

## ARTICLE 2022



# Literature Review of Protest Movement Outcomes

## Summary

- There is **strong evidence** that protests or protest movements can be effective in achieving their desired outcomes in North America and Western Europe, specifically within issues of civil rights, climate change, and social welfare.
- There is **strong evidence** that protest causes positive effects on public opinion, public discourse and voting behaviour (i.e. inline with the demands of the protestors). However, effects of protest on policymaking and policymakers are more mixed. Specifically, impacts of protest on policy seems **highly context dependent**, on factors such as existing political structures and current public opinion.
- In the studies we examined, there were **noticeable impacts on electoral outcomes as a result of protest activity**. Across four natural experiments, effect sizes on voting behaviour have been found to be between 1 - 6 percentage points, depending on the particular movement.
- **The effect sizes of protest on public opinion is small, yet significant**. Shifts of roughly 2-10% per protest movement for support or salience of an issue have been found, through both natural experiments and experimental conditions. However, the metrics used to measure public opinion differ quite a lot, so this range isn't an ideal representation of the true effect sizes. **We think the natural experiments studying voting behaviour add significantly to this evidence**, as it reveals true preferences rather than stated preferences, and is a reliable indicator for shifting public attitudes.
- **There is limited but reasonably strong evidence to show the impacts of protest movements on public discourse**, specifically media coverage or internet search volumes. For instance, sustained interest in novel discourse put forward by Black Lives Matter has been observed a year after the protest event, and shown to be up to 10x larger than pre-protest activity.
- **There is weak and mixed evidence that protest can influence policy**. There is some experimental evidence to show that it can influence policymaker beliefs, yet the impacts on policy seem to depend on the particular issue. Additionally, findings suggest this impact is likely mediated by influencing or amplifying public priorities.
- Whether protest influences political attitudes, or it simply amplifies existing public preferences is contested, with various studies lending support to both arguments.
- For countries in the Global South, there is very little research into protest outcomes, so **generalising these findings to other regions is quite tenuous**.

- The evidence for short-term and medium-term change is much stronger than the evidence for long-term change. This is largely because research designs that are able to make causal inferences are almost necessarily short-term. Research using experiments or quasi-experimental designs largely examine short-term or medium-term effects. **There is currently very little literature on the long-term impacts of protest on public opinion or public discourse.**

## Summary Table

Below, we represented our findings in a table format, with our various findings and the associated confidence we have in each finding. Confidence ratings are based on the proportion of methodologically robust (according to the two reviewers) studies we found supporting the claim. Low = >60% agreement in published studies, but less than 10 relevant studies; Medium = >60% of studies in agreement with >10 studies, or >80% of studies in agreement but <10 papers; Strong = >80% of total studies in agreement, and >10 studies. Short-term refers to time scales below 2 years and long-term refers to time scales over 30 years. To note, we believe that some papers were much more methodologically convincing than others, either due to breadth of protest movements studied, or the use of a convincing research design, but our summary table below treats all papers as equal. Whilst not reflected here, we did update more strongly on the more methodologically robust studies. Also, our categorisation is somewhat arbitrary, but we think it is appropriate given the small evidence base in the field of protest outcomes.

Finding	Confidence
Protest movements can have significant short-term impacts (on public opinion, voting and public discourse)	Strong (82% agreement, 37 studies)
Protest movements can achieve intended outcomes in North America and Western Europe	Strong (82% agreement, 37 studies)
Protest movements can have significant impacts (1-6 percentage point shifts) on voting behaviour	Medium (100% agreement, only 5 studies)
Protest movements can positively influence public opinion ( $\leq 10\%$ shifts)	Medium (~70% agreement, 12 studies)
Protest movements can influence public discourse (e.g. issue salience and media narratives)	Medium (100% agreement, only 6 studies)
Protest movements can influence policy or policymaker beliefs	Low (~70% agreement, only 7 studies)
Protest movements can have unclear but potentially positive long-term impacts on public opinion and voting behaviour	Low (weak agreement, 2 relevant studies)

## Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>1</b>
Summary Table	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Methodology</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. Literature Review</b>	<b>7</b>
3.1 Voter Behaviour	7
3.2 Public Opinion	9
3.3 Public Discourse and Media Coverage	18
3.4 Policy and Legislator Behaviour	22
3.5 Corporate Behaviour	26
3.6 Broad outcomes	31
<b>4. Limitations of the existing research</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>5. Conclusion</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>6. References</b>	<b>34</b>



## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this Literature Review is to summarise and evaluate the evidence surrounding the impacts of protests in order to improve the judgments of philanthropists and inform Social Movement Organisations. It is also intended to evaluate the potential of protests as a tool in the arsenal of the Effective Altruist community, where little attention has so far been paid to protest activity. Our research aim is to investigate the impact of protest activity on the following:

- Voter Behaviour
- Public Opinion
- Public Discourse and Media Coverage
- Legislator Behaviour and Policy
- Corporate Behaviour

Previous reviews into the literature (Amenta et al 2010; Giugni 1994, inter alia) on the consequences of social movements have not been intended to evaluate Social Movement Organisations and the protests that they carry out as a potential philanthropic opportunity. In addition, we are unaware of any significant attempt by Effective Altruists to evaluate whether protests are likely to be effective in influencing the outcomes that we have identified, and believe that this work provides value to the Effective Altruist community.

In conducting this literature review, we prioritised including modern, empirical research that used experimental or quasi-experimental methods, and had clear causal identification strategies. The majority of the literature examined protests relating to climate change, immigration, civil rights, or racism. Almost all of the literature we reviewed examines protests that occurred in developed countries (especially the United States, where much of the research on the impact of protests is conducted), and future research could assess the literature on protests and Social Movement Organisations in developing countries.

## 2. Methodology

The social science literature on protests and Social Movement Organisations (SMOs) is large. There is a substantial amount of theoretical literature and empirical literature, spanning political science, sociology, and other disciplines. We concentrated on newer, empirical research related to the following:

- The impact of protest on voting behaviour.
- The impact of protest on public opinion.
- The impact of protest on public discourse and media.
- The impact of protest on legislator behaviour and policy.
- The impact of protest on corporate behaviour.

It is worth noting that our Literature Review was intended to be representative, in that it would cover all the relevant literature related to the outcomes we were interested in, regardless of the finding. However, it is not exhaustive of all protest outcome literature as we focused on research with the following traits:

- Modern, empirical research that used experimental or quasi-experimental methods and had clear causal identification strategies.
- We were less likely to include articles that were related to theoretical developments. Our focus was on empirical literature that was specifically looking at the impact of protest.
- Focused on countries similar to the contexts we are interested in, which is largely Western democracies (e.g. the UK, the US and countries in Western Europe). Therefore we excluded all research studying the overthrowing of autocratic regimes in the Global South (e.g. Stephan & Chenoweth, 2008).
- Relatively recent protest movements, to provide more generalisability to the current social, political and economic contexts. Whilst we did include several papers on the Civil Rights Movements (1950s United States), most papers we included were focused on movements from the 1990s onwards.<sup>1</sup>
- Research from both highly relevant journals (such as *Mobilization* and *Social Forces*) and top political science and sociology journals (such as *APSR* and *ASR*), as well as using tools like Elicit to find relevant research in other journals.
- We mostly (but not exclusively) focus on the outcomes of large protest movements with at least 1,000 participants in active involvement.<sup>2</sup> This is because we want to understand the impact that protests *can* have rather than the impact that most protests *will* have.

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<sup>1</sup> We included papers such as Wasow (2020) and Mazumer (2018) due to their particularly interesting findings, and methodologies used.

<sup>2</sup> By “actively involved”, we mean people are attending in-person demonstrations, donating, going to meetings or otherwise participating in the movement.

It is worth noting that our Literature Review was not intended to be representative but not exhaustive. That is, to find relevant research that both had strong causal identification strategies and was broadly in line with the literature as a whole.

Because we were particularly interested in figuring out the extent to which protests and SMOs have an impact at all, we were less interested in the literature discussing theoretical developments and those engaged in disputes and discussions over methodological choices. For instance, we did not delve into *Resource Mobilization Theory* or the *Political Mediation Model* – while there have been important developments in the study of social movements, our focus is on evaluating protest as a potential intervention. Our time constraints meant that we were especially interested in research that was likely to have been demonstrating a causal effect of protest, rather than just an association between protest and a given outcome variable. Empirical research from the last few years was prioritised for inclusion.

We also had the opportunity to interview six academics who have studied protest and SMOs extensively. We for their views on the most important and influential research that may not have been on our radar. We prioritised the inclusion of papers that were mentioned as being particularly important and/or influential by multiple academics.

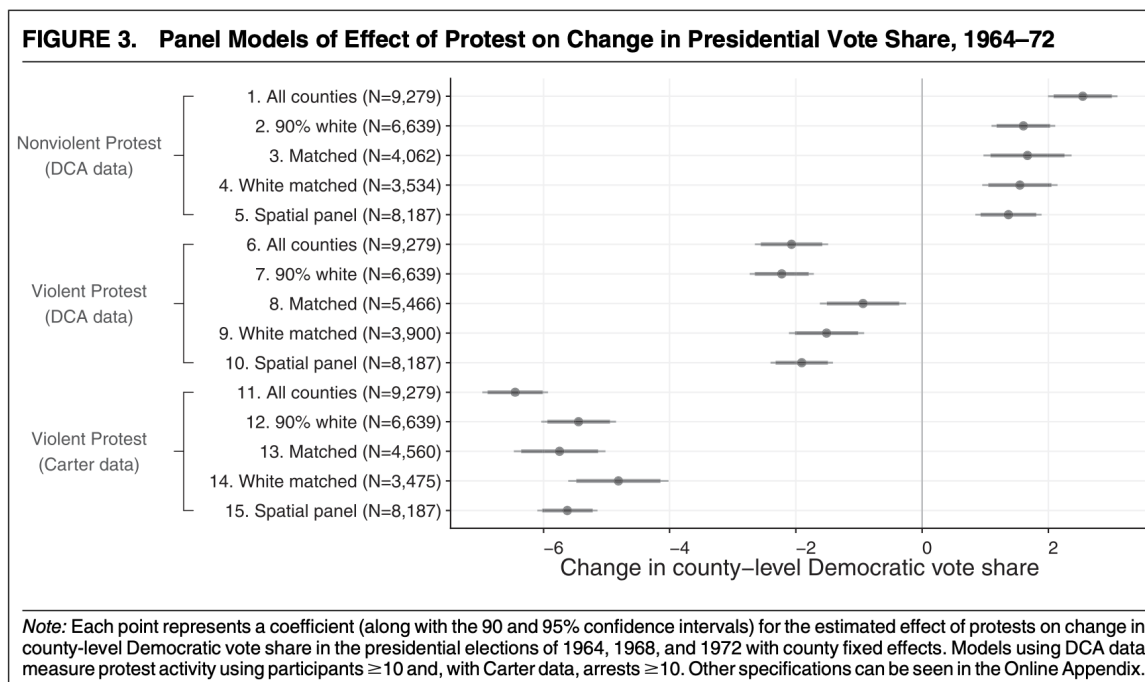
## Search Methods

There were some journals that were obviously particularly relevant to our research that we searched in specifically, such as *Mobilization* and *Social Forces*. Similarly, top political science and sociology journals (such as *American Political Science Review* and *American Sociological Review*) were searched more extensively than other, smaller journals. To find research in other journals, we used a range of tools such as Elicit, Research Rabbit, and Google Scholar. Keywords and phrases that we used included 'Protest Outcomes', 'Impacts of Protests', 'Protest Effectiveness', and more (forthcoming in future Appendix).

We were also given access to an [unpublished analysis](#) (Kenward & Brick, forthcoming) of the literature on protest movements, which we made use of to find relevant research that we hadn't found through searching journals or using other tools. We also performed a citation search - we both looked at the reference lists of useful research we had found in order to find other relevant research as well as looking at other research that had cited articles that we had found - this was useful for identifying articles in journals that we hadn't already searched in.

### 3. Literature Review

#### 3.1 Voter Behaviour



*Figure 1 - The findings from Wasow (2020) on the effect of violent/non-violent protest on voting behaviour during the Civil Rights Movement.*

Wasow (2020) examines the effect of non-violent and violent protest during the American Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. By looking at US counties that are similar on a number of dimensions (black population, foreign-born population, whether the county is urban/rural, etc.), Wasow is able to mimic an experiment by testing how the Democratic vote share changes in counties with protests and matching counties without protests. The results are informative for thinking about the effect of protest on voting behaviour: a 90% white county that was exposed to a non-violent protest had a 1.6 percentage point higher Democratic vote share relative to a 'control' county that was not exposed to a non-violent protest. Conversely, a 90% white county that was exposed to a violent protest had a 2.2 - 5.4 percentage point decrease in Democratic vote share - the change in county-level Democratic vote share can be seen in Figure 1.

Madestam et al. (2013) look at the effect of the 2009 Tea Party protests (a right-wing movement within the Republican party) in the US, and their effect on Republican vote share in subsequent elections. Their study used rainfall as an exogenous variable that would alter the attendance of the protests: more people are likely to attend a Tea Party protest on a day with no rainfall, and fewer people are likely to attend on a day with more rainfall. This means that the rainfall acts as a randomisation process and we can



compare Republican vote share in counties where there was a rainy protest (with less people) to the counties where there was a protest in good weather (with many more people). The effect here is that the Republican vote share is 1.04 percentage points higher in counties that had protests with no rain compared to counties that had protests *with* rain, suggesting that greater turnout at Tea Party protests did lead to an increased Republican vote share. The mechanism suggested for this is that greater attendance at the initial launch protest led to a stronger movement overall, with a higher number of organisers in areas that had low rainfall, as well as greater donations towards the Tea Party. Additional measures that changed in areas of low rainfall were greater likelihood of expressing support for the Tea Party, by 6 percentage points, as well as higher appearances of media coverage. The authors conclude that in this case, protests were instrumental in influencing political views, as opposed to only revealing existing political preferences.

Methods involving rainfall as an exogenous source of protest variation are fairly common - Teeselink and Melios (2021) use the same technique to analyse the effects of Black Lives Matter protests in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd in 2020, finding that a one percentage point increase in the fraction of the population going out to protest increased the Democratic vote share in that county by 5.6 percentage points. Given that protest turnout was just under 0.5% of the national population, they estimate there was a 1.6 to 2.8 percentage boost of the Democratic vote share as a result of BLM protests. The authors also find that protests didn't lead to a significant rise in turnout, rather it's more likely that protests lead to a progressive shift amongst undecided voters. Based on data from the Cooperative Election Study that studies public perceptions of discrimination and racial advantage, the authors find statistically significant effects of the BLM protests in shifting public attitudes. This finding therefore adds some weight to the claim that protest can be a significant factor in shifting public attitudes, in concordance with Madestam (2013) above.

In one of the few papers examining the long-term impacts of social movements, Veigh, Cunningham & Farrell (2014) examine the long-term impact of the Klu Klux Klan (KKK) on voting behaviour in the Southern US from 1960 to 2000. They find that four decades later, after controlling for various potential confounding variables, that counties with high levels of Klan activism had a 3.4% higher Republican vote in 2000 compared to non-Klan counties. It's important to note that the authors caveat that they do not believe the KKK was exerting influence on voting in 2000 even after its collapse in the 1960s. Rather, they claim a more likely mechanism for this result is that KKK activism in the 1960s "dislodged voters from preexisting party loyalties, and contributed to restructuring of network ties that would reinforce the link between segregationist

preferences and Republican voting over time.” Broadly, they believe this impact was mediated by voter behaviour, rather than being a direct impact of the KKK’s actions.

All of the studies above on protest or protest movements impacting voting behaviour have been focused on the United States, indicating a gap in the field for research into the impact of protest on electoral outcomes elsewhere in the world. Bremer et al. (2019) somewhat remedies this, by conducting a study looking at the impact of protest on electoral outcomes in Europe, across 30 countries, from 2000 to 2015. Specifically, they wanted to test whether there was any relationship between protest and performance in elections after the Great Recession of 2008. They found that whilst no such relationship existed for all 30 countries, in Western Europe did find a statistically significant interaction between protest, levels of economic hardship in a country and the loss of votes for the incumbent party. The authors found that protest might have played an amplification effect, highlighting the level of “economic misery” in a country, leading to a statistically significant reduction in votes for the incumbent party. It seems that for a given level of economic hardship a country faces, if the number of protests increase, the incumbent political party will lose more votes, as shown in Figure 2 below.

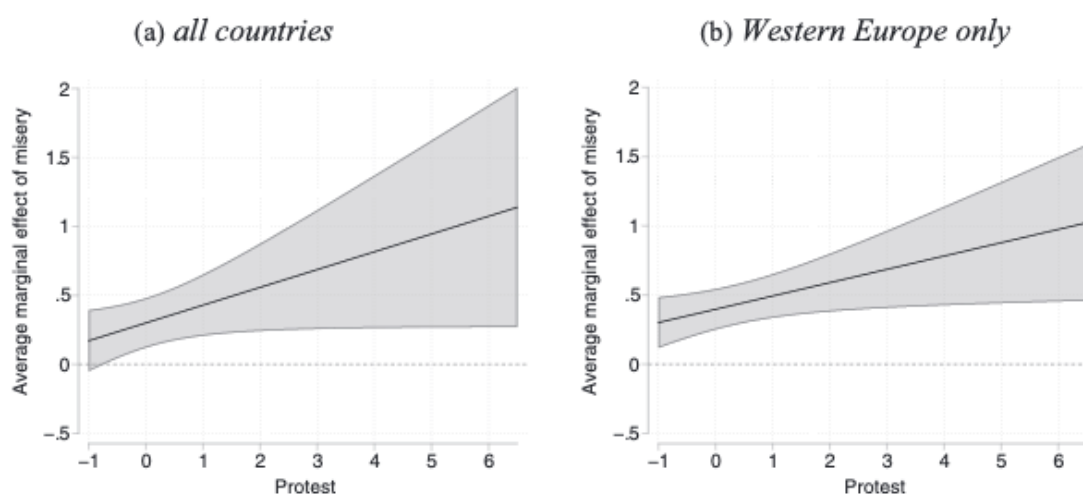


Figure 2 - The findings from Bremer et al. (2019) on the effects of protest. “Economic Misery” is formed from an index of the change of unemployment, change in GDP and change in national debt.

### 3.2 Public Opinion

Whether protest can have an impact on public opinion is an important question for figuring out the impact of protest more broadly, as the impact of protests on legislators and its ability to influence policy is likely to be at least partially mediated by the impact of protest on public opinion. A meta-analysis by Burstein (2003) examines the relationship between public opinion and policy change. He finds that in 75% cases of

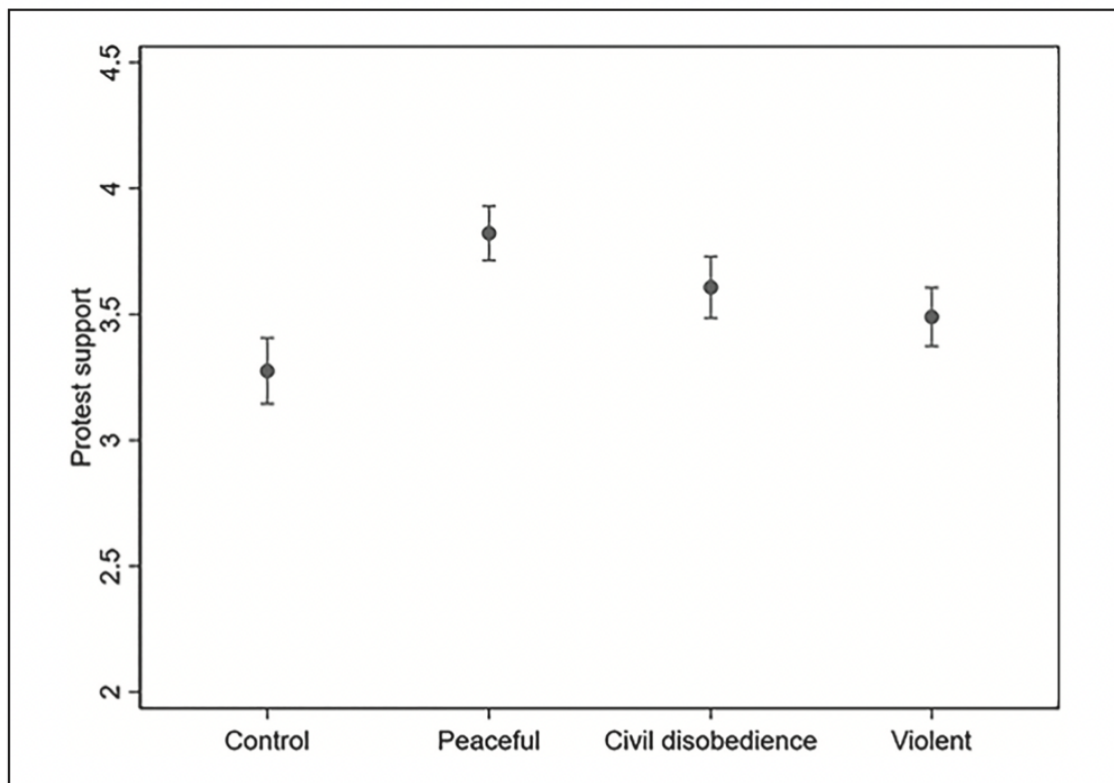
policy change, public opinion plays a statistically significant role. Furthermore, he identifies almost 50% of these as of substantial policy importance, indicating this is also true for policies with larger effects. Whilst this was done across a variety of policy areas, from social welfare to rights to business, this analysis was focused on US public opinion and policy from the 1950s to 2000s, so its generalisability is limited. In particular, the generalisability is probably the strongest for similar Western democracies, rather than countries with radically different cultural or political norms.

Now knowing that legislators are responsive to changes in public opinion, *if* it is the case that protests are able to significantly impact public opinion, they are also likely to be able to impact legislators and policy making. The impact of protest on public opinion may also be important in and of itself - even if a protest isn't immediately successful in affecting legislator behaviour, a shift in public opinion may lead individuals to make changes that have other positive outcomes, such as influencing industries and corporations to make changes that will appeal to consumers, and leading to more people becoming involved with whatever issue it is that people are protesting about.

Whilst not included in this section, we think natural experiments from the previous section that study voting behaviour are a strong indicator of shifting public opinion (Wasow, 2020; Teeselink & Melios, 2021; Madestam et al., 2013). This is because voting behaviour highlights [revealed preferences](#) of the public, rather than stated preferences, and is a hard-to-fake signal of shifting public attitudes.

Starting with the experimental literature measuring public opinion directly, Bugden (2020) conducted an experiment in which members of an online panel from the United States were placed either into a treatment group or a control group, with the treatment group being assigned to read a series of mock news reports about a climate protest. There were three different types of protests shown to respondents – the protest was either a violent protest, a protest involving civil disobedience, or a completely peaceful protest. The results can be seen in Figure 2: respondents who were surveyed after the intervention were most likely to say that they were supportive of the protest if they had been assigned to the ‘peaceful protest’ group. There is not a significant difference in means between the group who were shown violent protest and the control group. Bugden also broke down the effect of the intervention by political party affiliation - while Democrats and Independents were responsive to the intervention, Republican respondents’ opinions on the protest did not change after reading the mock news reports, indicating that there is an interaction effect between party Identification and responsiveness to protest. In addition, Bugden finds that civil disobedience and violence don’t result in decreases of support for the protest, indicating that there is no “backfire”

effect, as some other studies suggest when more extreme tactics, such as violence, are used.



*Figure 2 - The results of Bugden (2020) - respondents who were shown a news report about a peaceful protest were most likely to support the protest.*

Feinberg et al. (2020) carry out several experiments to test the reactions of citizens to extreme protests. In one experiment, participants read about a fictional animal rights organisation, and the movement's protest behaviour was manipulated so as to represent three levels of extremity - the actions were presented either as a moderate protest (e.g. peaceful marching), an extreme protest (e.g. breaking into an animal testing facility), or a highly extreme protest (e.g. breaking into an animal testing facility and drugging a security guard). There was no control group in the first two parts of this study, which means we can't compare the results to that of Bugden (2020) above, but respondents were significantly more likely to say they would support protesters in the moderate protest group than protesters in either the extreme or highly extreme protest groups. The average support (on a five point scale) given by respondents in the moderate group to protesters was 3.28, compared to 2.64 for extreme protesters and 2.57 for highly extreme protesters ( $p < 0.001$ ).

Overall, Feinberg et. al finds that in 5 out of 6 studies, extreme protest tactics led to study participants supporting the movement's central issue less, which raises some

concerns about the use of extreme protest tactics. However, Feinberg et al. notes that prior research has shown the effectiveness of extreme protest in applying pressure to institutions (Biggs & Andrews, 2015) and gaining media coverage for an issue (Sobieraj, 2010; Myers & Caniglia, 2014), which presents, as he calls, *an activist's dilemma*: Whilst extreme protest actions can be effective in applying pressure to institutions and raising awareness of an issue, it can also lead to reduced public support for the issue. The authors also touch on several limitations and open questions raised by this paper, with a key one being: When do protest actions become “extreme”? This is a crucial question to understand how a certain protest might impact public support, and the authors note this is likely to be different in various contexts due to historical protests in that country. For example, the Civil Rights Movement in the US was predominantly peaceful, which might have created a strong norm in the US for peaceful protest. Similarly, as the authors find immorality judgements are the drivers of survey respondent's beliefs, there may exist highly disruptive actions that are perceived as moral by the wider public. Another question to explore further is the existence of the “radical flank” effect, in which actions by a more extreme organisation can increase support for more moderate organisations working on the same issue (Chenoweth & Schock, 2015).

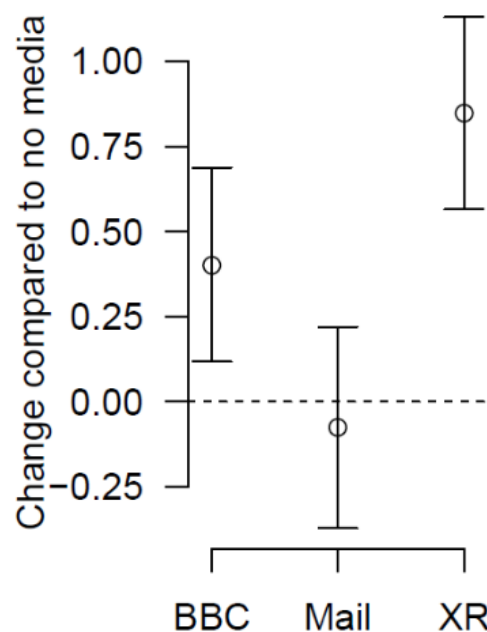


Figure 3: Impact of media reports on respondents' views about whether disruptive civil disobedience is necessary to force government action on climate change

Kenward and Brick (2019a), whilst still unpublished, used an experimental design to analyse how people respond to protests covered by different media sources. During Extinction Rebellion protests in London in 2019, participants were either presented with a BBC News report about the protests, a Daily Mail report about the protests, a report



from Extinction Rebellion about the protests, or no report about the protests at all. Both the BBC Report and the Extinction Rebellion report caused increases in respondents' beliefs that 'disruptive civil disobedience is necessary to force government action on climate change and ecological breakdown', and the Daily Mail report had no effect on respondents' beliefs about the necessity of disruptive civil disobedience (see Figure 3 above). On the question of whether respondents would be willing to engage in civil disobedience themselves, the Extinction Rebellion report had a statistically significant (although small) effect, whereas there was no significant effect from either the BBC report or the Daily Mail report. However, this study finds no evidence for increased environmental concern after exposure to the media articles, for all of the various media outlets.

This work highlights the medium by which protests can have impacts on public opinion, by garnering neutral or positive media coverage. Specifically, the Daily Mail articles had a more negative representation of Extinction Rebellion protests, the BBC being fairly neutral, and Extinction Rebellion's own media being the most favourable. As the reach of protestor's own media will be limited relative to mainstream media, this highlights the importance of garnering positive articles in mainstream media outlets about the issue of the protest. In addition, there was no statistically significant "backfire" effect observed in this experiment, despite the perceived disruptive tactics of Extinction Rebellion, namely blocking roads. Whilst not explicitly tested in this study, this adds some evidence that disruptive or extreme tactics don't always lead to a reduction in support for the cause, although the mechanism in this case is not obvious.

One limitation of Feinberg et al. (2020) and Bugden (2020) is that they both make use of an experimental vignette design, where study participants are presented once with a hypothetical situation and asked to record note various sentiments. Kenward and Brick (2019a) use a very similar design, exposing participants to one case of media about protests, however in this case they use real media articles rather than hypothetical situations. Using these methods, there is a question of ecological validity, as the ways in which a member of the public might encounter a protest event could be drastically different to these study designs, as often highlighted by the authors. As noted in Feinberg et al. (2020), "Using controlled settings in this way also removed much of the real-world context that might shape activists' choice of protest behaviours and observers' responses to those behaviours."

Specifically, it's very plausible that in reality, the public would be exposed to protest events repeatedly, potentially over a period of several days or weeks, or via different mediums, from social media to mainstream media. Exposure to content might only have a small effect in the short-term, but this might accumulate and increase in size

over time if the exposure is repeated (Funder & Ozer, 2019). In addition, as found by Kenward and Brick (2019a), the effect on members of the public is dependent on the news outlet covering the protest, which adds additional complications. Finally, it's possible that exposure to a disruptive or extreme protest (and questions about their level of disruptiveness) will cause participants to answer more negatively towards questions of their support for the protest, whilst they might subconsciously have increased concern for the issue, or support the policy demands of the protestors to a greater deal. Therefore, it would be useful for further experimental or observational studies to test this in greater detail, by focusing on the aims of the protestors rather than support for the protest itself, as this is ultimately what most protestors care about.

In the only study that conducts nationally representative surveys immediately before, during and after a protest, Kenward and Brick (2019b) used survey data from DeltaPoll to analyse the changes in public attitudes due to 10 days of Extinction Rebellion protests in London in April 2019. This study uses a longitudinal design, where the same panel of nationally representative participants are surveyed before, during and after the protests have occurred. Before the protests, 5% of respondents said that they strongly supported civil disobedience by environmental campaigners, and this increased by 4 percentage points in the aftermath of protests, a statistically significant result. In addition, concern about climate change increased significantly after the protests took place, shown in Figure 4 below. This is interesting to note as Kenward and Brick (2019a) finds that although there was no increase in environmental concern after a single exposure to a protest event via a media article, a sustained protest campaign over 10 days did lead to a statistically significant increase in public concern around climate change. This lends some evidence to the importance of repeated exposure in changing beliefs, as well as questioning the validity of experiments with single exposures.

However, this study also suffered from high levels of attrition, which may be a cause for concern. There were 863 participants who took part in the Before survey, 540 in the During phase, and 442 completed the survey after the protest, for an overall attrition rate of 47%. It's not clear if this attrition was differential i.e. the participants that dropped out were the least likely to positively update their beliefs based on exposure to climate protest, however, this factor still limits the conclusions we can draw from this specific study.

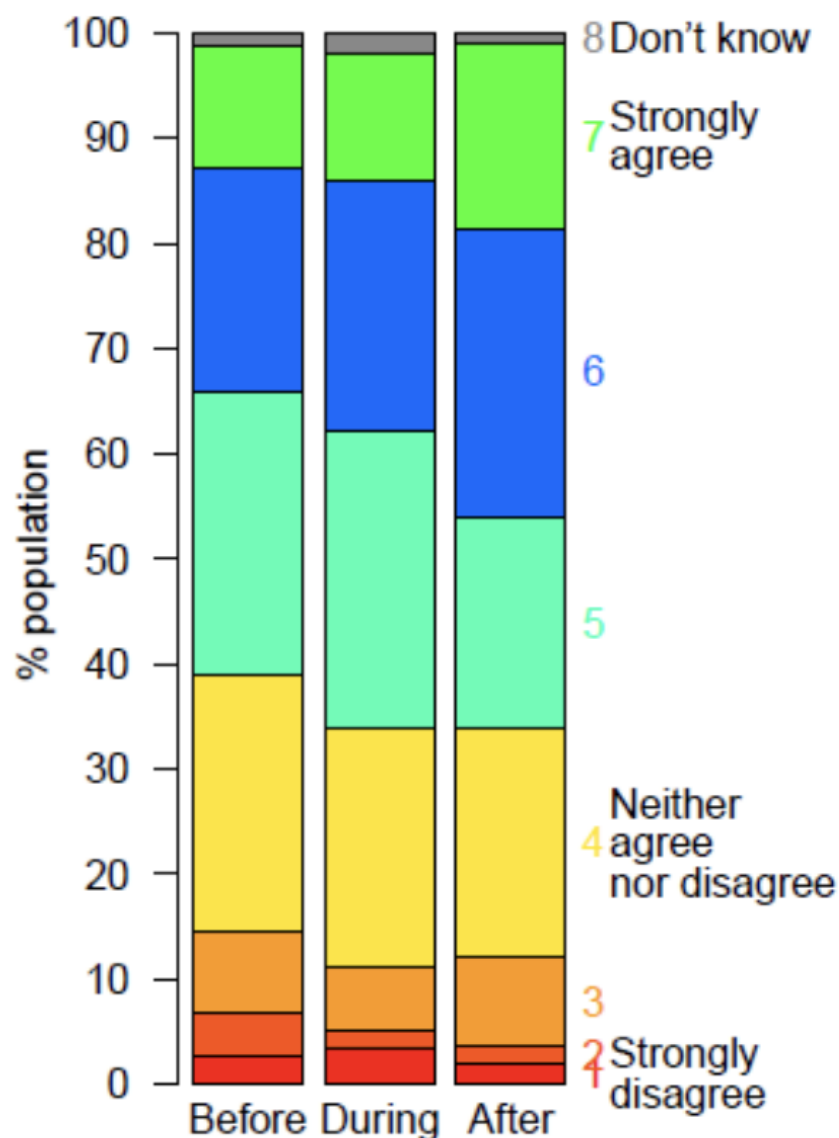


Figure 4: A sustained period of climate protest is found to increase public concern for the climate crisis (Kenward and Brick, 2019b). The question shows results from an average of three items, with the overall construct being 'Concern about the climate crisis'.

In one of the few papers looking at long-term changes in public opinion due to protest, Mazumder (2018) looks at the impact of the 1960s US Civil Rights movement on public opinion among white people in the US in 2006-2011, over 40 years after the Civil Rights movement actually took place. The data on public opinion is taken from the Co-operative Congressional Election Study and measures racial resentment, asking whether respondents agree with 2 statements: 'The Irish, Italians, Jews and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors' and 'Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for Blacks to work their way out of the lower class', and finds an association between US Civil Rights protests and lower levels of racial

resentment. The finding is that counties that had Civil Rights protests have significantly lower levels of racial resentment - the equivalent of moving from the South to the Midwest. Controls such as the county's urban population, the vote share of the Democrats in the mid 20th Century, and socioeconomic and demographic covariates are already included in the regression.

However, a re-analysis of Mazumder's work by Biggs et al. (2020) shows that when controlling for level of college education, the effect that Mazumder finds is cut in half, with 8 out of 9 of the combinations of outcome variables and protest measures being no longer statistically significant. As Mazumder's work was one of the main pieces of evidence for long-term impacts of protest on public opinion, understanding the long-term impacts of social movements remains as a key open question in the field.

Motta (2018) found that mobilisation can polarise public opinion, although the study only covers one set of rallies by scientists called the 'March for Science'. Motta sent out surveys to 428 respondents before and after the March for Science, and tested whether their views on statements like 'Scientists care less about solving important problems than their own personal gain' changed after the rallies occurred. Using a difference-in-differences design, Motta found that people who identified as liberals became more trusting of scientists after the rallies, whereas people who identified as conservatives became less trusting of scientists after the rallies. It should be mentioned that the external validity of this study is likely to be low - the United States may have a specific tendency towards polarisation, and views about scientists in the US may be different to other countries. However, polarisation is a potentially real consequence of protest which can have positive and negative characteristics (Kleiner, 2018; Piven, 2018; Ravndal, 2017). The topic of polarisation and other potentially negative consequences of protest will be explored in greater detail in further research.

A study by Carey et al. (2014) analysed the views of Latinos living in the United States on immigration before and after a series of protests in 2006 drawing attention to the hardships suffered by undocumented immigrants in the United States, in response to proposed sanctions on undocumented immigrants and people who assisted or employed undocumented immigrants. The study, conducted in a natural experiment fashion using the Latino National Survey which took place just before the protests, concludes that the protests were highly effective in increasing the salience of immigration among Latino voters. The authors noted that respondents surveyed after the protests took place were significantly more likely to regard immigration as the most important issue, and respondents who lived in an area where a protest took place were significantly more likely to prioritise immigration as an issue in comparison to respondents who did not live in an area where a protest took place. This study shows

that protests, in this case, were successful in shifting public opinion and raising salience of an issue in a specific constituency, which is often an intended goal of protest movements. Branton et al. (2015) studies the same event and finds similar results: that protests increase the salience of an issue in the public, leading to shifts in public opinion towards the position of the protestors.

A similar study by Wallace et al. (2014), also looking at effect of the 2006 immigration protests on the views of Latinos in the United States, with a focus on how much the protests influenced Latinos' views about their capacity to have an impact on government - interestingly, the causal impact of small protests on opinions seemed to be very different to the impact of large protests - the number of small protests near a respondent was associated with feeling that they were able to impact government, but the number of large protests near a respondent was associated with the feeling that they *weren't* able to impact government. It may be that Latinos who attended or were near to mass protests were more exposed to counternarratives and thus resulted in Latinos becoming more sceptical of their capacity to effect change.

Winkelmann et al. (2021) propose a complexity-based framework for understanding how social movements can trigger social tipping points in political systems. They claim that Fridays For Future, the youth climate movement which was especially popular in Europe, has been pushing the European political system towards a tipping point, at which point the system "will be propelled into a qualitatively different state". The authors note that "The specific upward shift in Germans viewing the environment as an important problem appears to coincide with the large-scale protests organised by FridaysForFuture in March, May and September of 2019.", although, present no causal evidence for this claim. They discuss the fact that it is rarely one actor that is responsible for the entirety of a tipping process, but rather a network of various actors and mechanisms, where a fuller account is required to understand the specific contributions of various actors. The authors remark that in this case, Fridays For Future (and the other actors) weren't sufficient to push the German political system to the point of criticality in this case, and that "a series of additional social movements and protests, or other shifts within the system or the environment, may be required."



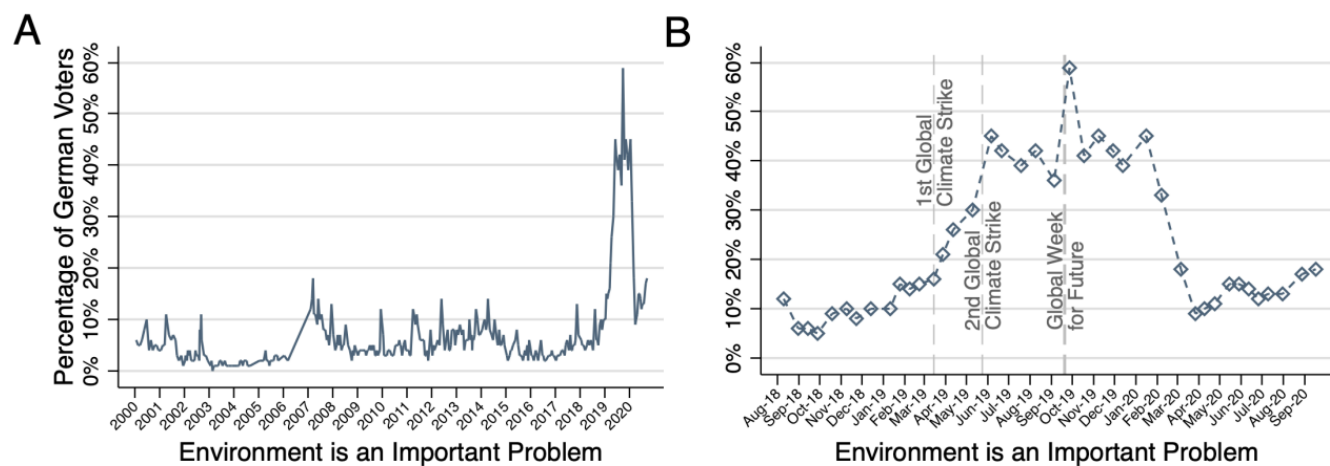


Figure 5: Percentages of potential German voters that list the environment as an important issue for the country and willingness to vote for the Green Party (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) if the election were to be held "today". Panel (A) presents monthly survey data from 2000 to September 2020. Panel (B) displays monthly surveys from August 2018 – September 2020, showing the change since the beginning of Greta Thunberg's protest actions. Dotted grey vertical lines display days of global strikes organised by FridaysForFuture in March, May and September 2019. Data is collected by Forschungsgruppe Wahlen: Politbarometer. Source: Winkelmann et al. 2021)

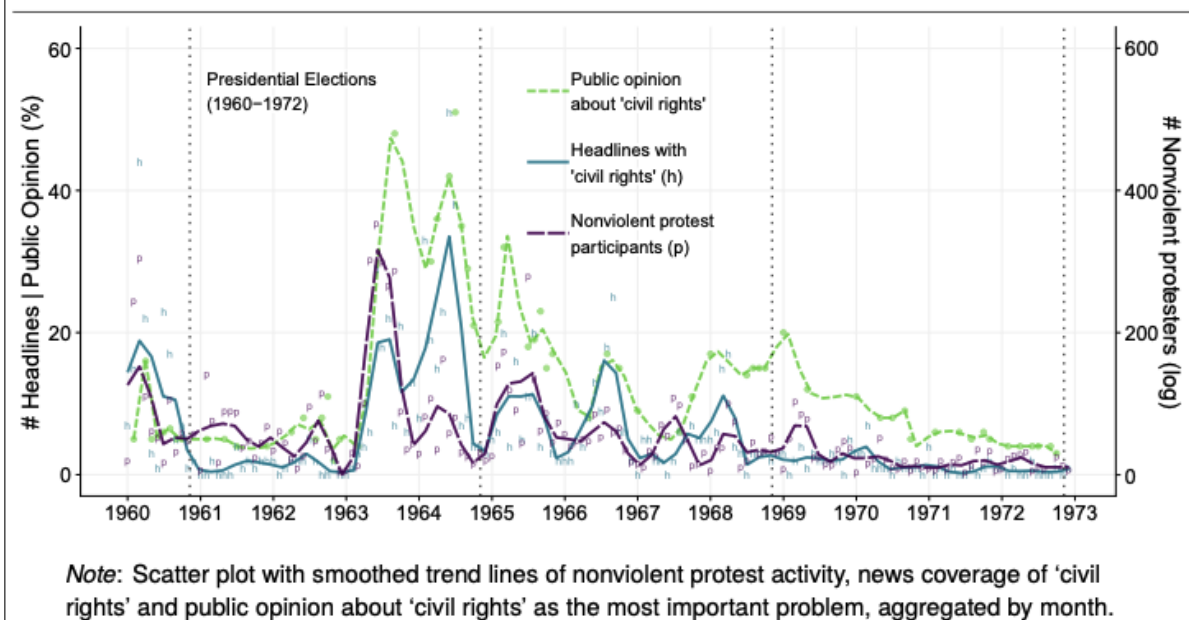
### 3.3 Public Discourse and Media Coverage

In the book *World protests: A study of key protest issues in the 21st century*, Ortiz et al. (2022) claims that protest movements have had a significant impact on public debate, pointing to the Occupy Wall Street protests in the United States against economic inequality in 2011, which popularised the phrase 'We are the 99%', the UK Uncut Protests against corporations' tax practises, which led to renewed public debate about tax avoidance, and the #MeToo movement in 2017, which encouraged women around the world to raise the issue of gender justice and fight for women's rights (Ortiz et al. 2022, p. 71). Whilst this book doesn't present particularly strong evidence that protests can influence public debate, there are papers that lend support to this hypothesis.

Wasow (2020) examines the relationship between nonviolent protest activity and front page headlines and Congressional Speech during the 1960s Civil Rights movement. By examining 274,950 frontpage headlines between 1960 and 1972 across major US newspapers, he estimates the 'agenda seeding' power of protest. Not only does he find that moments of heightened protest activity are correlated with increases in civil rights related headlines, but that nonviolent protests are highly predictive of front-page headlines and Congressional speech in following days. He uses bivariate Granger

causality tests to identify a causal relationship between nonviolent protest and increased media coverage of civil rights. He also finds that elite opinions drive media coverage, consistent with previous models of elite influence.

**FIGURE 6. Nonviolent Protest Activity, Headlines & Public Opinion on 'Civil Rights,' by Month**



A key question is whether protests can have sustained effects on public discourse, rather than moments of heightened attention on an issue. Dunivin et al. (2022) finds that Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests from 2014 onwards generated attention to BLM and related concepts even after the protests had ceased. Specifically, by analysing information across Google Search volumes, news items, Wikipedia page visits, and other sources, the authors find that BLM increased discourse in a way to “engender lasting changes” around novel ideas pushed by the movement, such as systemic racism. Specifically, the authors find that daily visits to the Wikipedia pages for “systemic racism” is 5.5 times greater six months after the George Floyd protests, relative to the previous year. They also find this to be true for visits to “Black Lives Matter”, which is 10x greater, and “prison abolition”, which is 1.6x greater. Further information on the impact of the George Floyd protests on specific search terms and outlets can be seen in Table S6 of the [Supplementary material](#). The graphs below also highlight the impact on news media and Google Search volume. However, the authors note that this study does not draw a causal link between street protest and changes in public discourse, as it is an observational study that evaluates the changes in trends over time. Whilst the amplification of antiracist discourse might lead to political change further down the line, this isn't guaranteed, and neither is the impact that BLM specifically had on changes in public attention.

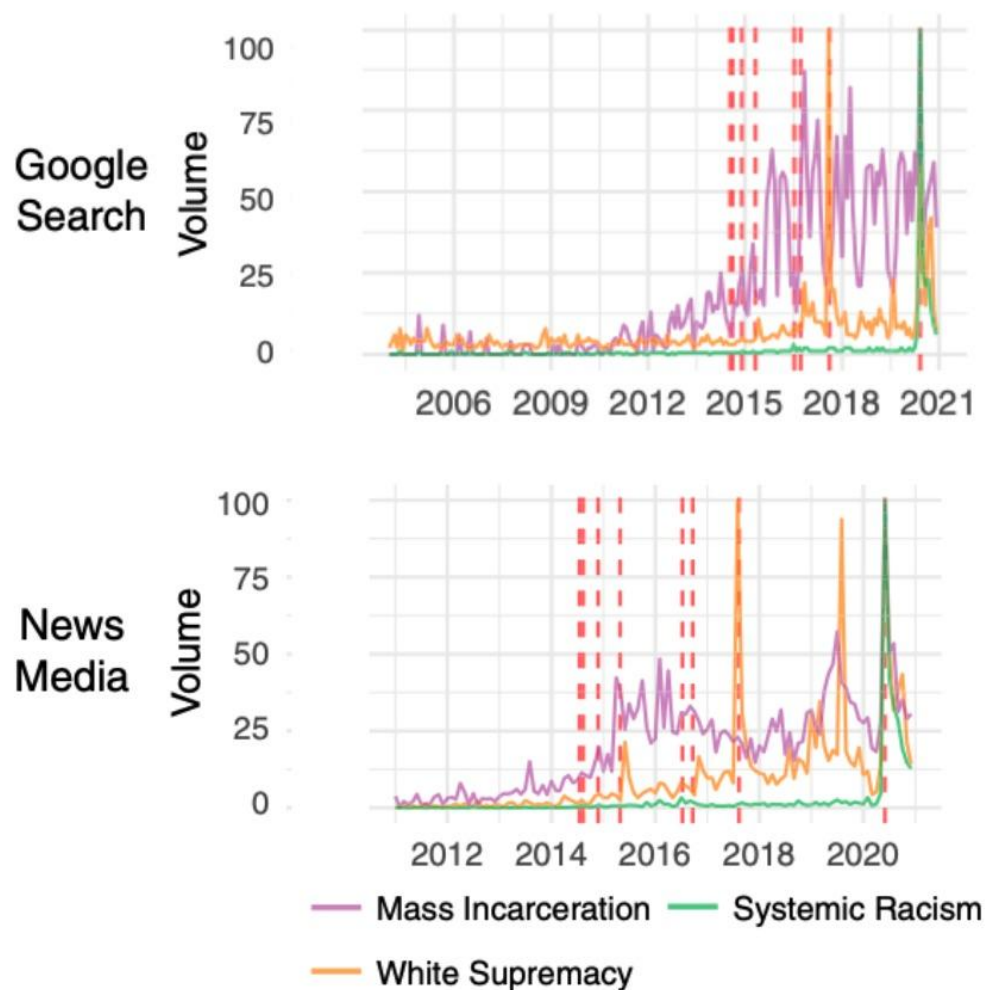


Figure 7: Trends in the use of selected antiracist terms that were specifically used by Black Lives Matter. Google Search volume is normalised from 0-100, rather than being absolute values. News media volume is given by national news articles mentioning each item. Red dashed lines correspond to major BLM protest events.

Walgrave and Vliegenthart (2012) evaluate the agenda-setting impact of protest in Belgium, for 25 issues that occurred from 1993-2000. They find that protest frequency and frequency size has causal and statistically significant impacts on newspaper coverage, and protest size has a statistically significant causal influence on TV appearances. However, they also note that seemingly the most important factor that determines media agendas is past media agenda, i.e. what has been covered in the news in the past days or weeks. Despite this, they also find that the media plays an intermediary role for protest events influencing legislative agendas.

Beyeler and Kriesi (2005) examine the empirical evidence from protests targeting the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and World Economic Forum (WEF), finding that the time and location of the protest is a key factor in its success in garnering attention from national media - the strategic staging of protests *during* an international summit is likely to draw extra attention to the actions and positions of the protesters. Another factor in the success of protests at getting attention from media organisations is the proximity of the summit to the country of the media organisation - for instance, protests in India received more attention from media when happening during a WTO Conference in New Delhi (Beyeler and Kriesi 2005, p. 102).

Smith et al. (2001) finds that media coverage of a protest is more likely to advance protestor's aims if the media covered the protest as 'thematic' (relating to a certain theme that persists over time, such as inequality or racial injustice) rather than 'episodic' (relating to a specific event, such a particular instance of racism). If a protest received thematic coverage, it was more than three times more likely to receive coverage that was friendly to the protesters (as opposed to pro-authority or neutral) in comparison to episodic media coverage. Interestingly, Smith et al. found that stories that mainly relied on neutral or authority sources rather than protesters as sources were four times *more* likely to be thematic, meaning that stories relying on movement sources exhibited characteristics that worked against the interests of the protesters (Smith et al. 2001, p. 1414).

Media coverage is important to protest success in affecting policy, but the causal pathway from media coverage to legislator action may not be as straightforward as the media covering protests and that coverage inducing legislative action. Vliegenthart et al. (2016) look at how the effect of protest on legislation is mediated by the media in six Western European countries. They find that there doesn't seem to be a *direct, unmediated* effect of protest media coverage on legislator agenda. Instead, the media serves a dual mediating role: the mechanism by which protest affects policy-making is that the media covers protests, and then the coverage of the protest leads to further coverage of the underlying issue in their output that is not directly related to the protest. They find that there is a correlation between protest activity and questions asked in parliament. They also find that when general media coverage of the issue is added to the model, the effect of coverage of the *protest* entirely disappears. However, the coverage of protest itself leads to more coverage of the issue - a one percent increase in the news coverage of protests relating to a particular issue, the wider coverage of that issue will increase 0.014 percent.

### 3.4 Policy and Legislator Behaviour

Wouters and Walgrave (2017) perform an experiment in which they showed vignettes to 269 elected representatives in Belgium, vignettes containing a news story about protests on the rights of asylum seekers. After exposure, representatives were asked about how salient they perceived the issue in the news story to be, their position on the issue, and their intended actions on the issue. Their experiment showed that there was an effect of being shown the vignette - legislators who had seen the vignette were more likely to say the issue was high salience, more likely to take a position closer to that of the protesters, and more likely to say they intended to take action on the issue.

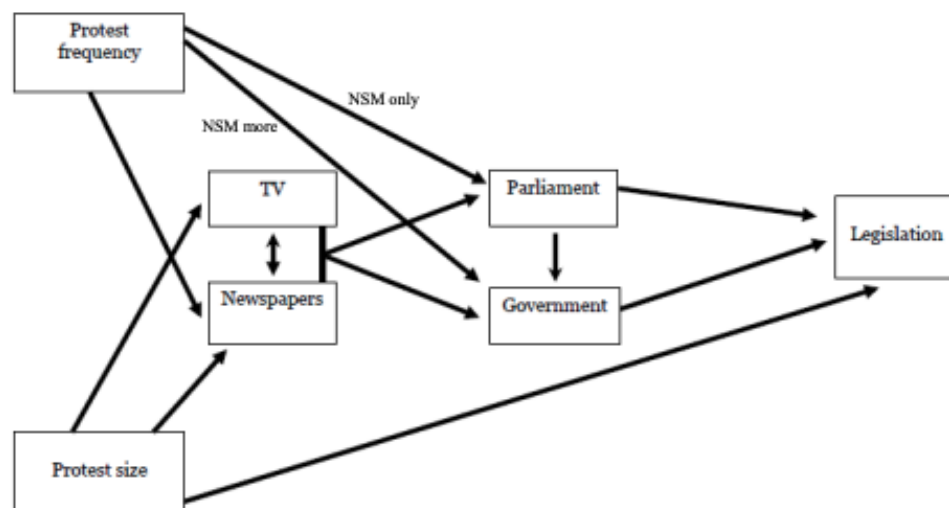
There is a puzzle about why SMOs would ever affect legislator behaviour - if electoral representatives are incentivised to respond to public opinion, why would they care about the actions of SMOs instead of the opinion of the general public? Lohmann (1993) asks the same question, stating 'it is puzzling that rational policy leaders with majoritarian incentives would ever respond to political action'. Burstein and Lipton (2003) try to address this question - they analyse 53 articles in the top sociology and political science journals, finding a slightly counterintuitive result: SMOs seem to have more impact on policy when public opinion is controlled for - this is slightly surprising because it might be expected that controlling for public opinion may make correlation between SMO activity and legislative behaviour weaker, with public opinion being a confounder. It should be noted that while they analysed 213 coefficients, only 21 of those coefficients were in equations which included public opinion, so we should remain sceptical of how much we can learn from this analysis, and the authors of the study note that because so few political scientists and sociologists have controlled for public opinion, a more in-depth analysis is needed to really understand this relationship (p. 396, Burstein and Lipton 2003).

One model for explaining the causal pathway is the Amplification Model, proposed by Agnone (2007) - the impact of public opinion is amplified by protest by raising an issue's salience for legislators. Looking at environmental laws in the US, Agnone finds that the correlation between the number of environmental protests and the number of laws passed relating to the environment is highly significant even when controlling for public opinion, media attention, a lagged dependent variable, and the extent to which other environmental advocacy is taking place. Agnone also finds an interaction effect between the number of protests and public opinion - public opinion is more likely to be correlated with the number of laws passed if there are also protests taking place, suggesting that protests may amplify public opinion to affect legislator behaviour.

Building on this, Walgrave and Vliegthart (2012), observe both direct and indirect effects of protest events on policy when studying the agenda-setting impact of protest



in Belgium, for 25 issues that occurred from 1993-2000. Using a large data-set of 3,839 demonstrations, 1,198 pieces of legislation and 180,265 news items, they find statistically significant and causal relationships where protest size and protest frequency influence legislation. As seen below in Figure 8, the indirect impacts of protest events can be mediated via both TV and newspaper coverage, as well as having direct impacts on Parliament and legislation.



Notes:  $p < .05$ ; all arrows indicate significant effects.

Figure 8: A causal diagram of the impact of protest on political agendas, by Walgrave & Vliegenthart (2012).

Hutter and Vliegenthart (2016) also add weight to the agenda-setting effects of protest. They examine four Western European countries and find that political parties respond to protests that are well covered by the media. Additionally, parties in opposition are more likely to be responsive to protest than parties in government, and parties are more likely to respond to protest if other parties have already responded to the relevant issue.

McAdam and Su (2002) look at the impact of protest on voting in the United States Congress during the Vietnam War - finding that highly disruptive protests against the Vietnam War resulted in members of Congress being more likely to vote for pro-peace measures, but that the pace of voting decreased (in other words, the disruptive protests depressed the rate of which both the House of Representatives and the Senate considered pro-peace measures). The opposite was true of large non-disruptive protests (over 10,000 protesters), which *increased* the pace of voting but decreased the number of pro-peace votes.

However, when Bernardi et al. (2020) analyse the effect of protest on legislative agendas, they find that protest generally does not have any direct effect on legislation, and also argue against the Amplification model in most circumstances. Although short-term and long-term interaction effects between public opinion and protest exist, the authors conclude that they are not significant. That being said, they do find a direct effect of protest on legislation when the issue is social welfare, where protest seems to be an important source of information to legislators, and they find an interaction effect between protest and public opinion on the issues of educational, housing, and unemployment issues - so the Amplification model may apply to a specific set of issues. These results are highlighted below in Figure 9. It's worth noting here that the effect of public opinion as expressed through surveys on legislator behaviour appears to be much stronger than the effect of public opinion as expressed through protest on legislator behaviour.

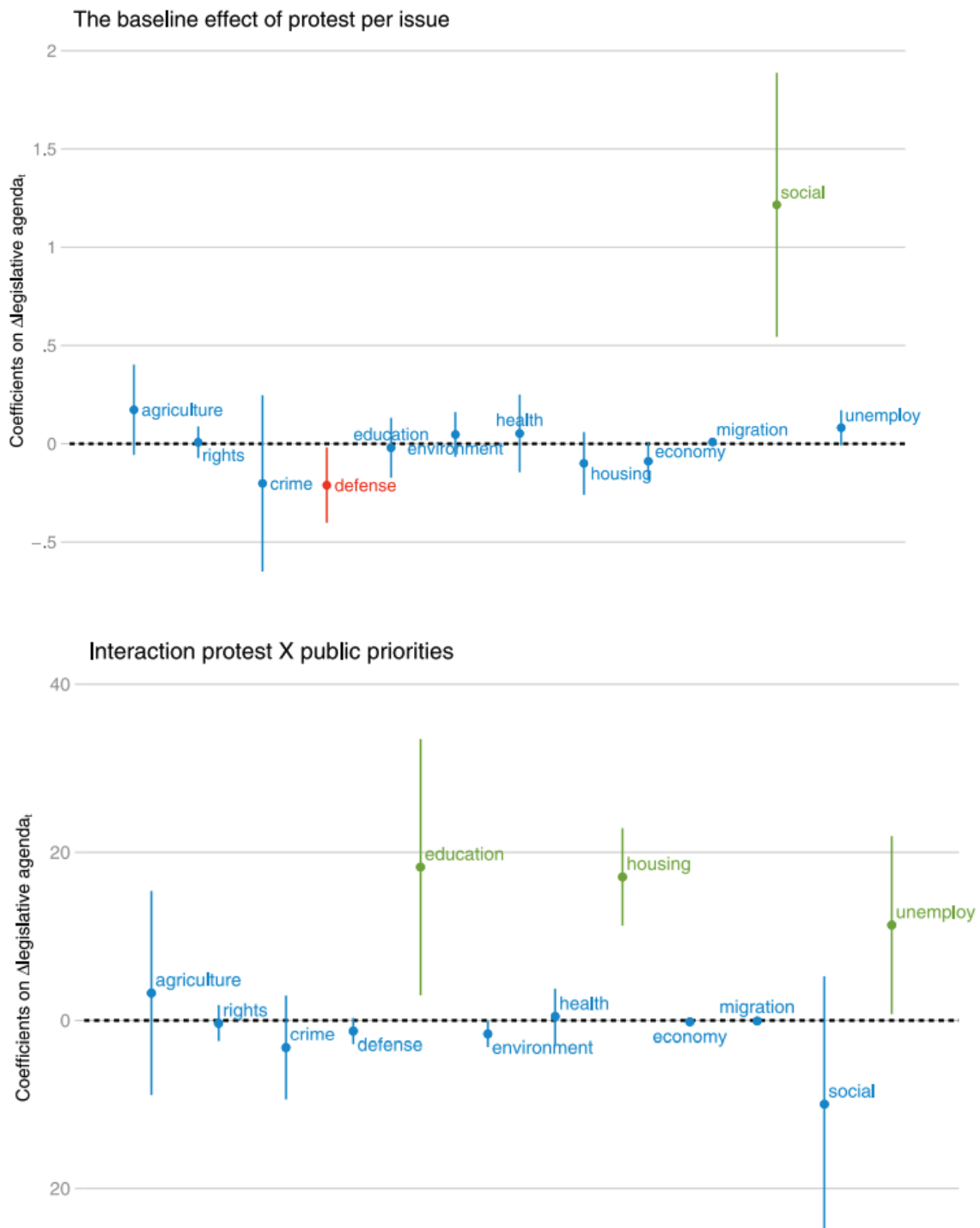


Figure 9: The direct and indirect effects of protest on various policy issues across 4 European countries. Source: Bernardi et al. (2020)

Additionally, Muñoz, Olzak & Soule (2018) provide some evidence that protest may have limited direct impact on policy, by examining the impact of environmental protests in the US on policy and subsequent CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from 1990-2007. Using CO<sub>2</sub> emissions

across all 50 US states, the authors find that social movement mobilisations lead to reduced CO2 emissions, although they cannot explain clear mechanisms for this finding. Interestingly, they find that carbon emissions are reduced even when controlling for the number of environmental policies (amongst other factors), suggesting the influence is happening via changes in corporate behaviour, the actions of individuals or another unknown mechanism.

### 3.5 Corporate Behaviour

Gulliver, Fielding & Louis (2021) analyse the impact of the Stop Adani campaign in Australia, a civil resistance campaign targeted at stopping the construction of a coal mine. Although the campaign ultimately failed in influencing the national government to stop the coal mine project, they later conducted partially successful targeting of business to withdraw their support for the Adani mine. This tactic, referred to as secondary targeting, constitutes social movements targeting the pillars of the support of the primary target, in this case the Adani corporation. For example, the Stop Adani campaign targeted banks lending money to the project, engineering firms supporting the construction, insurers doing the underwriting, and so on. The results of this secondary targeting can be seen in Table 2 below. Whilst this secondary targeting was reasonably successful, by pressuring 63 (out of 145 targeted) companies to commit to not working with the Adani corporation, ultimately the Adani corporation was able to find the necessary partners for each stage of their project.

COMPANY SECTOR	NUMBER OF COMPANIES		NUMBER OF CIVIL RESISTANCE ACTIONS
	TARGETED	WON (%)	
Finance	60 (41%)	46 (77%)	62
Construction and engineering	48 (33%)	12 (25%)	96
Insurance	34 (23%)	4 (12%)	
Coal haulage	3 (2%)	1 (33%)	4
Total	145	63 (43%)	160

*Table 2: Success rate for secondary targeting of supporting industry for the Adani Corporation, by the Stop Adani campaign in Australia.*

In the same monograph by Gulliver, Fielding & Louis (2021), they study the impact of the Australian Divestment movement, from 2015 to 2019, on garnering commitments by companies to divest their investments from fossil fuels. Interestingly, despite that the Divestment movement only targeted 36 specific organisations, they garnered over 235 divestment commitments. In addition, the majority of these divestment announcements

were made by superannuation funds, which is the equivalent to pension funds, which control significant amounts of money. The authors note that the number of divestment commitments drastically outpacing the number of specific activist campaigns suggests there are other factors influencing institutions to divest, again indicating it's challenging to draw a cause-and-effect relationship between protest and desired outcomes. A table of the outcomes, split by organisation type can be seen in the Appendix. Analysis from both case studies in this monograph leads the authors to conclude that civil resistance campaigns have higher rates of success against corporate targets, relative to government or government entities.

Additional literature on divestment campaigns by the climate movement yield further insights into the impact of protest movements on corporate behaviour. Bergman (2018) reviews the academic and grey literature to provide some analysis on the potential impacts of the climate divestment movement on policy, public discourse and financing of fossil fields. The author concludes that the direct impacts of the divestment movement on fossil fuel financing seems to be small, there are significant impacts on public discourse. Specifically, the authors note increased attention towards the legitimacy, reputation and viability of the fossil fuel industry might lead to long-term material damage to fossil fuel corporations. Additionally, this cultural impact has seemingly led to investors raising concerns with fossil fuel investments, and some funds underweighting fossil fuels to account for their relatively short-time horizon.

[Grady-Benson and Sarathy \(2016\)](#) catalogue a list of student campaigns to divest from fossil fuels in the United States, noting that high profile institutions such as Stanford University and the New School have committed to fossil fuel divestment. They conduct very brief case studies into the fossil fuel divestment campaigns at Prescott College, Pitzer College, and Unity College. It was noted that in the Prescott College decision, the Board of Trustees was convinced due to a 'carbon bubble' argument rather than a moral argument, indicating that highlighting the financial damage that failing to divest could cause was a key factor in the success of the campaign. On the other hand, the decision of Pitzer College to divest was based on the moral imperative rather than a cost-benefit analysis. The table below shows the successful student campaigns that the authors identify.



Table 1. College and university divestment successes.<sup>a</sup>

College	Endowment size (estimated)	Motivations for FFD (according to press releases)
1. Hampshire College	\$31,795,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with values of social and environmental responsibility</li> <li>• Previously established Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) policy</li> </ul>
2. Unity College	\$13,500,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with values</li> <li>• Power of educational institutions to take a stand against FFCs</li> </ul>
3. Sterling College	\$1,000,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expect minimal harm to endowment</li> <li>• Alignment with values</li> <li>• Long-term endowment stability</li> </ul>
4. College of the Atlantic	\$30,000,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student leadership and empowerment</li> </ul>
5. Green Mountain College	\$3,400,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with values</li> </ul>
6. San Francisco State University	\$51,200,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with sustainability clause</li> </ul>
7. Foothill-De Anza Community College District	\$33,000,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with values</li> <li>• Expect minimal harm to endowment</li> <li>• Long-term endowment stability</li> </ul>
8. Naropa University	Unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with values</li> <li>• Expect minimal harm to endowment</li> <li>• History of socially responsible investment</li> </ul>
9. Peralta Community College District	Unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with values</li> <li>• Providing for future students</li> </ul>
10. Prescott College	\$460,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with values</li> <li>• Long-term endowment stability</li> </ul>
11. Pitzer College	\$125,000,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alignment with values</li> <li>• Expect minimal harm to endowment</li> <li>• Part of holistic climate action plan</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup>The information in this table is derived from press releases and divestment announcements from the respective colleges based on victories as of April 2014 (Grady-Benson 2014).

*Table 5: A list of successful student fossil fuel divestment campaigns, as included in Grady-Benson and Sarathy (2016).*

That being said, many universities outright rejected calls for fossil fuel divestment (or ignored them), often citing the costs, the lack of impact that divestment would have, and the risks associated with fossil fuel divestment. Predictors of whether a college is likely to divest include the institutional values of the university and the size of the endowment (with colleges with smaller endowments being more likely to divest).

[Carpendale \(2022\)](#) of *Animal Ask* analyses the literature on Efficient Market Hypothesis and its plausible implications for the impact of divestment in the context of animal suffering. In theory, divesting from publicly traded stocks will make little difference to the fortunes of a company, as other traders will exploit the divestment by buying stock in the undervalued companies. This potential problem with divestment is also expressed in Hunt et al. (2016). Carpendale concludes that the evidence generally suggests that divestment results in short-term decreases in stock price, but that there is

little evidence of any direct long-term impact, which is consistent with Efficient Market Hypothesis. That being said, that does not rule out *indirect* impacts, in which the act of divestment acts as a stigmatisation process.

In fact, Carpendale claims that there is moderate evidence that divestment can be successful in stigmatising companies, although this may be less effective than other methods of reducing animal suffering (partially because people may overestimate the importance of the direct effect and underestimate the importance of the indirect effect). These other methods may include campaigning for legislative change, or personal changes in animal product consumption. A potential theory of change, including both indirect and divestment impacts are highlighted below in Figure 9. Carpendale concludes that the evidence for divestment as a potential activist strategy is weak relative to other strategies, although we should not conclude that it is necessarily *ineffective* (the evidence is mostly weak on account of the low number of attempts to isolate the causal impact of divestment). He also notes that with regards to animal consumption specifically, divestment on environmental grounds may lead to any reduction in the consumption of large animals being replaced by the consumption of smaller animals, which may result in more animal suffering.

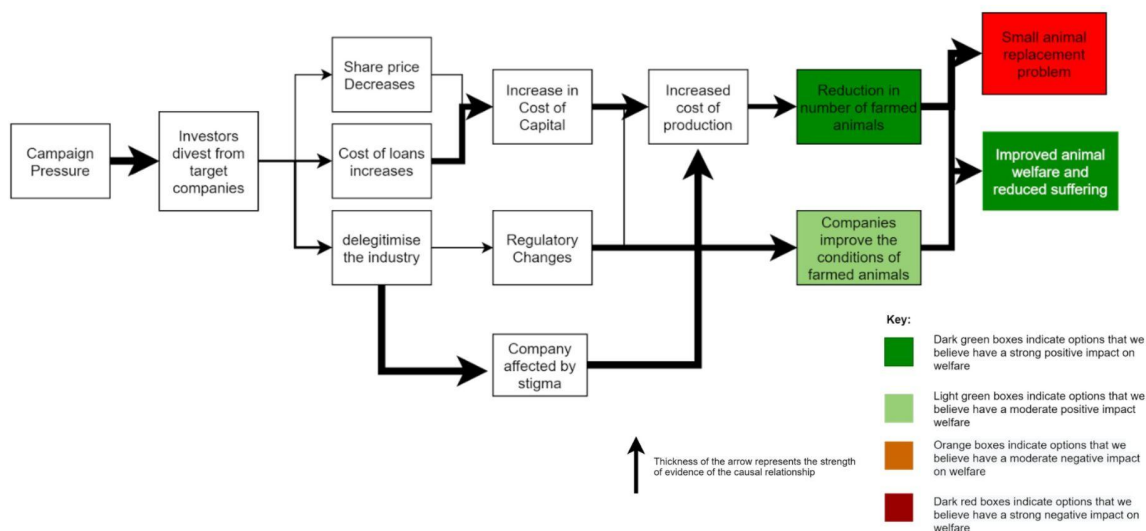


Figure 9: Mapping the direct and indirect impacts of divestment campaigns, in the context of animal advocacy. Source: [Carpendale \(2022\)](#)

[Braungardt, van Den Bergh and Dunlop \(2019\)](#) also review the arguments for and against institutional divestment campaigns. They find that whilst it's unlikely to have a direct impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, divestment can contribute towards increasing support for climate policies in the medium to long term. Additionally, they indicate that the divestment movement might have added political

and social pressure that led to recent successful climate policy, such as the Paris Climate Agreement.

Focusing more on the direct impact of fossil fuel divestment, Anser, Caldecott & Tilbury (2013) look at the impact of divestment campaigns on the valuation of fossil fuel assets. They find that the direct impacts are limited, due to the relatively small pool of funds that could be affected and the unlikelihood of fossil fuel company share prices declining significantly. However, they do conclude that stigmatisation of the fossil fuel industry, which has been successfully initiated by the divestment movement, poses a significant threat. This threat largely materialises through firms that receive heavy criticism having a reduced number of suppliers, subcontractors, employees and customers to do business with. In addition, governments and politicians might be less likely to engage with companies with bad reputations for fear of tarnishing their own. In addition to stigmatisation, the authors conclude that divestment campaigns have generally succeeded in passing restrictive legislation that suppresses demand for certain products, such as what happened with tobacco in South Africa, and could happen with carbon taxes.

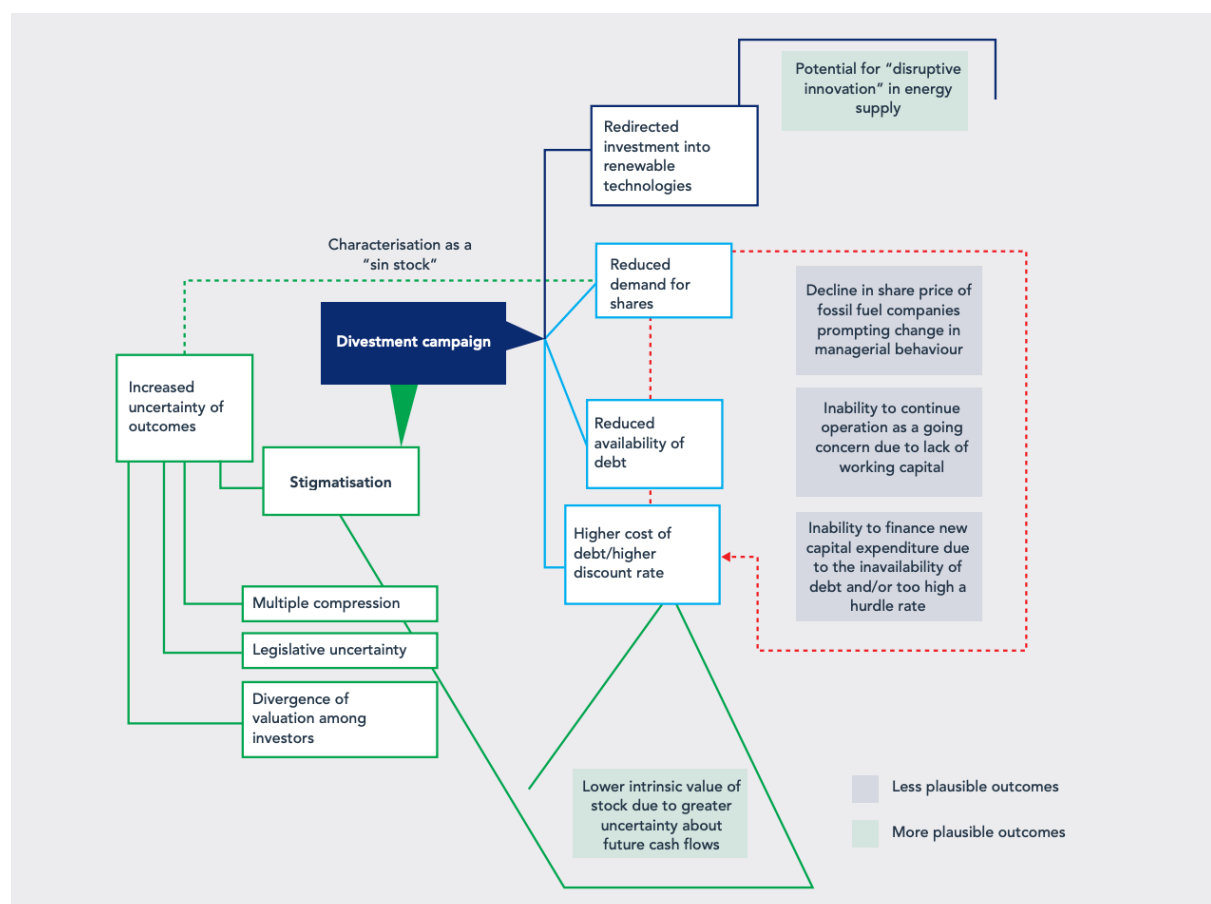


Figure 9: Mapping the direct and indirect impacts of divestment campaigns. Source: Anser, Caldecott & Tilbury (2013)

McDonnell et al. (2015) use longitudinal data to analyse the extent to which activism against harmful corporate practices results in corporations adopting 'social management devices', strategies developed by corporations to assist a firm in managing its social strategy and showing a commitment to socially responsible values. The results suggest that the total number of activist challenges faced by corporations is significantly linked to the likelihood that corporations will disseminate a (Corporate Social Responsibility) CSR report and institute a CSR Board Committee.

### 3.6 Broad outcomes

Gulliver, Fielding & Louis (2021) analysed information about 193 climate change campaigns in Australia from 2017-2020 who engaged in civil resistance. After gathering data about their initial stated aims, they evaluated the level of success these groups had in achieving their aims, categorising them as unsuccessful, partially successful, successful, or unknown. They found that 24% of the 193 analysed achieved successful outcomes, with 18% achieving partial success, and 25% being unsuccessful. The results are shown in Table 1 below.<sup>3</sup>

After categorising the intended targets of the campaigns, they found that groups that had the most measurable success were campaigns that target industry, with success rates of 31% (9 out of 29). Overall, they found that most campaigns targeted political change (100 out of 183), with 28% (28 out of 100) of these campaigns achieving success. It's important to note that the authors don't evaluate the extent to which the campaign actually influenced the outcome, meaning it's not possible to draw a causal link between civil resistance and campaign outcomes in this case.

CAMPAIGN OUTCOME	TOTAL CAMPAIGNS N (%)	TARGET					
		Political N (%)	Individual N (%)	Business N (%)	Unknown N (%)	Community Group N (%)	Health/Education N (%)
Successful	46 (24%)	28 (28%)	7 (17%)	9 (31%)	2 (11%)	-	-
Partially Successful	34 (18%)	19 (19%)	4 (10%)	9 (31%)	1 (6%)	-	1 (50%)
Unsuccessful	49 (25%)	35 (35%)	3 (7%)	2 (7%)	8 (44%)	1 (50%)	-
Unknown	64 (33%)	18 (18%)	28 (67%)	9 (31%)	7 (39%)	1 (50%)	1 (50%)
Total	193	100	42	29	18	2	2

Table 1: Gulliver, Fielding and Louis (2021) evaluate the outcomes of civil resistance campaigns against climate change in Australia, from 2017-2020.

<sup>3</sup> The full list of all campaigns, outcomes, and links to evidence for the assessment of outcomes is available online at: <https://osf.io/f8pys/>.

## 4. Limitations of the existing research

Some limitations of the research we've covered, in addition to what we've written in-line, include:

1. Most of the literature on the impact of protests is likely to study protests that are perceived to have been particularly effective or otherwise noteworthy, meaning that the average effect size found in the literature is likely to be larger than the genuine effect of the median protest. Similarly, due to [publication bias](#), we are much more likely to find studies that find statistically significant results rather than studies that find no impacts.
2. The experimental studies we have included suffer from concerns around ecological validity: it is unclear whether exposure to media articles in a controlled setting is a sufficiently close proxy to public exposure to protest in the real world. Therefore, whilst experimental studies show strong causal links, it's unclear whether these results will be replicable outside of controlled settings.
3. On the other hand, observational studies suffer from difficulty in proving causation. Whilst they seek to use natural protest events to measure outcomes in the real world, confounding factors add a level of uncertainty when determining causality. However, most of the observational studies we've found rigorously test many confounders and assumptions, so the studies seem sufficiently strong evidence in our opinion.
4. The long-term effects of protest on public opinion, agenda setting and policy are rarely studied. Most studies focus on short-term outcomes, due to ease of measurement, although the long-run considerations might be far more important.
5. There is little research on protest outcomes in countries outside the US. Around 50% of the literature we reviewed was from the US, which possesses an atypical political context, so it would be useful to have greater research from both European countries and especially countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa.
6. There is little research on issues outside of civil rights, racism, immigration and climate change. These issues make up the vast majority (80%+) of the protest research we have examined to date.
7. It's unclear how different levels of extremity of nonviolent protest affect outcomes. Whilst there is a good amount of research on the outcomes of nonviolent vs violent protest, there is little on the differing impacts of different levels of disruption. This seems pertinent due to recent protest movements, such as Extinction Rebellion or Insulate Britain, employing highly disruptive yet nonviolent tactics, which raises concerns around the loss of public opinion.

## 5. Conclusion

There is moderately strong evidence of successful protest impacts in certain contexts. Especially, the case for protest effectiveness on civil rights in the US seems strong, with statistically significant results from both the 1960s Civil Rights Movement and the Black Lives Matter movement from 2014 onwards. There is *some* evidence, both experimental and observational, that climate protest has been effective in Western Europe and to some degree, the US, from 2018 onwards.

The evidence seems the strongest for positive impacts on public opinion, public discourse and voting behaviour. Whilst there is some evidence on protests positively influencing policymakers and policy, this is debated within the field. Effects on policy, like most effects of protest, seem highly context dependent on external political structures and pre-existing public opinion.



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