black Lives Matter. After Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson, Missouri a few years ago, not that long ago, Black Lives Matter emerged and everyone said that the things that they're asking for are unthinkable

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And now it's 2020, it's a few years after that, and the things that people previously said were unthinkable are now at the center of the political debate. There's this opening right now that we've just never seen before. It's made possible because the public has finally said enough, these videos of these unthinkable tragedies, we will not tolerate them anymore.

How do we remake the systems? What needs to happen to sustain the energy? The rolling protests that we see in cities across the U.S. are not going to last for the period of time that it takes to make true institutional change. Minnesota is a place where I happened to have done work for a long time and have been in conversation with and they've been thinking a lot about what would it take for us to really remake the police system in Minneapolis, for example. It's at least a three year process. We're at the very beginning of what's going to be a really long process.

That's where you're going to really need these leaders that can manage both, both the kind of energy and the work of building constituencies even as they're moving through a political process, in negotiation with the political system. Then the last thing I'll just say there is that I think constituency is really important for movement leaders and thinking about moving that political process.

Our politics has gotten to a point where sometimes we mistake access to power for power itself. The movements that have been the most effective have been able to earn a seat at the table, not because a donor or a funder or political party gave them that seat at the table but because they earned it through their constituency. I think that's a really important thing for Black Lives Matter to hold onto right now. They earn that seat at the table because of the constituency that they built - that's their source of power. The reason why that's important is because when they're at that negotiating table for the next three years, there's going to be many, many, many moments when people are going to try to force them into a compromise on this, a compromise on that.

The question of when they do it and when they don't, that has to be rooted in constituency as opposed to the need to satisfy their donor or someone who like got them at the table. It's the both hand of staying rooted in the constituents because that's your source of power, but then also, being part of that political process moving forward.

Ruparelia: [00:46:24] Right, it's a very fine balance but as you're saying with these examples you are giving us, you really have to be grounded in these movements and that gives you the legitimacy and credibility to sit at a table with decision makers who are trying to. It's also remarkable, as you say, how things that were seemed inconceivable are suddenly on the table.

I don't know what it means because it means different things to different people. But like people calling for defunding the police, Bernie Sanders openly saying that he's a socialist, I mean, that was unthinkable a decade ago. When they tried to target Barack Obama as being a socialist, he was very quick to say he wasn't. The point was that it was also just seen politically as a liability. This question that you are

talking about probably links with how you ended, your last set of thoughts. It is this question, do you believe in systems reform?

You've already started talking about this but do you believe there need to abolish and start a new realized democracy? Your comments seem to strike as somebody who again has a very difficult balance about both being passionate about a cause, but being pragmatic. That is a hard one to balance. How do you think about change? Is it something that requires a big structural overhaul or can you have sort of more incremental, gradual change that has more simple incremental and gradual effects?

Han: [00:48:08] You know, so I'm 45 and so maybe there's a problem, perhaps a generational component, to the way that I'd answer this question. I think that I probably come at this with a balance of passion and pragmatism. I believe in my soul very deeply that democracy, even if it has never functioned in the way that we really aspire to, is a system that gives people the opportunity to exercise voice and power over the things that matter most in their lives. I think in that sense we want to invest in making it work in the way that it should. As a part of being part of a small democratic process, there's this constant part of what democracy does where it normalizes the idea of struggle. Struggle is central to the way that democracy works.

When we try to make it too neat and packaged, that's when we lose some of the dynamism that makes democracy possible. I feel like the question is like, yes, I do feel like we have to reimagine the kind of system that we have.

I know it's like so frustrating to say this, but I think it's like, it's a *both and*. You have to be able to use the tools at your disposal to make the change that you want, but then simultaneously kind of reimagine it. The research that I'm thinking about here is there's a book by a woman named Elisabeth Clemens called the People's Lobby and she's looking at the turn of 20th century American politics.

The question that she asked there, this is the progressive era in U.S. politics. The question that she asked there is, she looks at women, labor and farmers, and she says, how was it that groups of people who didn't even have the right to participate in the political system were able to change the very rules of the game by which the system operated? That's where you saw women who are not yet allowed to vote change the way senators were elected, the way the ballot was sort of constructed, and all these fundamental institutional reforms in US politics. The argument that she makes is, I love it because it's very grounded in analysis of organization, these organizations that are able to do the both and, make themselves legible to existing institutions of power but then in making themselves legible, they push the boundaries of what people understood as appropriate.

An example would be that there are women's groups who structured themselves organizationally, very similar to the business lobbies of the 19th century. That worked because when they walked into a legislator's office, a legislator would be completely flabbergasted. They'd be like, "Oh my God, there's a woman in my office and she's asking for stuff," they're taken aback by that but they at least knew, okay, but I now know how I need to respond because I respond to them the same way that I respond to other lobbyists. Those women structured themselves in a way that was very legible to institutions of power, but then they had a deeply kind of like radical feminist ideology at their root. That helped force the political system to reimagine how I wanted to engage with groups like women who are fundamentally excluded from the system.

That sort of both and has been historically, at least, been necessary for the kind of change that we want to see.

Ruparelia: [00:52:00] That work is fascinating, that organizational resonance. Here's a question that is more challenging, how can you say that the system represents the people's voice when our electoral system is set up to systematically exclude almost half the population? So it doesn't say what country they're talking about, I don't know if it's modern representative democracy generally, whether it's Canada or the U.S., it doesn't say. This question raises a broader question to me, a very specific question that I also was thinking about when I was reading some of your work, is this relationship between civic action and voting for instance. We also know that we're an electrical system in which gerrymandering and other oligarchy tendencies exist cause the role of money.

This is all legal because of certain Supreme Court judgments in some countries like the United States, maybe not others. This question here is about getting more at the electrical system itself. You know, to what extent is it really, truly democratic in terms of who it empowers? What do you think about that?

Han: [00:53:12] To be clear, I may have said something that kind of led to this. So I'm not saying the system as it currently is, at least certainly the U.S. system as it currently exists, fully empowers all people or even represents all people. I think that's fundamentally one of the failings of the system, just to be very clear about that.

I think it's possible. I think that what I do think is that democracy properly functioning is supposed to fully represent, you know, the broad swath of the public. And I think that's what we need to aspire to. But no, I'm not claiming that the existing system does that at all. Now that being said, one of the things that I've been thinking about a lot about lately is this idea of public accountability and what does public accountability mean? And where does voting fit into that?

I think one of the failings of our political system right now in the U.S. at least is that the only systems for accountability that we really have these days are elections and things like the pandemic pointed out how hugely inadequate that is. If we mistake elections for democracy, right?

Democracy is supposed to be so much more than just the elections. The pandemic hits in March, you have all these horrible effects on many people's lives and people have no choice except to wait until November for our next election to come along to try to hope that a new government comes into response.

What really should have happened is that in that moment, in those moments in March and April and now, and May and June and whatnot, that there are all these other venues through which people, the public, can hold public leaders. Whether that be heads of public health agencies, elected leaders, governors, whatever, hold them accountable to meet and solve the problems that they have in their lives. I think the challenge is how do we recreate those notions of accountability within the system?

Sanjay: There's still other questions to be asked, but I think for this section that's a great way to end it because I think that's one of the questions we might want to discuss in the breakout rooms and others that might come up. I'm going to pass it on to Braelyn who is going to introduce the next part of the session for today's event.

Guppy: [00:55:35] Hi everyone. Thank you so much for that fantastic conversation Professor Han and Sanjay. There's still so many questions that still need to be answered along the way, and hopefully we'll have some time to do that in our breakout sessions.

My name is Braelyn Guppy and I'm the Communications Lead for our DemocracyXChange as well as for the Ryerson Leadership Lab. We're going to move into our breakout sections now, which is the design section of this discussion and design session where we're going to talk about the best ways for us to incorporate some of this conversation into our DemocracyXChange platform in October, as well as the best way for us to do the reimagining of that platform in the fall.

Before we move into breakout rooms, I think Karem wanted to jump back in for just a moment and say a few words.

Bardeesy: [00:56:26] Yes, just to note that we are going to be able to provide a video of this as well as the summary. Just as one motivating thing to mention to make some of the

discussion really concrete, something I failed to mention at the outset, I just really wanted to mention one of the treasured members of our community who is someone whom some people in the community may want to do some concrete organizing for. Maria Ressa, who was one of our keynoters last year and has joined us for other conversations, including most recently with Hot Docs, just a couple of weeks ago, is the CEO of Rappler and has just been found guilty of cyber crime in a dodgy court proceeding in the Philippines. She's facing six months to six years in prison.

As one very motivating, immediate aspect to what a political organization might look like, I just want to note that a lot of us in the DemocracyXChange community are thinking of her and in solidarity with her. As Hahrie mentioned, there are a number of other spaces to look at across our communities right now for potential motivation. But I just want to point that one out.

Guppy: [00:57:38] Great. Thank you, Karim. So with that, we're going to head into our breakout rooms. Each one of them will be led by one of the members of the DemocracyXChange community and we'll come back together in about 20, 25 minutes.

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Guppy: [00:59:04] Everybody's just coming back into the session. Some people might've exited out.

Bardeesy: [00:59:11] I wanted to close by saying thank you to Sanjay, Jarislowsky Chair for Democracy at Ryerson Faculty of Arts. Thank you to our co-presenting partners Samara Center for Democracy, Ryerson Faculty of Art's Jarislowsky Chair and Democratic Engagement Exchange, Toronto Public Library and Morris J Wosk Centre for Dialogue at Simon Fraser University. I think we got some really rich input in terms of how we can proceed online.

I'm going to cheat a little bit and take the key takeaway that Hari gave us in the breakout room that I was lucky enough to be in. She just reminded us, and I think this is important as organizers of events, that the key takeaway that I got from her in our breakout room was that these virtual spaces can contribute to exhaustion or overload, Zoom overload and they really helped break down various geography.

I think that should be pointing to us as an ambitious DemocracyXChange in an attempt to take what is Canada's democracy summit and invite in voices from beyond, including in our breakout room we had Nissa join us from Indonesia. I noticed in the chat box that we had some folks in from other places, we'll be sending

you a survey because we want to find out how you found out about this event as we have some mailing list reach and some social reach.

Also want to thank the team at DemocracyXChange that makes us successful, including the stuffies, that help make the Open Democracy project successful. Sabrina Delancey, the adviser of that project, and my co-directors Chris Copperthwaite and Anna Serrano, as well as Braelyn Guppy and Fahmida Kamil who together formed the dream team DemocracyXChange.

Thank you so much, Professor Han for your time and wisdom, I think I speak for many. We want to be selfish and have more of your time in October, hopefully with Marshall Ganz. We noticed you used the story of self very effectively at the outset of your talk and we want to connect you with our student community who will be fully engaged in October, as well as all the democracy activists.

We hope to see you and follow the work that you're doing obviously, and see you and everyone on this call at DemocracyXChange 2020 from October 13th to 15th. With that, I will say thank you so much for a great event.

Han: [01:01:43] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you everybody.