

Adaku Utah:

Hey comrades. Welcome to this special episode of The Solidarity Is This Podcast. I'm Adaku Utah, your co-host, and I'm so thrilled to be joined by fellow co-host and comrade, Deepa Iyer.

We are all in the midst of an intense and wild time as the 2024 elections approach, and I just want to acknowledge the incredible work so many of you are doing from organizing to mutual aid to parenting to culture work. We know that election cycles offer so many opportunities to sharpen our strategies and build power with our communities.

And today, Deepa and I will be sharing about the Building Movement Project's [2024 Elections and Beyond](#) Toolkit, which will hopefully support you and your organizations in preparing for what's ahead and fortifying ourselves and our movements to respond strategically while staying connected and grounded with our people and our values. Let's dive in.

Hey Deepa.

Deepa Iyer:

Hey Adaku. It's so great to be here and welcome to all the listeners of The Solidarity is This Podcast.

Adaku Utah:

Thanks for being with us, especially in this season. And right now as we're having this conversation, it's officially 19 days until the election. We've been preparing for the elections alongside many of our movement partners and are also bearing witness to continued climate catastrophe of Hurricane Milton and Helene where many of our communities are still displaced and currently without power.

We're also witnessing the continued genocides in Palestine, Sudan, and Congo, and we're also noticing the continued erosion of so many of our reproductive freedoms and safety for queer and trans folks and migrants. And I know for both of us, we're not just bearing witness, we're also continuing a lot of our frontline work with many of our communities. And in the midst of all of this complexity with this election season, I'm so curious how you're coming into this conversation.

Deepa Iyer:

Yeah, I'm sure that folks who are listening are also having complex emotions just as we are. And I think that there are a lot of personal complexities, confusion, curiosity that folks are holding, I know I am, with this election, and also just hearing about the ways in which there's a sense of overwhelm, there's a sense of readiness as well. It's like a mix of it.

And I think that's what we've been seeing and hearing in some of the election scenario planning, that Building Movement Project has been supporting with organizations as well as tables and networks that bring different groups together. And so there is this sense of readiness in terms of, okay, we're going to have to roll up our sleeves and meet our communities and the moment, and at the same time holding space for this confusion that I mentioned earlier.

And I know we'll get into in a bit the third theme that we often hear when we do these workshops, which is infrastructure and whether or not we've got the right infrastructure to not just respond to the election, but actually thinking about the time in between the election and the inauguration, if results aren't clear, the time between the inauguration and the first 100 days, and obviously after that. So how do we resource ourselves for this longer period of time that we may need to be engaged in?

What about you? What are you seeing and hearing when we're in conversation with groups?

Adaku Utah:

I'm echoing a lot of that too. I'm feeling both the immense grief of this moment. We have lost far too many ancestors and trancesors too soon. I'm also feeling the sadness and the rage from how stretched and fatigued people are from responding to crisis and crisis and crisis over and over again, and simultaneously just feeling so moved and really grateful for that continued level of commitment and consistency of so many movement organizations that we get to work alongside, including our own, who are continuing to show up, contributing time, resources, strategic efforts, and dare I say, love to making sure that our attention keeps staying on our people for the long run regardless of how this election season unfolds.

There have been so many powerful and beautiful examples of solidarity that I've also gotten to witness, shouting out the labor unions and the climate justice organizers who are and have been joining forces for quite some time to address the dual crisis of economic inequity and climate change to queer and trans organizers who are showing solidarity with migrant communities that are facing deportation and making sure that our folks are protected, and of course the many folks that we work with and folks who are also listening that are working to end occupation and genocide in the global north and global south.

I feel grateful that one of our many roles at Solidarity is to be a builder. We listen intentionally with our communities and pay attention to the gaps and the needs, many of which that are arising right now are around how do we pay attention to this rapid response moment, and as you said, also build the infrastructure that we need to build power. How do we make sure that the chaos is not disintegrating our

relationships, and how do we make sure that we're sustaining ourselves? As long as movement requires, this is lifelong work.

So thankfully, thanks to the wisdom of our folks that we work with, we've been able to create some really necessary tools and resources for this moment that really help folks prepare to be in their right role, to respond strategically and also buttress our connections and partnerships. And earlier this summer, we released the [2024 Elections and Beyond: Fortifying Ourselves, Our Organizations and Our Ecosystems](#) Toolkit, which many of y'all who are listening have downloaded, thank you, and are currently using in your work. And yeah, we wanted to dedicate some time on this podcast to share more about what this toolkit is, how you might use it in your work with your communities and your organization.

So what is this toolkit, Deepa? Why did we create it? What's the hope around how it could impact folks' work?

Deepa Iyer:

And thank you for naming all those complexities and issues as well, Adaku. I think that you gave voice to a lot of the context that folks are sitting with and sitting in and the complexity of that context.

So this toolkit, which is called *2024 Elections and Beyond: Fortifying Ourselves, Our Organizations and Our Ecosystems* is an offering from us at Solidarity as in BMP that is community centered, that is the result of some of these workshops that we've been doing around the country with different groups, and that gives folks a menu of options to utilize for themselves, for organizations that they're part of, or for broader coalitions and networks. I want to give a shoutout to our colleague, UyenThi Tran Myhre, who is a big part of creating this toolkit as well with us.

So the goals of the toolkit are to use certain types of frameworks that we've offered in order to fortify ourselves, which is a word that you use a lot, Adaku, and so I'm going to ask you about that in just a bit, but to fortify ourselves in order to tend to what is coming to meet the moment. So there are worksheets. At BMP, we really tried to provide accessible worksheets so you always have places to write, places to think. We hope that these offerings can be utilized by you in election scenario planning you might be doing in your organizations or in your networks.

There are specifically... I'm just going to run through the main ones that exist and then we can talk about some of them. So one of the worksheets that we have in there is called the Movement Pantry Worksheet, and that is a place where folks could often begin because it's an opportunity to take a look at and reflect on what do we already have, right? We're not starting from scratch. We've been here before in different ways. So what are the frameworks, analyses, partnerships and practices that we've stored in our pantry and that we can lean on and bring out as we need to tend to what is in front of us?

So first we want to take stock. Then we have a worksheet for you all that is focused on the types of roles that organizations might be playing as they prepare for the 2024 elections. And this is based on the social change ecosystem framework the folks might've seen with the 10 roles and the values. So we have an election specific worksheet that is related to that, and so that's an opportunity to think about. For example, perhaps we are going to be storytellers who are documenting the reasons why voting is a vital civic strategy or we're even as storytellers gathering data through exit poll monitoring, or perhaps we are caregivers and we're supporting people who face barriers to vote, like non-English speakers or the elderly or those who don't have access to transportation.

Those are just a few examples you'll find because getting specific about what our roles are going to be pre-election, on election day, in the weeks after the election through the first 100 days, can help to anchor us when we're feeling this kind of seesaw of confusion and uncertainty, disinformation and the like.

And then there are two other resources to draw your attention to that are more around rapid response. So one is a decision making tool that allows organizations to reflect on the types of conditions that they will respond to. And then the other is a series of rapid response stances, and we'll get into this even more in a bit that organizations may think about taking, so this is more of a strategic tactical response. And then finally, there is a tool called The Ecosystem of Wellbeing where we're really focusing here on the fortification of ourselves in order to deal with volatility.

So I'll pause there. That's a lot of resources. So we've got starting with our pantry to figuring out our roles to rapid response decisions and stances to fortifying ourselves and our organizations throughout the whole time period. This is what you could find. And I want to ask you, Adaku, a little bit about this idea of fortification. Why is that an important language to have as we think about what is ahead?

Adaku Utah:

In thinking about fortification, I mean, the root meaning of that word is the act of making something stronger or more secure. And especially in moments like an election cycle where there's a lot of crisis and fast moving change and very unexpected change, it's really easy for us to get knocked off center no matter how strong or connected our organization or community or coalition is. It can be really easy to deviate from our values and some organizations start to adopt tendencies that can contract our power, that can isolate our abilities to be inside of relationships or can start to break under the weight of a lot of pressure.

So the word fortification just really recognizes that the reality of both internal and external challenges that we'll be up against and our inherent capacity to get stronger, to get even more secure by how we choose to pay attention to what's

happening to us and where we can intentionally and strategically pivot so that we're preparing for moments that we know that are coming. Many movement organizations have been in these cycles before and there are patterns and themes that we can not just pay attention to but also get really prepared for.

And then for some of us who are in the moment and just unexpectedly dealing with a lot of change, whether it's the change of voter suppression or having to deal with another abortion ban that hit a state, these resources really help us to create the necessary conditions that can make our responses more aligned with who we want to be in these moments, how we want to relate to each other and whatever our mandate and our purpose is in this particular time.

So that's the hope, and we've also heard from folks who've been using the toolkit that it's been serving in that way both in terms of preparation, but also in strengthening the skills, the competence, the relationships that already exist within organizations.

Deepa Iyer:

I love that. And I think that's the key, right, that we're not starting from scratch.

Adaku Utah:

Exactly.

Deepa Iyer:

Yeah. And I think that's so important because sometimes it feels like we are every time there's a crisis or there's a cycle, and I think one of the things that we say often at BMP is it's not if a crisis is going to happen, it's when a crisis is going to happen, right? So the preparation piece is super, super important.

Can you talk a little bit about the rapid response? There's two rapid response documents or worksheets. There's one that's more of a decision-making tool, and then there's one on some of the stances that we might think about taking. Could you talk a little bit about the decision-making one? When should organizations pick that one up? What could they gain from it? And then I can talk a little bit about the stances that they might take.

Adaku Utah:

So many of our organizations are constantly... It can feel like a state of rapid response. We are deeply connected to community and often getting a lot of requests about how to show up, and also trying to respond as best as we can to the political climate that is just constantly shifting. And what can tend to happen is that organizations overextend or over-promise what they're able to do, which then spreads themselves too thin or doesn't allow for the work that we can possibly do

to be as grounded and strategic and as impactful as it can if we were focused in the areas where we need to.

So this rapid response tool is not a static tool. It's actually a list of questions in a number of different categories where organizations can really offer themselves a kind and rigorous assessment of, where are you? As requests are coming in, what's your assessment around your capacity and resources? Is the request that you're getting around meeting a rapid response moment aligned with your mission and the kind of impacts that you want to make? How well do you understand community's needs, both short-term and long term? And then where might there be opportunities to collaborate so that there is a bigger weave that's holding the rapid response moment and it's not just recreating a cycle of very few people holding too much work?

And there are additional questions there around legal and ethical considerations. How do we communicate with each other? How do we support our safety and security to make sure that we're minimizing the risk of harm with our folks? And there's also invitations for you to think about what are some additional questions that you might add, some additional considerations that could support you in deciding whether you want to engage in a rapid response moment and then how you want to do that in a way that feels values-aligned, in a way that is community-centered and also hopefully continues to build power. So that's that tool and yeah, would love to have you share about the other rapid response tool.

Deepa Iyer:

Yeah. Yeah, and so then once, say, an organization goes through the checklist that you talked about and they decide, "Okay, we need to do something," right, we are offering seven rapid response stances that may be required during three different timeline phases from now until the election, from the election to inauguration and from the inauguration through the first 100 days.

And we offered this with an understanding, and we heard this a lot when we were talking to groups and doing scenario planning, that folks are expecting a pretty volatile time. Folks are expecting that there might not be clarity of information in terms of results. Folks are expecting that the results will be contentious. Folks are expecting some worst case scenarios around vigilante responses, and folks are also expecting fear on the part of communities that might be impacted, uncertainty. Across the board regardless of the outcome, there's a concern about disinformation, and again, everything we offer is like, "Take what works, discard the rest."

So these seven stances, I'll just go over them really quickly, are, one, defend, and this is really for organizations that need to put into place community defense strategies. That could look like mutual aid. It could look like legal representation. It

could look like security safety measures. Other organizations might be focusing more on demand, and that is where we are setting forth policy and systems recommendations that are collectively held and putting those forward.

Still, other organizations may be in the stance of document, so this is where organizations might be sharing stories of what is happening in the community, case studies, research and the like. Others might be thinking about the importance of discuss, and this is around sharing narratives and shaping narratives that we might be seeing in the public or online, making sure that there's an opportunity to shape these narratives from the lens of the communities we're working with.

Another stance is deepen, and so this is really focused on the importance of strengthening our partnerships. How are we deepening the ways in which we're connecting to each other, understanding that, as you said earlier, we may not have to do everything even if we get a request because we know others are going to take it.

And then the last two are disrupt, so this I think folks are pretty familiar with. There might be a need to take direct actions or protests, whether it's in person or whether it is digitally, and then finally design. So this is where there's a more generative opportunity where folks are thinking about how can we experiment with new strategies and new tactics for mobilizing our communities.

So again, just to go over them, defend, demand, document, design, discuss, disrupt and deepen. And so all these are, again, part of the worksheet that we talked about and you will have a chance to actually respond in the worksheet in terms of whether it is the vital stance for you to take, whether it is a secondary stance for you to take, et cetera.

In your work, Adaku, so far with some of the election planning scenario workshops we've been doing, do you feel like this has been a helpful tool? How do people respond to this?

Adaku Utah:

Really just a lot of gratitude for the specificity. Like I was saying earlier, people often feel so pulled in multiple directions and sometimes aren't even clear about what those directions are. And so one of the biggest responses that we've been getting is that the clarity around stances help people really discern what strategies that they're going to take, particularly at different time cycles of this election, so that folks are not only being clear about the impacts that they want to make and how they're going to be showing up with their communities, but also really clear about the partnerships that they need to make in this time so that they can design or they can defend or they can do one of those stances really, really well.

Both you and I were talking about just the amount of overwhelm that folks are in right now and how people's sustainability is just being really impacted, and I think that this helps people just use their energy and resources really wisely.

Deepa Iyer:

We're nearing the close of our podcast and conversation, so we wanted to just talk a little bit about beyond the election, right, and that is a movement question. And so a doctor from your vantage point, what does it mean to both engage with the electoral system, but also simultaneously holding critiques of that system and thinking about well beyond the elections? The elections are vital, we know this, but our communities need to be in connection with each other and with stakeholders and policymakers and elected officials, not just around the election season, right? So how would you like to see movement folks engaging with elections?

Adaku Utah:

Yeah, election season and cycles are just always a charged time for many of us because it brings together both the possibilities of change, and like you said, the very real limitations of our current democratic system. It can for me feel like a tug of war between hope and reality. And so many of our fellow movement organizers and organizations have been reminding us for decades to recognize that, yeah, the elections, while they're important, are not the only path to transformation, and they really highlight moments of concentrated power where our collective voice and impacts can be leveraged.

And really, it's a snapshot of time that reflects where we are as a society and also where we are as a movement, but not necessarily where we want to be. And yes, the elections are deeply flawed and imperfect and they can also create openings for advancing particular movement agendas even if they don't deliver everything that we need. So I'm thinking a lot about reproductive justice folks who are using this time to make sure that local governments are enshrining abortions into their constitutions, to folks who are making sure that we're paying attention to continuing to pay attention to the genocide and putting even more pressure on our government to have a ceasefire.

Yeah, this is a moment of a lot of deep contradictions where we get to also hold critiques about many systemic inequities around voter suppression, around the high influence of corporate power and the many different ways many of our marginalized communities are sidelined and silenced by all of our political parties, and we recognize that voting is only one tactic within a larger strategy for change, and we can recognize the flaws and growth edges of our candidates and the parties while also continuing to push for policies and people that align more closely with our values and hopefully move us all closer to freedom and liberation and engaging



in elections is one way, one of many ways of ensuring that we're keeping our longer-term goals in mind.

Our movements are inherently about building power. We've said that a couple times on this podcast and on many of our podcasts, and really this means organizing around issues that matter the most to our people and making sure that as we're doing election work, that we're continuing the work of building systems of mutual aid and alternative governance and mobilizing around direct action so that no matter the outcome of the elections, that we're continuing to strengthen our movements and our communities.

And I want to shout out so many organizations on the ground, like [Seed the Vote](#), [Black Feminist Future](#), who are not just pushing for turnout, but also using elections as moments to politicize our base, connecting voting to larger struggles and co-creating voter education campaigns that are really rooted in our own values.

Deepa Iyer:

I totally agree. I thought that was a brilliant way of looking at this beyond just the elections and using it as an opportunity to think about what matters the most to us and how we're going to have to organize, mobilize, and be in solidarity with one another in order to make sure that we can see these futures become real.

With that, we're at the close of our conversation and we want to send everybody a lot of love and care and solidarity. As you move through the next few weeks, few months, please rely on the resources that we shared. And I should also say that in our toolkit, which we'll be linking to in the show notes, you also will find other resources that different organizations have created that might be useful to you all as well, so really encourage you to look at some of these. They range from [Electoral Safety Toolkit](#) from [Vision Change Win](#) to information about funding for rapid response and movement protection. So please take a look at the resources that we have also offered in this toolkit.

And with that, Adaku and I are so grateful to all of you for listening, and we will see you out there in the world. Take good care.

Adaku Utah:

Take care. Thank you so much for your presence with us, comrades. We hope the insights and resources we shared support you and your communities through this election season and beyond. Don't forget to check out the full election toolkit and other resources linked in the show notes. Thank you again for joining us. Remember, we're in this together building the world that we deserve. Until next time, stay connected. Take care.