Ep. 12 Learning from Opponents with Munira Lokhandwala of LittleSis Transcript

Munira Lokhandwala 0:02
More and more of the wealthy and corporations have no loyalty or allegiances to any particular party or politician, but are always using their resources strategically to ensure that their status remains protected no matter who's in power. And so power research kind of helps us to gain a more accurate picture of who we're up against and what those people care about how they think and the networks and connections they rely on to maintain their power.

Stephanie Luce 0:37
Welcome back to the Practical Radicals Podcast. I'm Stephanie Luce.

Deepak Bhargava 0:41
And I'm Deepak Bhargava.

Stephanie Luce 0:42
Deepak, one of the main reasons you approached me to co-teach this class was your interest in learning more about how opponents develop strategy. And that's the topic of today's podcast. We'll be joined by Munira Lokhandwala from the research organization LittleSis to talk about power research. But first, Deepak, can you talk about why you wanted to study overdogs?

Deepak Bhargava 1:09
Sure. So after I left Community Change, I was hungry to understand how the other side thinks. I'd spent most of my career engaging with and thinking about oppressed people and how they could build power: mothers receiving welfare, public housing residents, and undocumented immigrants, for example. But I hadn't spent nearly enough time thinking about our opponents. How are they organized? What are the divisions among them? What are their long-term strategies? So as soon as I got to the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies, I did a deep dive reading the key strategy texts in three fields: the military, business and politics. And for me, it was a revelation. Stephanie, I feel like because you've spent your time focused in the labor movement, you've had to spend much more time thinking about opponents, in this case, bosses and corporations, right?

Stephanie Luce 2:03
Yeah, definitely in the labor movement, that's what unions have to do. And I want to hear more about your revelation in a minute. But yeah, unions spend a lot of time doing corporate research, trying to learn about the boss, what is their financial situation? Where are potential sources of money that could go to workers, where are their vulnerabilities? But even then, a lot of that research focuses on a particular employer or corporation, or perhaps the industry, but not the way the corporate class is thinking and what their long-term plans are. So even in the labor movement, the understanding needs to be deeper. So Deepak, what did you learn about overdog strategy?

Deepak Bhargava 2:43
Well, for one thing, the size of the apparatus that trains overdogs to do strategy and to understand power, it's just mind boggling. Business Schools, corporate consulting firms, like McKinsey and Company, and conservative leadership training programs that groom people to ascend to the highest levels of every sector — the judiciary, business, politics and NGOs — these operate at a huge scale. The conservative Leadership Institute to cite just one example has trained 200,000 people who now occupy key positions of power throughout society, united by a common worldview. The motto of the Leadership Institute is, “You owe it to your philosophy to learn how to win.” There is nothing operating at that scale, with an orientation to both ideology and strategy on the progressive side. And the vast majority of the literature about strategy is written for overdogs, about how to acquire power and how to keep it. Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* are the most famous examples. But you could fill whole libraries with this stuff.

And I want to emphasize that most of it is not brilliant at all. A lot of strategy manuals say really obvious things in needlessly complicated ways. But the fact remains that overdogs have a vast literature about strategy to draw on. And there really are some gems there. And then they have schools that teach it to thousands and thousands of people at scale.

Stephanie Luce 4:14
Underdogs have a lot of strategic wisdom to draw on, too, but not as much of it is written down or taught, which is one of the reasons why we wrote *Practical Radicals*. But in terms of overdog strategy, we argue in the book that overdogs use three strategies over and over again. Let's go over them.

Deepak Bhargava 4:35
Right, so overdogs almost always face one gigantic problem that shapes how they see the world: there are just not that many of them. The defining weakness overdogs must overcome is that they are vastly outnumbered. They live in fear, that underdogs will unite and realize the potential power of their numbers. So there are three basic strategies that overdogs deploy, with a million variations, to prevent that from happening. First, overdogs seek to weaken sources of power for underdogs. They are relentlessly focused on this. The attack on votinig rights and on unions and the intensified attack on universities in recent years are not random. Overdogs understand that voting rights give majorities comprised of many minorities the power to express their views electorally, the anti-democratic orientation of many overdogs is a natural result of their fear of being outnumbered. Unions give workers power at the workplace, in society, and in politics, and they are uniquely positioned to threaten profit, which is both the means and the end of overdog power. Overdogs have long had a love-hate relationship with universities. On the one hand, elite universities are where they get trained, where they send their kids, and where a lot of crucial research for corporations and the military gets done. On the other hand, universities have always been a place where young people explore new ideas and get engaged in politics. So overdogs try and shut down the potentially rebellious elements of higher education.
Second, overdogs use psychological operations, or what the US military calls PSYOPS efforts to persuade or confuse potentially hostile populations. The US military learned the lesson from Vietnam, that stronger firepower alone isn't enough. Generals set a goal after that defeat to “dominate the cognitive environment.”

Stephanie Luce 6:47
So I know one of your favorite discoveries was the OODA loop, a method for figuring out how to get in your opponents’ heads. And that's one of the favorites of our students as well.

Deepak Bhargava 6:57
Yeah, I really geeked out on some of this researching some of the most interesting and innovative figures in PSYOPS. One of those was US Air Force fighter pilot John Boyd, who argued that the primary objective is “to break the spirit of the will of the enemy command, by creating surprising and dangerous operational or strategic situations.” Boyd argued that you wanted to demoralize your enemy by using mental and moral warfare to confuse them, so they lose confidence in their ability to understand what's happening. He developed a framework called the OODA Loop. OODA is an acronym for observe, orient, decide, and act. And it's a way of capturing how we process information, which is always through a set of filters of how we've responded to previous similar situations, and the cultural biases of our society, and time and our own position. This framework allows you to analyze how to get in the head of your opponents to confuse and demoralize them by seeing how the way they make sense of the world has limitations based on their own history and experiences. It's the dark arts, Stephanie, for real. Now, I think you should talk about the third strategy overdogs typically use: divide and conquer. This strategy is the overdogs’ bread and butter. And it's their antidote to solidarity, which is the key source of power for underdogs.

Stephanie Luce 8:29
Yeah, divide and conquer is an age old strategy and a powerful one. Employers divide workers all the time to keep them from building solidarity. Think about places like restaurants or airports as examples of workplaces that are highly

segregated by gender, race, ethnicity, and immigration status. Employers divide workers from the start by keeping them in separate occupations. Then they use management practices to make workers compete with one another, so you see your coworker as a threat and not an ally. Like, do we pool tips and share them with everyone? Or do we keep them for ourselves? This divide-and-conquer approach prevents many workers from even thinking about unionizing with co-workers in the first place. But if they do, the boss still tries to use it to stop union drives or to break up unions. I remember organizing graduate students, and the university really tried to sow divisions between the hard sciences and the other disciplines. And between international students and students born in the US. They would use carrots and sticks with different groups trying to peel off people from supporting the union. Employers have been using divide and conquer to keep workers from uniting from day one of this country, particularly by race. Here's a video clip from the Union of Southern Service Workers talking about the ways in which laws were put in place to keep white, black, and brown workers apart in the South.

Speaker 2 9:49
Well, let's look at the laws that certain legislators put in place to suppress workers.

Speaker 3 9:56
Jump forward to the Reconstruction Era

When southern business owners saw the potential power of early multiracial unions,

Speaker 4 10:03
They feared what would happen when black and white workers organize around common demands.

Speaker 3 10:11
But workers getting united was a threat to the system.

Speaker 2 10:15
So to protect the South Jim Crow economy,

Speaker 3 10:19
they passed laws that made it harder for black and southern workers to organize unions.

Stephanie Luce 10:26
The right also manufactures moral panics, inventing threats from others that demand a strong authoritarian response. These enemies typically include racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, LGBTQ plus people and immigrants, or people living in other countries. The rise of authoritarian and fascist movements around the world right now is predicated on this. So Deepak, it's obviously important to understand how the other side thinks. But can underdogs ethically borrow tools and methods from overdogs?

Deepak Bhargava 10:57
I think so. It's interesting how much overdog movements unapologetically borrow from underdogs. For example, the Tea Party that rose to prominence in the 2010s used Saul Alinsky *Rules for Radicals* as a core text. Good strategy doesn't belong to any side. And there's a lot of borrowing back and forth throughout history. We talked about how overdog relentlessly focus on weakening sources of power for underdogs by passing laws to undermine voting rights and unions. Underdogs can do the same. They can use policy feedback loops, which we discussed in episode eight about inside-outside strategies to weaken sources of overdog power through policy. For example, stronger antitrust enforcement, or rules on drilling on public lands, or policies that reduce the role of insurance companies in providing health care all erode corporate power. Underdogs can and sometimes do you PSYOPS of their own. I remember being on the stage as one of the leaders of a march for immigrant rights in 2010 on the National Mall, getting a call that there

was a quote “mime down.” I was confused, asking if we were really talking about an actor in white face paint who didn't talk. Turns out that in response to the expected appearance of white supremacists intent on provoking violence, someone had organized a troupe of mimes to insert themselves between provocateurs and immigrants by making absurd hand gestures and funny faces. When one of the white supremacists was being interviewed by a TV station, the mime blocked the shot, prompting the white supremacist to punch the mime. The mime was fine. But the white supremacist got arrested. The mimes had gotten inside the white supremacist’s OODA loop by delivering something unexpected, surprising. They didn't know what to do with the mimes. They were totally off script. We can use the OODA loop to plan more unpredictable actions. So often overdogs expect us to do pre-programmed protests or rallies. This framework gives us a method to explore what could actually surprise them or rattle them. Finally, underdogs can and sometimes do deliberately disrupt the overdog coalition. The Birmingham campaign, known as Project C won a titanic victory against segregation in that city in 1963 not only by uniting the black community, but also by dividing the white power structure. Specifically, the campaign used economic pressure to force white business owners to break from the rest of the white power structure. One of the big lessons of our book *Practical Radicals* is that underdogs usually win only when there is some division in the overdose coalition. Sometimes these divisions happen on their own. But other times underdogs can create the fracture. Stephanie, you've been an advocate of experimentation and the use of data, things that overdogs do routinely. But underdogs don't, often because they lack the resources. Can you talk about that?

Stephanie Luce 14:17
Sure, overdogs have a lot more resources than underdogs do. And one thing they consistently do with their resources is to test their theories using data. For example, the military uses a variety of techniques like tabletop exercises, war games, live-action drills, and more to prepare for war. The key in all of these is to evaluate what happens. There are some progressive groups that have started to use tabletop exercises, where different people take on the roles of different groups in a scenario and play out a campaign. What would a mayor do in response to a strike in a given city? What options do they have? How about the national headquarters of the affected company? Other unions? Silicon Valley has also focused a lot on the use of data to test assumptions before launching a new product line. One of the key methods is called lean startup, the traditional approach in business and many progressive groups is to come up with a big new idea, seek funding for it, wait for the funding, execute, and then evaluate. But a lot of time can be wasted and waiting for funding that may never materialize, or time and funds can be wasted executing a grand plan that may have been poorly conceived but is only evaluated after it fails. Lean startup proposes instead that you build, measure, and learn. Using this approach, a group develops a minimum viable product, the simplest, cheapest prototype of an idea and tests it with clear measures. Here's Silicon Valley entrepreneur Eric Ries explaining the minimum viable product concept.

Eric Ries 15:56
Let me say a word about minimum viable product. I know, you know, people will have heard of this phrase at least a little bit. The idea here is we want to kind of . . . most startups are torn between these two different approaches to building product. One, which I call maximizing chance of success, says, “Look, we've only got one shot at this. So let's get it right. Right?” That's what I talked about startup number one, we're going to ship it when it's right. And that actually is perfectly rational. If you only have one shot, you want to take the best shot you can, build the most perfect product you can. The issue is, of course, you know, you can spend, I don't know, say five years of stealth r&d building a product you think customers want, and then discover to your chagrin that they don't. So the other possible extreme approach is to say, well, let's just do release early release often. People have heard that phrase? And this is just look, we'll just throw whatever crap we have out there. And then we'll hear what customers say, and we'll do whatever they say. But the issue there is if you show a product to three customers, you get 30 opinions. And now what do you do? So, minimum viable product is kind of a synthesis of those two possible extremes. We want to figure out what's the minimum set of features necessary to engage with those early evangelists to start the learning feedback loop going.

Stephanie Luce 17:03

The minimum viable product idea can be useful for underdogs. For example, in an organizing context, a group might have a hunch that public housing residents are fed up and ready to be organized into a city-wide tenant union. Using the lean startup approach, rather than trying to organize the talent and money needed for a citywide blitz, a tenant group would develop a simple test, perhaps sending a couple of organizers into a representative building to see whether light organizing recruitment produces big turnout at a residence meeting. You test your hunch against actual data rather than build a plan on a hunch.

Deepak Bhargava 17:38
This experimental, data-driven ethos runs against the grain of the culture of many social change groups. And there are some good reasons to be wary. There is a sordid history of researching marginalized people as test subjects without their knowledge and in ways that cause a lot of harm. And we can't use random sampling and control groups and organizing as easily as we can in a lab setting. But practical radicals can and should, ethically and strategically incorporate the use of experimentation, and data in their work. We owe it to each other to use our limited resources in ways that will have the biggest impact. And community members can be involved in designing experiments so that their lived experience is built into the prototype from the beginning.

Stephanie Luce 18:27
We can always practice rigorous evaluation. After an action we can ask how many people came? Did we hit our goal? How many new people showed up? Did the action really have an impact on the target or not? A campaign can assess progress not just in terms of winning on an issue, but along other axes as well, like member involvement, alliance building, and narrative shift. Failure can be a good teacher if we take time to make meaning of it. In fact, my dissertation research was inspired by a study of failure. I was working on getting living wage ordinances passed in cities, and I began to realize that in many cases, they were not being enforced. I decided we need to study these failures to learn what conditions made it more likely that the laws will be implemented, and how campaigns could maximize the impact of their work.

Deepak Bhargava 19:17
I know from firsthand experience, that scarcity and the urgency of the problems we face often prevent us from using data or from evaluating our work honestly and rigorously. But that has to change if we're going to win. Another thing overdogs do is to plan for the long term, in the span of decades. When I've been engrossed in an issue campaign, I've been lucky to think a week ahead. Stephanie, what can we learn from over dog's orientation to long-term planning.

Stephanie Luce 19:49
We've talked about how racial neoliberalism the system we live with today didn't just happen. There were long term plans by right-wing organizations and leaders to reverse the gains of working people, people of color, and women that were implemented over decades. One exemplar of this approach is the infamous Powell memo, a plan to seize back the initiative from a surging left written for the US Chamber of Commerce by the future Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell. But this orientation to the long term is part of the DNA of the American right. Corporations and the military have devoted a ton of time to planning for the future. They have futurists on staff and commission reports on what trends might mean for them. For example, there's a lot of money to be made right now by helping corporate America figure out how to profit from climate change by building the security apparatus needed to deter future climate migrants from coming to the US. In our final class, we ask our students to develop their own Powell memo for the left, to articulate a bold, long-term vision for society and the name the steps needed to get there. Most students have never done anything like it before. Progressives are fragmented by issue, and we are often responding to urgent attacks. But it's crucial for us to develop long-term cross-issue plans for governing power. We talked about how the fight over abolition of slavery extended across generations. On a smaller scale, we can see how long-term planning by savvy progressive strategists and organizers has had a real impact on the trajectory of states like Arizona, Georgia, and Minnesota. Here's Doran Schrantz, former executive director of ISAIAH Minnesota, talking about the success of campaigns in her state.

Doran Schrantz 21:37
There's not something like magic in the water in Minnesota. It's leadership, organizing, intention, strategy, over long periods of time and being in it for the long haul, holding ourselves accountable to having goals that are bigger than what we can achieve today. So that means we have to push ourselves to where we want to be in four years or five years, and we're going to need each other to achieve that goal, rather than just a single organization or a single campaign.

Stephanie Luce 22:10
We'll hear more from Doran and others in our next episode, when we talk more about long-term planning. Deepak, one thing I know you've been thinking a lot about is how the right recruits based on belonging rather than belief.

Deepak Bhargava 22:23
Right, so a lot of progressives assume that people are rational, calculating actors, weighing policy proposals to see what will benefit them and then acting accordingly in politics. But this is actually a very narrow view of human motivation. A lot of what we seek in the organizations we join and in our politics is a sense of community, meaning making, being seen and valued. The right has in recent years done better work of creating cultures of belonging than the left. For example, academic research has found that many people who joined the anti-abortion movement were actually pro-choice. To most leftists, this seems nuts. How could it be? But when you understand that people felt welcomed and cared for in an evangelical church group, or wherever, it makes sense. Our views follow our identification and membership with a community. Too many progressive groups work the other way around. We have extensive litmus tests you have to pass before you can even become part of a group. We put belief before belonging. I think this is an area where we could learn a lot from our opponents. And from some of the historical and contemporary examples we cite in the book, where progressive groups created cultures of belonging that facilitated mass participation.

Stephanie Luce 23:47
So there's a lot to learn from overdogs. One way to learn about them is to study them. So we invited Munira Lokhandwala from the research organization LittleSis to speak with us about how to study overdogs and power networks.

Welcome, Munira.

Munira Lokhandwala 24:08
Thanks so much for having us.

Stephanie Luce 24:09
So can you first just start out by sharing a little bit about what LittleSis does.

Munira Lokhandwala 24:16
Sure, so to start LittleSis is a organization, a research group, that focuses on connections between powerful individuals and organizations. We do you know what's called corporate opposition research and are really interested in the way that these individuals and organizations wield power in our society over policy, over our everyday lives. And so LittleSis as an organization has been around for . . . I lose track sometimes, but I think it's been about 15 years now that LittleSis has been doing this work in different forms. And so we both, you know, do original research that we published independently. That's one part of our work. And another really important part of our work is working with movement groups. So working closely with base-building groups across the country, who are, you know, looking to build alignment and build a strategy for taking on corporate power where they are. And that's a major chunk of our work and kind of what we do a lot behind the scenes. And then a lot of people actually know us from our database and from our

power research tools. And so it's really interesting that, you know, people kind of find us through these different channels. Journalists might find us through our independent reporting and research, and movement groups know us as LittleSis and know us through the database. Those are some of the major aspects of our work. More recently, we've really also been wanting to put more energy into capacity building, to thinking about how we as a small organization with a big mission can help develop more research skills in our movements, because we know that we can't do this work alone. And in order for us to do this work for the long haul, we need more people who are trained up in these skills, because certainly there's a lot of amazing organizers out there who are interested in in learning these skills, but they aren't readily available. And so that's really part of our our hope, through the research tools for organizers training series is to be able to give people some small doses of these kinds of skills training so that if the hunger is there, people will continue. So that's a little bit about LittleSis as an organization.

Stephanie Luce 26:38
That's great. Can you tell me a little bit about how you got involved in LittleSis?

Munira Lokhandwala 26:42
Sure, yeah. I've been at LittleSis now for almost seven years. I actually first came across LittleSis's work while I was in graduate school at UC Berkeley, and I was there and you know, 2008, and around 2009, the financial crisis hit California really hard. And we were seeing across the state, really intense austerity measures that we're coming down and impacting workers at the university, and also, you know, impacting students, and just generally broadly, the community and one of the early pieces of research that I came across on the UC regents was actually a map that someone had made using the LittleSis oligrapher tool. And so it was really exciting for us to know that this kind of power research was something that we could use to, you know, mobilize students and community members and workers across the UC campuses, and really, you know, gave us a kind of a real sense of the power structure that was making decisions at our workplaces and in our communities. So I went on to work really closely with my union in the following years and helped bring together rank-and-file caucus that really took that kind of ethos of power structure research. And we really used it in our organizing and in our campaigning and bargaining. And so before I even got to come work at LittleSis, I really benefited greatly from the work it does. So . . .

Stephanie Luce 28:14
That's great. So can we dig into this notion of power research? What does it mean? And what does it look like?

Munira Lokhandwala 28:21
Yeah, so at LittleSis we, you know, like to think about power research as one tool in our larger organizing toolbox that can help us to answer critical questions about what challenges and oppositions we face when we're trying to win, you know, a better life for ourselves and our communities. And for us power research begins with three questions: Who governs? Who benefits? And who wins? Meaning, you know, who's participating in the decision making? Who's benefiting from the current status quo? And who tends to get their way despite opposition? And these are the people and organizations we need to know more about and understand better and where, you know, the work begins for us at LittleSis. So in our work, we specifically focus on the power and influence of people, organizations, and institutions that have shaped the world as it currently is. And we ask, you know, who's benefiting from the current status quo and who's standing in our way as we try to change the world. And often we refer to this set of actors as the power structure. And the current power structure is dominated by a group that we call the power elite, or we might also call the overdogs. And the power elite is who governs, who's participating in the decision making, and who's benefiting from the current system, and who's wealth and security are really not at risk. And they also are the ones who usually win and can exert their power and influence over things like policy. And so we're especially interested in researching the networks of wealthy and powerful people and organizations. Most often in our work, we're focused on, you know, corporations and billionaires with special attention to the mapping out of the relationship networks and money flows through which they're wielding this power and influence in our society. We like to say that politicians come and go, but corporations and the wealthy remain kind of steadfast in wielding their power, and fighting back against any challenges

to their power or status. So to do this research on the overdogs, we're often interested in the investigating flows of money as a way to connect dots in the power structure, you know, whether it's looking at campaign finance donations, or government contracts. Campaign finance research is a critical tool for connecting the dots. But it's really just one tool or view among many into the power structure. And as we see more and more that the wealthy and corporations have no loyalty or allegiances to any particular party or politician but are always using their resources strategically to ensure that their status remains protected no matter who's in power. And so power research kind of helps us to gain a more accurate picture of who we're up against and what those people care about. Power research can you know, also just help us demystify the corporate playbook and understand a bit better how they think and the networks and connections they rely on to maintain their power. And from an organizing standpoint, it also then helps us to identify campaignable or strategic opportunities to challenge their power. It can also help us you know, uncover creative direct action targets so that we're not always just showing up to their headquarters all the time where they expect us to come. It also helps us reshape the narrative around an issue and to inform the public about who and what is standing in the way of us winning. And I think most inspiringly, it can help us find ways that campaigns and movements are connected through a shared overdog and help us find, again, strategic targets and points of leverage beyond maybe just the overdogs themselves, but into their networks. And this can help us create pressure that's unexpected that can help us chip away at that power. It not only helps us to understand who we're up against, but it can also help us see who is on our side and how to bring others into our coalitions and campaigns. And I just want to note that like historically, movements for justice that had the most meaningful long term impact were guided by a deep and shared analysis of the power structure and an analysis of how to challenge and move that power structure was key. So groups like SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, used power research to draw clear lines between racist Jim Crow legislation and corporate interests and develop an analysis to better understand their opposition, to craft organizing strategy, to engage their base, and I think, ultimately, really, to bring more people into the civil rights movement at that time.

Stephanie Luce 33:02
Yeah, that's a great example. I like hearing about that. And do you have a current example that you might share of a campaign that you all did research on that helped identify a target or?

Munira Lokhandwala 33:12
Yeah, a recent example that comes to mind is we're working with a coalition of organizations on a campaign called banking on solidarity. And it's calling on Citibank to pull out of Israel in this moment. And it points to a long history of Citibank both being a partner in financing government bonds that have been used to bulk up the military, at the same time, being a huge financier of the weapons industry, which in this moment is also enabling a genocide to happen. And so we've been working with organizations like Empower Change and Echo to bolster this existing campaign that's happening internationally and bring it to the US. There's been calls, for example, for Citibank to pay reparations to the Haitian people for the role that they played in the early 20th century, extracting wealth from Haiti at a critical moment. And so we're kind of joining this call. And we're also part of a coalition called Stop the Money Pipeline, which is just had like a really beautiful week of action on Citibank in New York. And it's these moments where these two independent campaigns and coalitions that we're supporting have really zeroed in on a target and are kind of working in some ways symbiotically to build the pressure that we think is you know, really key to chipping away again at the at the power of the overdogs.

Stephanie Luce 34:43
That's great. So you at LittleSis are conducting research, you work with organizations as partners, but then you also train individual activists and organizers who want to learn some of these skills too. So can you say a bit about how that works? Like what are the resources that you provide to people wanting to learn how to do this, some of this?

Munira Lokhandwala 35:01

Sure, yeah, so providing research tools, trainings, resources, it's a large part of our mission at LittleSis. And for the last decade and a half, we've been maintaining free wiki-style power research database called LittleSis.org. It's the opposite of Big Brother. So it's all of us looking up at the power structure, tracking connections, and it's a platform for doing and sharing research on powerful people and organizations. The database really focuses on tracking relationships between entities and highlighting interlocking relationship networks. The database is sourced using publicly available data. And this is a way for us to encourage people who might be new to doing research, to try their hand at something without needing fancy tools to do so. And so we really provide a lot of background and support for people who are interested in in doing power research to be able to kind of approach it through some of the same tools that we use to do our research. So the database is definitely one really rich resource. And another is our mapping tool, Oligrapher, which, you know, is kind of a play on mapping the oligarchy. And Oligrapher is a part of the LittleSis.or database, it's an accompanying tool that users can use to build network visualizations of their research. And it's, you know, a way to kind of take the sometimes dense power research that is in the database and give it a new life and be able to really share it with larger audiences and on different platforms. So those are two tools that we have built specifically to support people in doing power research. We are also regularly creating research primers and releasing large datasets that we've compiled on topics, you know, ranging from how to research your local utility company to also researching university board ties to fossil fuel and weapons industries. And so creating these kinds of resources that can help a particular movement moment, you know, be able to kind of like tackle some questions that are coming up, is really important to us to be able to respond to the moment and share what we know about doing research. And those have been, I think, really successful points of entry for new people coming into the movement. And of course, a new addition to our repertoire this year is our research tools for organizers public training series, which we launched earlier this year, and is running this year through November. And it offers free monthly trainings on the hows and whys of power research. And it's very much designed to guide new and seasoned researchers through a kind of systematic approach to doing the kind of research that we do at our organization. These webinar trainings offer both practical how tos on using a variety of publicly available research databases and tools as well as sharing our analysis of power structure research, also sharing examples of research and action to inspire participants to think about how they want the research they're doing to inform organizing and strategy where they are. We've got trainings this year, ranging on topics from you know, how to research a nonprofit organization, how to research private companies, as well as public corporate corporations, and one that's coming up in July, on how to research billionaires, which is going to be really fun. And we've been doing some version of research tools for organizers for several years, and in a more semi-public form with some of the base building groups that we work with. And more recently at our organization, we've been thinking about how to kind of widen the audience for this work, which is really important to us — capacity building within our movements. And so we really want to take what we know works really well from this curriculum and share it more widely, so that we can ignite folks, amplify the research methods and tools, and, you know, we hope can like really help support short-term fights as well as our movements in the long haul. Because power research is, I think, such a critical kind of foundational set of strategy and information that I think can really help people get on the same page. So, you know, we see the training series as planting seeds across our movement ecosystems, like we don't know, what will germinate in the soil, but we know that there's a lot of desire and interest. We've had so far this year, hundreds of people come to each of the trainings. And we know that, you know, it is a unique contribution we can make to our movement ecosystems at this moment. And it's exciting for us because we don't know who we're going to meet in the room. And it really matters just to keep the offerings free and continue to think about ways to make them more accessible. So the public training that we've offered throughout the years have led to some pretty amazing campaign local campaigns and collaborations. And we just love knowing that we can support organizers to kind of layer these research skills on to what they already are working on in their local contexts.

Stephanie Luce 40:10
That's great. It's exciting. And we'll put the link to the trainings and the organization in the show notes. And I think what's exciting to think about is, you know, we know corporations, overdogs, elites are sometimes pretty sophisticated with their research because they have the money to do it, and they have the access. But I think, you know, I think we underestimate ourselves sometimes of the skills that we do have and can tap into. And that's what you guys are doing is

helping to lift that up, because we have a lot of talented people out there people who are able to develop their skills, and also people who have grounds-eye view to really important information, like what is going on in their workplace? Who knows better than workers on the front line, for example? So that's really exciting. So this episode of our podcast is focusing on studying the overdogs, and what can we learn from the overdogs? And I think so one of the things is, we need to take more seriously the research and the evaluation and get rigorous in it. And it's so great what you all are doing. We were also curious, have you learned things about how overdogs work in this work? Like, are there surprising things that you would share about how they function, these power networks?

Munira Lokhandwala 41:17
Yeah, that's a really great question. And I thought about this alongside my co workers, and everyone had some really great insights to share, so I'll try to bring all of those together. But I think one really important takeaway, I think, is remembering that the very thing that we know is the source of their power, which are these large networks, that they work really hard to maintain, you know, we can strategically use those networks against them. So power elites, and overdogs have relationships just like us. But theirs are networks of power that they make through their business relationships and positions and also positions in high society on like cultural academic boards, or memberships to professional and policy organizations, social clubs, etc. It can feel kind of daunting, right, to see these connections, and like wonder how it is that we're could possibly appeal to them, move them affect them in any way. But actually, every one of those connections is a relationship that has to be maintained for them to maintain their power. So where we can think about how to drive wedges between different factions of a power formation is where we can potentially have some leverage so and is a way that I think, you know, if something kind of impacts their image or draws too much negative attention to their business relationships or impacts their bottom line in any way — maybe causes others in their power networks or formations to pull away from them — we're having the impact of diminishing their power. So if we think about their large networks as an opportunity to come at their power, their reputation, their profits from many different angles, then we can imagine building long-term, intersectional issue campaigns to overpower them and move bigger than we are in a way and slowly chip away at their power. So researching their networks can help us turn the very source of their power against them. If we can't get them legislatively, maybe we can get them socially, find ways to tarnish their image or highlight conflicts of interest that can help undo long-standing alliances between them and other power elites. One thing, you know, we can, I think, learn from their strategy is their ability to band together, to call in favors with each other, to move resources quickly. I think we need to learn to not only identify our targets, but also our allies across movements. So there are so many common targets in our movements and being able to bring our fight together, we are stronger and more resilient to their opposition when we can learn from that and do that ourselves. So I'd say this is kind of an unexpected outcome of power research that we really embrace and want to kind of uplift in our work at LittleSis seeing how many campaigns are connected through their shared targets and entities that you know are driving policy in different ways.

Stephanie Luce 44:19
So, so that's fantastic. I think we have so much to learn from LittleSis and we're so grateful for you all as a resource. So it sounds like people can sign up for the online trainings. And that's one way to get connected. Their organizations can also outreach to LittleSis, are there other ways people can plug in with your work? What's the point of entry to LittleSis?

Munira Lokhandwala 44:41
Yeah, I think that database is definitely a really good point of entry. If you're really interested in the kind of methodology of the work that we do and understanding some of the key information that when you're doing research are important, because I think one of the things that can be really challenging about doing research is that you can kind of end up down these rabbit holes that are not actually that helpful. But I mean, some rabbit holes are helpful, but oftentimes they can kind of lead you astray. And so we really have designed the database in a way to encourage people to really capture the some of the key relationship information that can be really helpful. When groups reach out to us like small groups of people who are doing research together, we're always happy to offer coaching or advice or even

some kind of like less obvious tools or tools that are not necessarily publicly available, but might be available through other means. And so a point of entry is really just to send us an email, at info@LittleSis.org. We hear from a lot of different groups really from around the world who really just need a little bit of encouragement that they're on the right track. And we're always happy to get on the phone or get on Zoom and offer what we can. We're not always able to like support with research. But that's why we want to be able to feel these requests and at least get people started on the right track. So yeah, people should always reach out to us. We love knowing about who the work is reaching. So . . .

Stephanie Luce 46:15
Thank you so much. We really appreciate your time and we're so grateful for your work.

Munira Lokhandwala
Thank you.

Deepak Bhargava 46:31
It's great to have organizations like LittleSis doing this kind of deep research and teaching these skills to activists. We encourage you to check out their tools and trainings. And we can borrow some other tools from our opponents. In the appendix of *Practical Radicals* we include several we've already talked about. Tool eight, "Writing a Powell Memo for the Left," can help any group walk through the exercise we did with our students. Tool 18, "OODA Loops," helps us examine how our opponent thinks and to develop tactics that might confuse or demoralize them. Tool 29, "Lean Startup," can help us build experimentation and data into our work. And tool 17, the "tabletop exercise" is useful in mapping out how a campaign might actually play out and how different players and all sides of an issue could respond.

Stephanie Luce 47:20
I was surprised at how helpful the tabletop exercise was the first time I tried it. You have to be ready to take your role seriously and to think creatively about possible moves in a game because it's very easy to fall back on familiar tactics. The exercise is great for stimulating new ideas and anticipating the range of moves the opposition might make. Many organizations are starting to use scenario planning tools that group choose democracy just developed one called What do we do if Trump wins? This is designed to help groups explore detailed scenarios for what might happen if Trump wins so that you're better prepared emotionally and practically should that occur. We'll put a link to the tool in the show notes.

That's all for this penultimate episode of the Practical Radicals podcast. Join us next time for our final episode. We'll talk with former students and some leading progressive organizers about what we've learned since our book came out and how it's being used in the field by people actually changing the world. Here's movement strategist Lissy Romanow.

Lissy Romanow 48:28
I think is just a really, really hopeful time in the sense that a lot of organizers are now willing to innovate. The ones who have been oriented to mass protests are building deep organization, and the ones who've been building deep organization are reorienting to upsurge moments as opportunities for growth. So I feel like overall, it's really exciting that the movement is growing.

Deepak Bhargava 48:49
Practical Radicals is made possible with support from the Roosevelt Institute. Harry Hanbury and Peter Coccoma produced the series and Peter Coccoma is the series editor. Our theme music was composed by Christian Perez Yates and performed by Trio Gafas. Additional music was by Christian Perez Yeates. Join us next time for more practical and radical strategies to change the world.