Negotiation power and agenda design

In an entrenched situation, how can you help get people to the negotiating table?

In a difficult or protracted dispute, it can be very hard for the parties to agree to meet and discuss a possible resolution – especially if there is a power imbalance.

These people might find it hard to get these people to sit down at the negotiating table.

These people might benefit most from a negotiation...

...but these people might have more to lose, and prefer to keep things as they are.

To resolve their differences, should they propose an agenda that starts with easy issues, or with the more contentious ones?

Recent research shows that these people are more likely to come to the table if you offer to talk to them about substantive or difficult issues first.

...and these people are more likely to agree to a meeting if you offer to talk to them about less contentious issues first.

So think about the agenda that you propose for your first meeting, depending on the other party's perception of how much power you each have.

The first meeting is the hardest to initiate – but if successful then trust can start to build, and the perceived power imbalance might reduce.