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Conclusion

Sometimes attacks backfire: they end up being counterproductive for the attacker. A backfire commonly involves a public reaction of outrage.

There are two essential conditions for a backfire. First, something occurs that some people think is unjust, unfair, disproportionate, disgusting, disquieting, or upsetting — or any number of other words indicating they are concerned about it. Possibilities include massacres, beatings, dismissals, censorship, torture, and wars. For convenience, the words “unjust” or “unfair” can stand in for a full list of reactions.

To be seen as unjust, an event or situation has to be seen as violating normal expectations. If two people voluntarily fight each other and one is badly hurt, that may well be thought unfortunate but not unfair. But if a person attacks and seriously injures someone who is not fighting and who is trying to avoid a fight, that is cause for outrage. If there is a qualitative difference between the two sides — for example, one is violent and the other peaceful — then outrage is more likely. Similarly, a large quantitative difference can lead to a perception of unfairness. The more the victim is perceived as innocent and incapable of resistance, the greater the outrage. An attack on a child or a person with a disability is seen as more reprehensible than one on an able-bodied adult.

If the difference between the two sides is reduced or muddied, then fewer people will perceive an action as unfair. If, in a peaceful protest, even a few protesters throw stones, then violence by the police will seem less upsetting, even when it is much greater. Therefore, backfire is far more likely when those subject to injustice avoid any suggestion of being perpetrators themselves.

The second essential condition for backfire is communication to receptive audiences. This can be by direct witnessing of the event or via reports, photos, and the like. “Receptive audiences” means those who will be aroused by the information. They could be people already concerned about an issue, such as human rights advocates who are campaigning against torture. They could be third parties, not involved with the issue, such as people watching news about torture. Or they could be people linked with the perpetrators, such as soldiers who are disgusted by actions taken by others in their squad.

Two Essential Conditions for Backfire

1. Perception of something as unjust, unfair, disproportionate, or otherwise in violation of a social norm.
2. Communication to receptive audiences.

Backfires do not occur automatically. Perpetrators can take actions that reduce the likelihood or scale of backfire. These actions can be conveniently classified into five methods¹ that inhibit outrage, disgust, and other negative reactions to an event or situation.

Five Methods to Inhibit Outrage

1. Cover up the action or situation.
2. Devalue the target.
3. Reinterpret what happened.
4. Use official channels that give the appearance of justice.
5. Intimidate or bribe people involved.

1. Strictly speaking, these are five *types* of methods, but for convenience I refer to them as five methods.

From the case studies in previous chapters, these methods should be quite familiar. In the appendix, numerous specific techniques are listed for each of the five methods.

In principle, these methods can be used by anyone, but in practice only powerful groups have significant capacity to inhibit outrage from their actions. A customer who openly assaults an employee has little prospect of inhibiting outrage, whereas senior police who brutalize a suspect can use all five methods. Backfire analysis thus becomes most revealing when analyzing injustices perpetrated by those much more powerful than their victims.

Strictly speaking, only the first four methods actually reduce outrage. Method 5, intimidation and bribery, is about inhibiting the *expression* of outrage. But the distinction is not a big one, especially because people often change their beliefs to accord with their actions. Therefore, intimidation and bribery can actually cause people to feel less outrage as well as prevent its expression.

Those who think outrage is the appropriate response to perceived injustices need to counter the methods of inhibition. There are many ways of doing this; five general ways neatly mirror the methods of inhibition.

Some Ways to Counter Inhibition of Outrage

1. Expose the action or situation.
2. Validate the target.
3. Emphasize the injustice involved.
4. Mobilize public support and avoid or discredit official channels.
5. Resist and expose intimidation and bribery.

Methods of countering inhibition can be conveniently summed up in five Rs: revealing, redeeming, reframing, redirecting, and resisting.² But it is important to remember there are many possible ways to respond to each of the methods of inhibition. The appendix lists various possibilities.

2. Steve Wright had the idea of alliterative labels and we brainstormed them together.

The struggle between inhibiting and amplifying outrage is summarized in Figure 14.1 (next page).

There are many factors affecting the way a message is received. Some of these are particularly important for understanding the dynamics of backfire. Sometimes a lot of groundwork has to be done to convince people that an issue is of concern. The movement against nuclear power spent years alerting people to the dangers of the technology. Before this, nuclear accidents received little attention; afterwards, they caused enormous concern. Another factor is the “information environment,” such as what else is happening at the same time. If corruption in an organization is publicized during a slow news period, it may receive extensive coverage, but if revealed during a war or disaster, it may pass without much notice. A third key factor is whether there are opportunities for taking action. News stories of foreign atrocities often generate concern but most individuals have no idea how they might make a difference. But if there is a well known organization or avenue for protest, people are far more likely to join or take action themselves.

Three Factors, Relevant to Backfire, that Affect Reception of a Message

1. Audience receptivity: understanding of things as unjust.
2. Information environment: visibility of stories and the salience of an issue compared with other issues.
3. Actionability: the existence of social movements and opportunities for action.

These factors are all linked to timing: *when* an action is taken affects the response. If an atrocity is covered up, it may cause outrage when revealed decades later, but not as much as if it had been exposed when it occurred. Official channels often take such a long time that outrage has died down when a finding is declared.

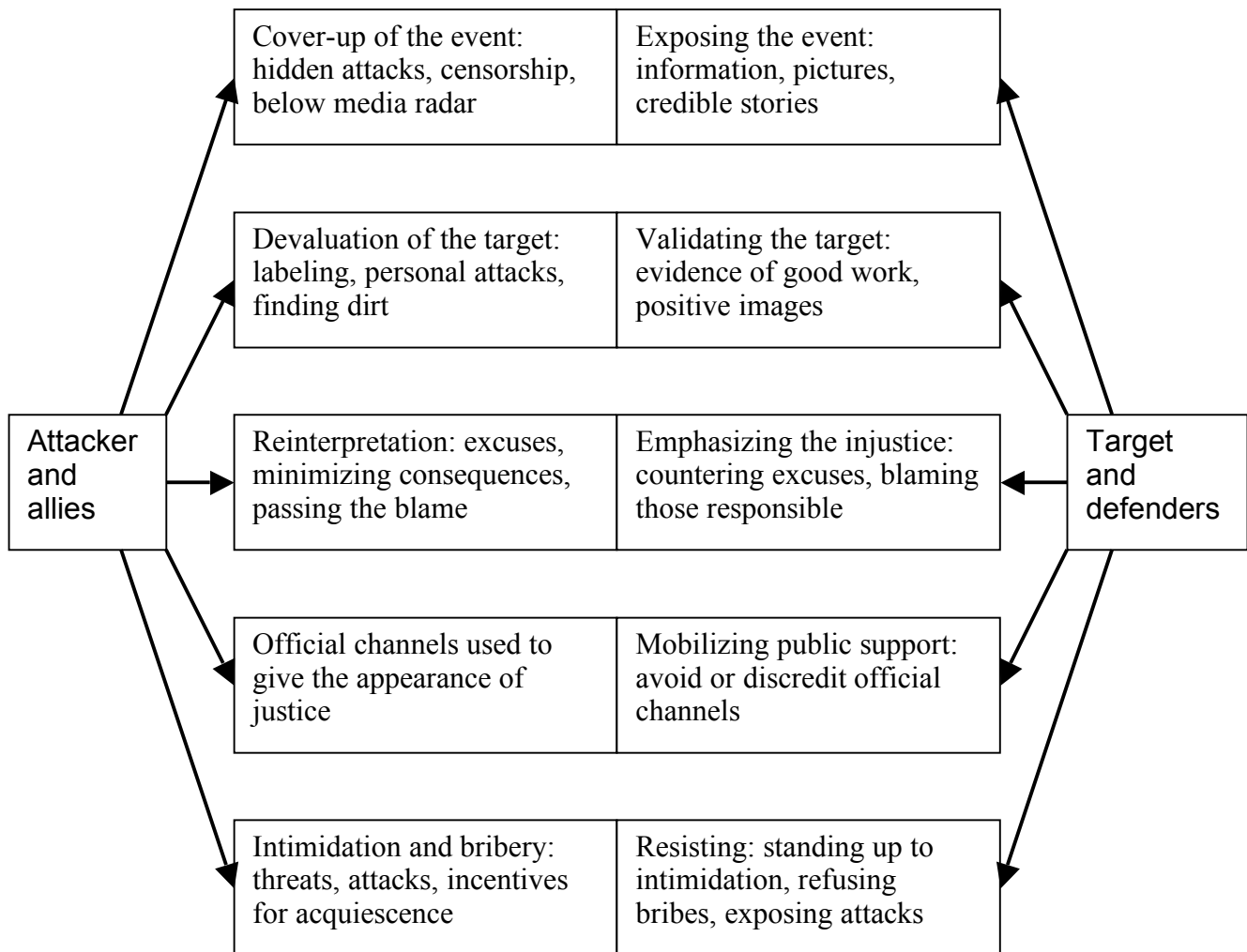


Figure 14.1

These are the bare bones of the backfire model. It is quite easy to formulate a more complex model, with lots of factors, inter-connections, exceptions, and special cases. But caution is warranted, because often a complex model is not as useful as a simple one: the complexities can be confusing and divert attention from the key factors.

Lessons from the Case Studies

There are many things to be learned by applying a model to case studies, including how it can be extended to new domains and what its limits are. Models are always simplifications and therefore cannot be expected to fit or explain every detail of any given case study.

Nevertheless, it can be fruitful to try to extend a model based on features of one case study and then see how well the extensions apply to another. In this way, the model can be turned into a more useful tool. For example, if a case study reveals a new method of inhibition, it is worth exploring whether this same method is observed in other case studies.

The *Sharpeville*, *Dili*, and *Dharasana* cases show that using violence against peaceful protesters can backfire against the perpetrators. This is the phenomenon Richard Gregg called moral jiu-jitsu and Gene Sharp called political jiu-jitsu. These cases also reveal the struggle over the consequences of the events, namely the use by the perpetrators of each of the five methods for inhibiting outrage and the use by

their opponents of five corresponding methods to encourage expression of outrage. In other words, political jiu-jitsu has a fine texture, namely the methods for waging a struggle over outrage. The outcome of such struggles determines whether backfire occurs.

The *Rodney King beating* shows clearly that backfire can occur from violent attacks even when the victim resists and when the victim is neither protesting nor taking a principled stand. The key factor is a perceived injustice, in this case a disproportionality between what King appeared to do and what the police were perceived to be doing. Violent attacks on peaceful protesters are just one form of injustice, though a particularly vivid one; there are many others.

The King beating also reveals the importance of routine media practices in de facto cover-up: the mass media generally deal with police use of force from the point of view of police, which, for most consumers of the media, does little to arouse concern about police behaviors. Only occasionally do incidents such as the King beating break through the usual police-media framing of matters.

The King beating also shows how a backfire can lead those labeled as responsible to fall out with each other: Los Angeles police chief Daryl Gates blamed the officers involved in the beating; Stacey Koon, in charge of King's arrest, blamed Gates and the police hierarchy. Predictably, they both blamed King, but this was not sufficient. From the public's point of view, justice required that blame be apportioned to police, whether it be the officers directly involved, the entire force, or top officials.

The examination of *whistleblowing* as a backfire process reveals a twofold injustice: first, the issue the whistleblower speaks out about, such as corruption or hazards to the public; second, reprisals against the whistleblower. In essence, a whistleblower is a person who attempts to expose a problem, challenging cover-up and reinterpretation, and who is then dealt with through intimidation. By speaking out and suffering reprisals as a result, the whistleblower becomes part of a wider injustice.

A second key feature of many whistleblowing cases is that the whistleblower may act instinctively in ways that reduce outrage. Most whistleblowers avoid publicity, at least in the beginning. Instead, they put their trust in formal processes at their place of work or in official bodies outside of it. Many whistleblowers also accept settlements that muzzle them. Thus whistleblowers are often parties to cover-up, are initially enthusiasts for official channels (only becoming disillusioned after experiencing them), and acquiesce in cover-up through forms of bribery at the end. Whistleblowers are far from unique in doing things that minimize outrage, nor should they be blamed for this; in some instances it is foolhardy to go public. The lesson, though, is that whistleblowers have other options besides the official-channel road. In particular, a campaigning approach gives a much better prospect for channeling outrage and confronting the original problem.

The *Ted Steele dismissal* highlights the existence of multiple backfire processes in an academic situation. Steele's dismissal backfired on the university administration, but prior to this Steele's own provocative behavior had alienated many people on campus, especially his immediate colleagues. The important lesson is that the personal behavior of a dissident is important in gaining support. But, as in the King beating, a person without much credibility can be turned into a martyr if attacked in a way seen as unfair.

The Steele case also shows that only some parties to a dispute may be able to use backfire dynamics to their advantage. Steele's colleagues in Biological Sciences felt the department's reputation had been unfairly tarnished but, caught between Steele's allegations and the administration's dismissal of Steele, there seemed to be little they could do to redress the problem.

The study of *environmental disasters* shows that backfires can occur even when the party held responsible had no intention of creating a problem and took no active steps to do so. Many observers of the Chernobyl nuclear accident held the Soviet government responsible; likewise, many observers of the *Exxon*

Valdez oil spill held Exxon responsible. These disasters were widely recognized to be accidents, not intentional acts, yet most members of the public felt someone should be blamed. These disasters show the usual methods of inhibiting outrage. They also reveal attempts to shift blame, with the Soviet government blaming the Chernobyl plant operators and Exxon blaming the ship captain.

The invasion of Iraq illustrates that outrage can be generated even before an attack is launched. Furthermore, the struggle over the meaning of the Iraq invasion continues years afterward. This illustrates that backfire struggles may be unbounded in time: every one of the methods of inhibition, and methods of countering inhibition, can be used over a period of years or decades. There is no single point at which someone can say conclusively that an event has or hasn't backfired, because new developments may change the assessment. This reflects the dynamic nature of backfire as a process.

The Iraq case also illustrates that activists may be unnecessarily pessimistic about the impact of their efforts. Although protests did not stop the invasion, they greatly increased its negative consequences for the U.S. government, thereby reducing support for further invasions, such as of Iran or Syria, and reducing support for the Bush administration's domestic agendas. Bill Moyer in his book *Doing Democracy*, which presents an eight-stage model of social movement campaigns, repeatedly emphasizes that activists commonly become discouraged just when they are beginning to succeed.³ Arguably, this is what happened with campaigning against the Iraq invasion.

The *Abu Ghraib* story is an example of how a specific backfire, over torture at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, can occur within and contribute to a larger backfire process, over the invasion

and occupation of Iraq. The huge opposition to the invasion of Iraq created an international audience receptive to news critical of the U.S. role. The Abu Ghraib revelations therefore had an exceptional impact, augmenting hostility and resistance to the occupation of Iraq. The Abu Ghraib case suggests that backfires can open the door for further backfires, challenging the usual process by which a successful cover-up lays the basis for further cover-ups, devaluation lays the groundwork for further devaluation, and so on through the other methods of inhibiting outrage.

The use of *electroshock weapons* for torture is a case in which the initiative for resistance must be taken by non-victims. While people are being tortured, they have little capacity for effective resistance; if and when they become safe from their torturers, they often need all their energies purely to survive and recover. Therefore the task of opposing torture falls largely on others, such as human rights groups.

Torture by electroshock weapons is only possible if scientists and engineers conceive and design the weapons, companies produce and sell them, governments allow sales, and governments do not pass or enforce laws against them. The injustice of electroshock torture thus has a long path of responsibility, with a corresponding array of points for intervention. Outrage can be directed at torturers as individuals, at technologists designing weaponry easily usable for torture, at corporations manufacturing the equipment, at governments that allow torture, and at governments that make no protest about torture in other countries.

The case of electroshock weapons also offers a somewhat different perspective on official channels. On the one hand, endless negotiation of treaties and regulations concerning torture gives the appearance of action while dozens of countries support or tolerate torture. On the other hand, existing treaties can offer a campaigning platform for human rights groups, for example when a new technology violates international law. Although official channels are regularly used to give the appearance of justice without the substance, nevertheless this is not automatic: there is an

3. Bill Moyer, with JoAnn McAllister, Mary Lou Finley, and Steven Soifer, *Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements* (Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2001).

ongoing struggle over the content and uses of official channels. Furthermore, rulings by official bodies can affect the baseline for what is perceived as unjust. Shifts in the baseline can make it easier or harder to arouse indignation about a new or existing weapon.

Terrorism is an act almost guaranteed to backfire, according to the criteria used here. When non-state groups make violent attacks on civilians, this inevitably causes outrage. There are various explanations for why groups undertake these apparently counterproductive activities, including the desire for revenge (regardless of the consequences), the intention to provoke a counterattack that itself backfires, and the concentration of power in leaders of violent struggle by alienation of those supporting more moderate positions.

Actually, terrorism is just one of many examples of how attacks reliably backfire when launched by those with little power and authority. For example, the same process occurs when an employee grossly insults a decent boss. On the other hand, terrorism is far less likely to backfire when undertaken by governments. The very fact that terrorism, to most people, means terrorism by non-state groups (or by so-called rogue states) is a striking illustration of the way powerful states have diverted attention from their own activities. The very expression “state terrorism” is little known outside the ranks of terrorism scholars.

Each of these case studies could be mined for further insights. Another way to develop further insights is to study additional case studies, such as other police beatings and other wars such as the Vietnam war. Some other possible areas of application are bullying, censorship, corporate disasters, defamation, genocide, labor struggles, lying, protests, refugees, sexual harassment, and social movements.⁴

4. Work has been done on several of these topics.

Censorship: Sue Curry Jansen and Brian Martin, “Making Censorship Backfire,” *Counterpoise* 7 (July 2003): 5–15; Sue Curry

Jansen and Brian Martin, “Exposing and Opposing Censorship: Backfire Dynamics in Freedom-of-Speech Struggles,” *Pacific Journalism Review* 10 (April 2004): 29–45.

Corporate disasters: Susan Engel and I have examined the Bhopal disaster and the James Hardie asbestos tragedy in “Union Carbide and James Hardie: Lessons in Politics and Power,” *Global Society*, in press.

Defamation: Truda Gray and I have analyzed defamation threats and actions as attacks on free speech in “How to Make Defamation Threats and Actions Backfire,” *Australian Journalism Review* 27 (July 2005): 157–66; “Defamation and the Art of Backfire,” *Deakin Law Review*, in press.

Deportation: Iain Murray and I wrote about government and activist tactics used in the 2005 deportation of U.S. peace activist Scott Parkin from Australia, in “The Parkin Backfire,” *Social Alternatives* 24 (Third Quarter 2005): 46–49.

Labor struggles: Kylie Smith and I examined this topic, with special attention to the confrontation between the stevedoring firm Patrick and the Maritime Union of Australia, in “Tactics of labor struggles,” *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, in press.

Refugees: Andrew Herd, “Official Channels or Public Action: Refugees in Australia,” *Flinders Journal of History and Politics*, in press; “Amplifying Outrage over Children Overboard,” *Social Alternatives*, in press.

Sexual harassment: Greg Scott and I analyzed the Anita Hill–Clarence Thomas case in “Tactics against Sexual Harassment: The Role of Backfire,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, in press.

Social movements: David Hess and I have studied backfire as a type of transformative event for social movements in “Backfire, Repression, and the Theory of Transformative Events,” *Mobilization* 11 (June 2006): 249–67.

Other Directions

I have focused on backfire analysis as a way of understanding tactics and as a guide for formulating strategies against injustice. Another way to use the approach is to measure the extent of backfire. Following the beating of Rodney King, public opinion about the Los Angeles police became less favorable. Likewise, following the invasion of Iraq, public attitudes towards the United States became less favorable in many countries. The extent of backfire might also be judged by levels of activism in support of a cause, by comments on blogs and e-mail discussion groups, by petitions, and by open dissent within and defections from the dominant group.

Another way to assess the extent of backfire is by looking at the tactics used by the other side. If cover-up and reinterpretation are effective, there may be little open opposition to an injustice. But if these methods fail, the perpetrators may resort to devaluation, intimidation, or referring the matter to official bodies. This can signify a greater level of backfire.

A different issue is the evolution of tactics: in an ongoing struggle, each side can learn from the other side's behavior. For example, police who are caught on camera beating protesters might decide, next time, to arrest anyone with a camera, or to smash the cameras. Protesters, if they suspect this might occur, could be prepared with hidden cameras or ones at a safe distance. Police might then find ways to assault protesters that do not look so bad even if photographed. And so on. Any group that keeps repeating its tactics is at risk of losing its edge.⁵

Backfire is based on outrage from perceived injustice. The word "perceived" is important, because perceptions can be wrong, at least as judged from a different perspective. Contrasting perceptions are at the core of struggles over interpretation. It is possible to

5. I thank Steve Wright for valuable discussions on this point.

distinguish several types of backfire according to the perpetrator's role.

- *White backfire*. This is the usual case: an attack backfires against the perpetrator. An example is the Dili massacre.

- *Gray backfire*. A perpetrator uses a convenient event, portrayed and widely perceived as unjust, as a pretext for launching an attack. Imagine that prior to the Dili massacre, the Indonesian parliament building in Jakarta had been bombed. The Indonesian government could have blamed the bombing on the East Timorese and used this to undercut concern about use of violence in Dili.

An actual example is the Tonkin Gulf incident of 1964, in which North Vietnamese PT boats were alleged to have attacked U.S. ships in international waters. This incident provoked the outrage necessary for Congress to pass a resolution allowing expansion of the U.S. military role in the Vietnam war. Yet, at the time, the evidence for a North Vietnamese attack was far from conclusive.

- *Black backfire*. A perpetrator sets out to create an injustice that will be blamed on someone else, such as the perpetrator's victim. Imagine that Indonesian troops, in carrying out the Dili massacre, dressed themselves as a dissident faction of the East Timorese resistance: they would have been aiming to make the killings backfire against the resistance. Black backfire is the aim of the agent provocateur who pretends to be a protester, uses or encourages violence, and thus serves to discredit the protesters.

Deciding what is black, gray, or white can be difficult, because cover-up often makes it hard to know who or what is responsible. The principal message is that things may not be what they appear to be on the surface.⁶

6. These terms are inspired by the existing language of black, gray, and white propaganda. Truda Gray and I are working on a study of black, gray, and white backfire in the Vietnam war and elsewhere. I thank her for useful discussions on this topic.

The Bigger Picture

Backfire analysis can be a convenient tool for understanding tactics in struggles against injustice. It is not a guarantee of success. It's quite possible to have an excellent understanding of what is happening but lack the power to do much to change the situation. There are many situations in which powerful groups do terrible things and opponents are too weak, divided, or discredited to stop them.

There are many things not covered in backfire theory. Among them are skills, morale, organization, discipline, and courage, each of which deserves great attention. Understanding tactics is certainly valuable but is not much use unless there are skilled and committed individuals and groups ready and able to take action.

In the previous chapter, I described Gene Sharp's concept of political jiu-jitsu, by which a violent attack on peaceful protesters can increase support for the protesters and thus be counterproductive for the attacker. The concept of backfire is a generalization and extension of political jiu-jitsu. Sharp's bigger picture is his "dynamics of nonviolent action," a set of stages through which nonviolent campaigns often proceed, in which political jiu-jitsu is just one stage. Here are Sharp's stages.⁷

- Laying the groundwork, including leadership, preparation, and strategy.
- Challenge brings repression, including challenge, repression, persistence, suffering, and facing brutality.
- Solidarity and discipline, including maintaining support and promoting nonviolent discipline.
- Political jiu-jitsu.
- Methods of success: conversion, accommodation, and nonviolent coercion.

- Redistribution of power, including empowering effects on the nonviolent group and decentralization of power.

The backfire model is built from political jiu-jitsu, by examining methods of inhibiting or amplifying outrage and applying the dynamic well beyond the violence-versus-nonviolence template. It is possible to apply this same generalization process to other stages presented by Sharp. For example, consider Sharp's first stage, laying the groundwork, which is when a nascent social movement builds its knowledge, resources, and organization, constructing a foundation from which it might eventually be able to mount credible actions. A repressive government might seek to inhibit this process of development, for example by killing, discrediting, or co-opting potential leaders, infiltrating and subverting developing organizations, and encouraging the proto-movement to adopt misleading analyses and counterproductive tactics. In effect, there is an ongoing struggle over a proto-movement's attempt to build its capacity to act and the government's attempt to inhibit this development.

Consider next an example well outside the violence-nonviolence mold: a boss who bullies selected subordinates by making demeaning comments, assigning tasks that are set up for failure, and spreading rumors. Bullying behavior can backfire if co-workers find out what is happening and react against it, so it is not surprising to find evidence for the usual methods of inhibiting outrage, from cover-up to ineffectual grievance procedures. That is a straightforward application of the backfire model. But it is also possible for the boss to intervene at the stage of laying the groundwork. If a particular employee seeks advice, starts building a support network, collects documentation of abuses, or begins trying out defensive techniques, the boss might transfer the employee, reduce bullying behaviors directed at the employee (while continuing to target others), or conversely increase the attack to break the employee's will to resist.

In this way, Sharp's stage of laying the groundwork can be generalized beyond his

7. Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973), 447–814. I have changed some of Sharp's wording but maintained his basic structure.

original framework, just as backfire is a generalization of political jiu-jitsu. Similarly, Sharp's other stages can be generalized by examining tactics used by both sides and by applying the analysis to a wide variety of cases. Sharp's model is a good basis for this sort of generalization because it is based on observation of numerous actual cases.⁸

Self-check

It is natural to assume that the perpetrators of injustice are someone else: bullies, torturers, insensitive aggressive governments, scheming enemies. *They* are bad. *We* are good.

Yet, reflecting on the matter, most people should have to admit that sometimes they are perpetrators, even if only as a child when grabbing a toy from a playmate and then lying about it. Yet it is far more difficult to recognize one's own role in causing injustice than to recognize injustice against oneself, or against someone else. Backfire analysis provides a convenient way to check what is going on: just go through the list of methods of inhibiting outrage and see whether you are using them.

- Am I being completely open, or am I hiding information?
- Am I saying or implying derogatory things about others?
- Am I considering only ways of interpreting things that are most favorable to me and unfavorable to others? Am I lying by omission?
- Do I pass off matters to higher authorities when they should be my responsibility?
- Do I threaten penalties or promise rewards?

8. As noted in chapter 13, Sharp's framework can be considered to be a form of grounded theory. Bill Moyer's social movement model in *Doing Democracy*, also a product of grounded theory, can also be used in the same way as a foundation for a more generalized theory.

Everyone does some of these things some of the time. Sometimes there are good reasons to hide information, for example to protect people's privacy. Sometimes criticism of others is fully justified. Nevertheless, it can be revealing to look for patterns of behavior and to compare one's actions to the actions of others. If you are spreading nasty rumors but others are not, is this fair? If you are making threats but others aren't, is your attack unfair?

Most importantly, do you have more or less power than the other party? If you have a lot less power, then launching an open attack is likely to be foolish: backfire is almost guaranteed. On the other hand, if you have a lot more power, then there is a risk you may be misusing that power — and this misuse of power may itself backfire against you! Psychological research provides strong support for Lord Acton's adage "Power tends to corrupt": the exercise of power makes a person think less of those who are subject to power.⁹ In this sort of situation, a self-check is most important.

The inspiration behind backfire analysis is to aid the effectiveness of those challenging injustice. In principle, the analysis could be used by unscrupulous, scheming attackers who want to be more effective in perpetrating injustices. In one way, this is unlikely, simply because most people who commit evil acts do not think of themselves as evil — they feel they are the victims, or that their actions are justified in the circumstances.¹⁰ On the other

9. David Kipnis, *The Powerholders* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); David Kipnis, *Technology and Power* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990).

10. Roy F. Baumeister, *Evil: Inside Human Violence and Cruelty* (New York: Freeman, 1997), makes the case that the usual perceptions of evildoers as malevolent or uncaring are wrong. See also Fred Emil Katz, *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil: A Report on the Beguiling of Evil* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993); Philip G. Zimbardo, "A Situationist Perspective on the Psychology of Evil: Understanding How

hand, perpetrators seem to instinctively use methods to inhibit outrage. Targets, in many cases, seem to have less awareness of what will be effective in countering attacks, and thus have more to learn from studying backfire dynamics.

There is still much to learn about opposing injustice. What better place to begin than actions that backfire?

Finally, there's another side to opposing injustice — promoting justice, for example by helping those in need. Sometimes this creates a boomerang effect, bringing good fortune to the person doing good deeds.¹¹ That is a type of backfire well worth promoting.

Acknowledgements

I thank Stan Cohen, Truda Gray, Samantha Reis, and Greg Scott for valuable comments on drafts of this chapter.

Good People Are Transformed into Perpetrators,” in *The Social Psychology of Good and Evil*, ed. Arthur G. Miller (New York: Guilford Press, 2004), 21–50.

11. Jack Doueck, *The Chesed Boomerang: How Acts of Kindness Enrich Our Lives*, 2d ed. (Deal, NJ: Yagdiyl Torah Publications, 1999).