

# Expert survey on social movements and protest

A survey of 120 social movement academics on tactics, strategies and targets for effective social movements

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AUGUST 2023



## Executive summary

We surveyed 120 social and political scientists whose research focuses on social movements. The questions tackled topics such as what makes social movements succeed or fail to meet their goals, the use of specific tactics such as nonviolent disruption, the role of action logic in protest and the relative effectiveness of targeting different stakeholders. We also asked experts to respond to questions specifically addressing the climate and animal advocacy movements. The survey was designed in partnership with [Ruud Wouters](#) (Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Tilburg University) and the analysis was completed in partnership with [Apollo Academic Surveys](#). The [full results](#), without our additional analysis and commentary, can be seen on the Apollo website.

### Some notable findings were:

- 90% of experts thought that non-violent climate protests targeting the government are at least somewhat effective overall.
- In terms of what makes social movements succeed, experts thought the most important governance and organisational factor is the ability to 'mobilise and scale quickly in response to external events'. Decentralised decision making was thought to be the least important factor.
- Experts thought the most important tactical and strategic factor for success is 'the strategic use of nonviolent disruptive tactics', ranking it as more important than focusing on gaining media coverage or having ambitious goals.
- 69% of experts thought that disruptive tactics are effective for issues (such as climate change) that have high public awareness and support. For issues with high awareness but low support (such as anti-vaccination), only 30% thought disruptive tactics are effective.
- The most important internal factors that can threaten success were 'internal conflict or movement infighting' and a 'lack of clear political objectives'.
- Experts considered the most successful social movements of the last twenty years to be the LGBTQ+ and BLM movements

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## Introduction

There are many open questions about which strategies and tactics are likely to be most effective for social movements. At Social Change Lab we use many research methods to gather better evidence to inform the work of activists, organisers, and those who support them. The purpose of this survey was to gain insights from academic experts about the approaches they think are most likely to bring effective change, as well as their views on the factors, both within and outside movements themselves, which might impede success.

We solicited the views of academic researchers on the activities and effects of social movements in a democratic context. We asked experts to compare the effectiveness of disruptive and non-disruptive protests, to specify tactics best suited to particular targets and goals, as well as to give qualitative insights into what makes movements succeed.

We also invited those with relevant knowledge to respond to specific sets of questions about the climate and the animal advocacy movements.

Answering general questions about complex socio-political topics is never easy, since answers are typically highly context-dependent. Notwithstanding the over-simplification, we asked experts to give their 'best guesses' on general questions and left optional open text response boxes for them to contextualise their answers. We recommend reading these for the required nuance and to aid interpretation.

We believe this research is important in a context in which, given the multitude of pressing problems the world faces, protests are [increasing in number](#). [One study](#) estimates that protest numbers increased by an average 11.5 percent per year between 2009 and 2019. This is happening at a time when governments in the UK and elsewhere are cracking down on protest with new [punitive legislation](#) as well as tougher sentencing.

While there is a growing need to know more about which social movement strategies are most effective, there are difficulties studying real-world campaigns empirically; not only do the issues of protest vary greatly, there are rarely compatible control conditions, and protest outcomes are specific to time and place. Given this, we recognise that a survey is imperfect. Aggregating responses to simple, concrete and mostly quantitative questions necessarily limits the level of detail. But given the need for better intelligence about what works, we believe that collating the expertise of those who have spent their careers studying social movements constitutes a useful additional source of evidence.

## Method

We recruited respondents with expertise in social movement research in a variety of ways. Our initial list comprised academics whose work we were already familiar with from [our own research](#). We supplemented this list with scholars who had a strong publication record in relevant topics, by cross-referencing from existing literature and researching scholars with high citation numbers on [Google scholar](#). We included experts on the editorial boards of relevant journals such as [Social Movement Studies](#) and [Mobilization](#) and asked for recommendations from our existing network, as well as asking some prominent experts to share the survey with qualified colleagues. We also made some specific searches to expand our geographical diversity and reach (the full list of country expertise reflected in the survey is included in the [Appendix](#)). We targeted mainly senior academics, Assistant / Associate Professor level or higher, to increase the likelihood that scholars had spent many years researching this field.

The questions sought to evaluate the different tactics and strategies protest movements use and how these affect specific outcomes. We were also interested in external and internal factors that influence effectiveness - that is, both factors within and factors outside a movement's control. We wanted to know about what can make movements fail as well as what helps them succeed. Given that recent years have seen [an increase in the use of disruptive tactics](#), particularly by the climate and animal advocacy movements, we wanted to know what experts thought about the effectiveness of such an approach. We were also interested in whether the view (as discussed in [this paper](#)) that disruption causes backfire effects (that is, such alienation or annoyance as to become net ineffective) and polarisation, was a view shared by experts.

Questions were primarily quantitative with optional open comment sections for respondents to contextualise their responses. We also asked two open-ended, qualitative questions, namely 'What has been the most successful social movement in the last twenty years and to what do you attribute its success?' and 'What is the single most important piece of advice you would give to organisers of protest movements?'

We invited everyone to respond via a link to the [Survey Monkey](#) platform. Participants could choose their level of anonymity, from complete anonymity to the inclusion of their name in the list of respondents to attribution of specific comments and responses to them. The full set of questions, as well as the list of respondents who chose not to remain anonymous can be seen [here](#).

The survey was designed in partnership with [Ruud Wouters](#) (Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Tilburg University) and the analysis was completed in partnership with [Apollo Academic Surveys](#).

## Results

### Who responded?

In total, 120 respondents completed the survey. 68% were of Associate Professor level or higher, with the remainder mostly (21%) currently at Lecturer, Fellow or Postdoctoral level.

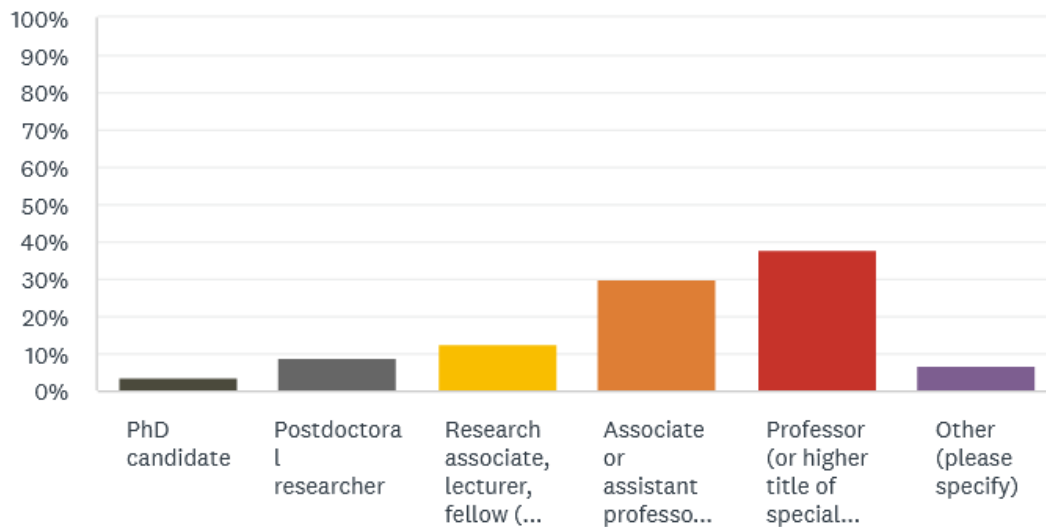


Fig. 1. Academic seniority of respondents

Their departmental subject specialities were primarily Sociology (just under 60%), followed by Political Science (24%) and Psychology (6%). They were split roughly equally between researchers using predominantly quantitative and those using predominantly qualitative methodologies.



Fig. 2. Academic subject area of respondents

Most respondents focus on the Global North (69%) in their research, with 16% focusing on the Global South and 15% doing research relevant to both contexts.

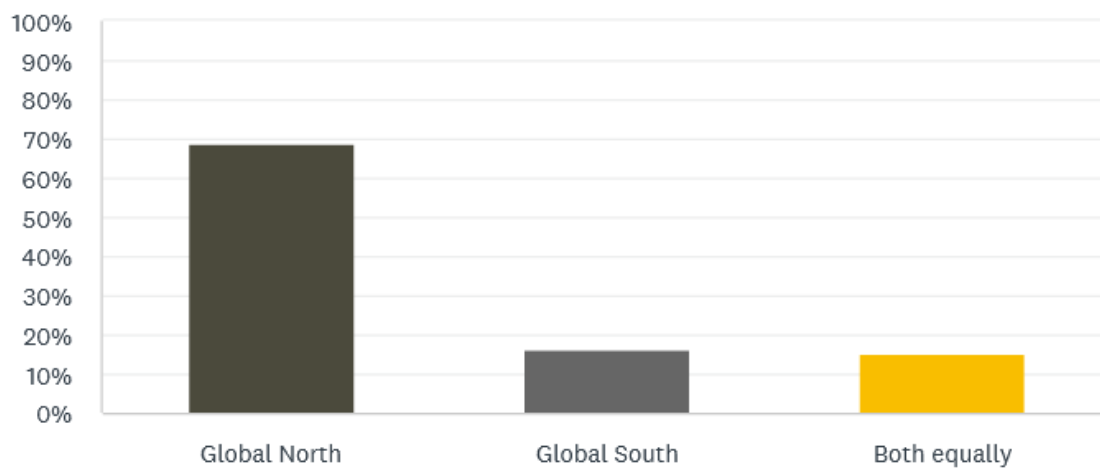


Fig. 3. Geographic research focus of respondents

A total of 25 different nationalities from all continents were represented in the survey, though the majority were from the US (45%) and the UK (13%). (The full breakdown of nationalities is shown in the [Appendix](#)). 80% of respondents were at least somewhat directly involved in activism themselves and 19% described themselves as ‘very active’ in social and protest movements.

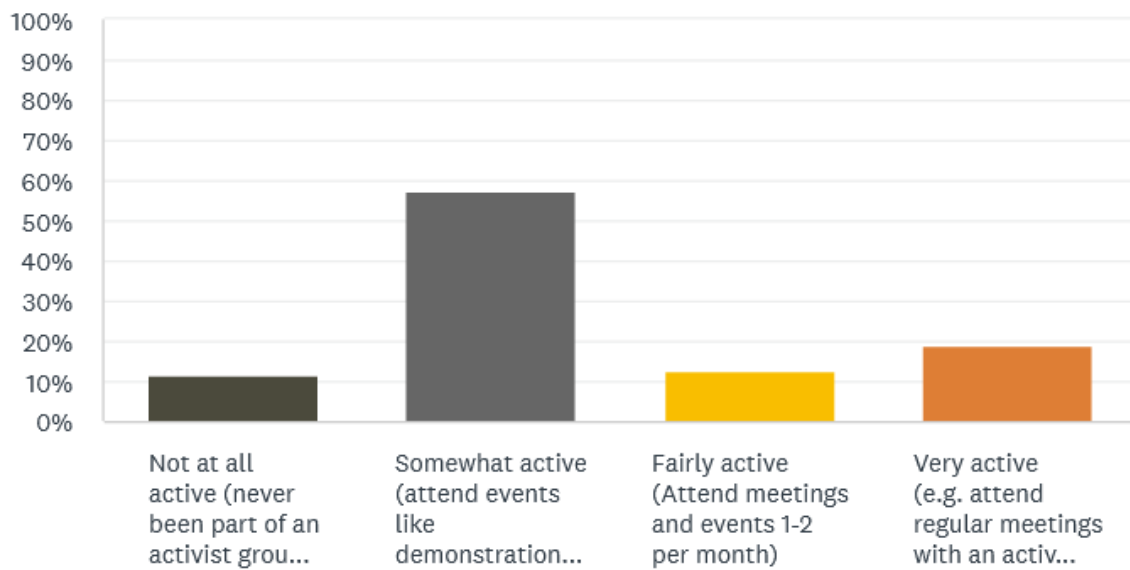


Fig. 4. Extent to which respondents are involved in activism

## What did experts say?

We will present the findings under thematic headlines. Full results are shown at the end and can also be seen on the Apollo Academic Surveys website [here](#).

The thematic headings that follow are:

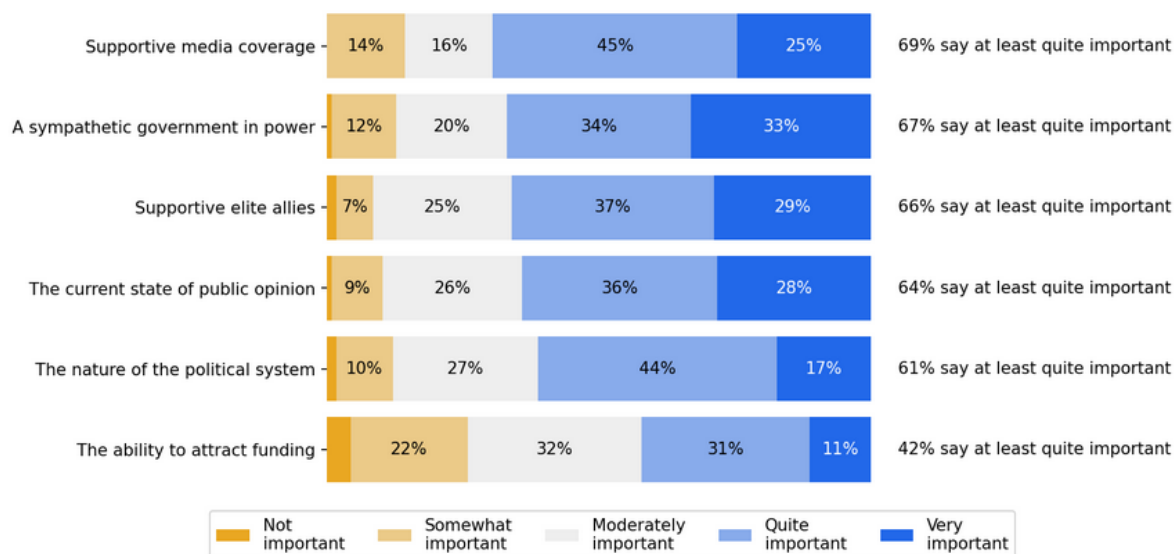
1. [Success factors](#)
2. [Factors contributed to the failure of a social movement](#)
3. [Disruptive tactics](#)
4. [Goals of social movements](#)
5. [The climate movement](#)
6. [The animal advocacy movement](#)
7. [Advice for social movements](#)

### 1. Success factors

We asked experts to give quantitative ratings on a range of factors that influence success, both those outside and within a social movement's control. We also asked them an open qualitative question about what they considered the most successful social movement this century. We first consider quantitative responses.

On external factors - that is, features of the sociopolitical context that are largely outside the control of a social movement – experts believed that supportive media coverage was the most important factor (69% believing it to be ‘quite’ or ‘very’ important), closely followed by having a sympathetic government in power (67%) and supportive elite allies (66%). The current state of public opinion on an issue was seen as another important factor (64%) as was the nature of the political system (61%). A movement’s ability to attract funding was seen as less crucial to success (42%).

*How important do you think the following external factors are in contributing to a social movement’s success?*



*Fig. 5. Importance of various external factors contributing to success where external factor is defined as a factor that is largely out of the control of the movement.*

Several experts commented on the difficulty of giving general answers about external factors - both because of big differences in national or regional contexts but also because of the very different goals movements might have. For example, at an extreme, “A social movement can win by persuading the government or by defeating it.”

In terms of success factors that lie within the control of a social movement organisation, we asked experts about two kinds: first, about tactics and strategies employed and second, about organisation and governance of the social movement itself.

On tactics and strategy, experts thought that as well as the strategic use of disruptive tactics (which 69% of experts said were ‘quite’ or ‘very’ important), it was effective to use a range of tactics; 54% of experts thought it was important for groups to have both radical and moderate flanks. This view concurs with [our own research](#) which shows the benefits moderate groups can gain from radical actions of others in the movement.

Focusing on achievable demands was also considered important by a large number (61%) of respondents. Surprisingly, given the [extensive evidence from the existing literature](#) that non violent tactics are key components of success, far fewer experts thought that ‘a strict avoidance of violent tactics’ was important (just 34% believing this to be ‘quite’ or ‘very’ important).

For some respondents, tactical diversity was an important success feature. Heidi Reynolds-Stenson at Colorado State University Pueblo commented, ‘Just like I think a mix of more radical and moderate flanks can be beneficial to a movement, so can using a range of tactics (e.g. some more disruptive than others) and having both attainable tangible goals and a more ambitious/lofty vision guiding the movement. In other words, diversity in all these areas can be beneficial to a movement.’

*How important do you think the following tactical and strategic factors are in contributing to a social movement’s success?*

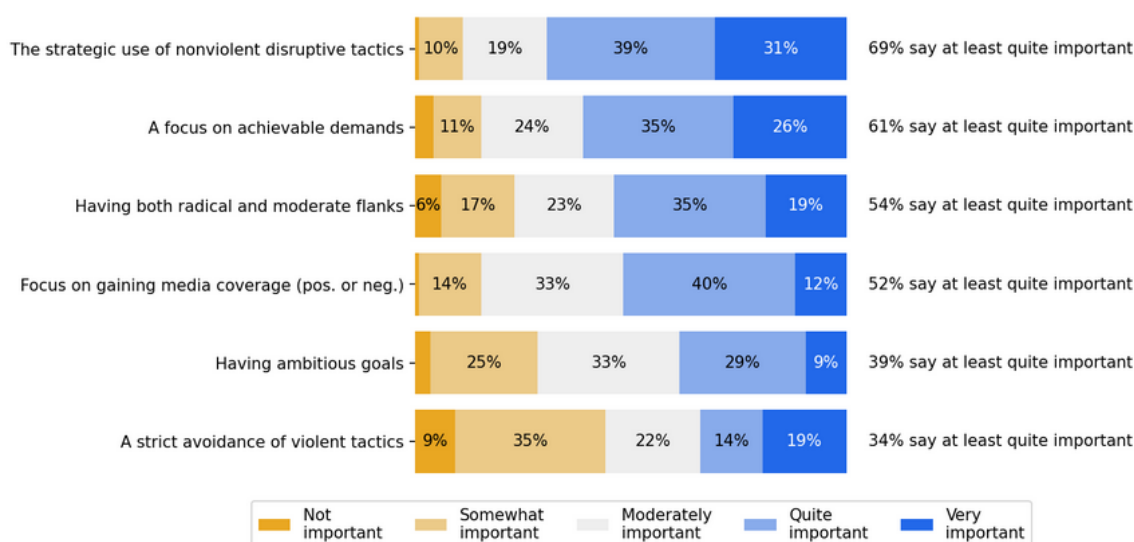


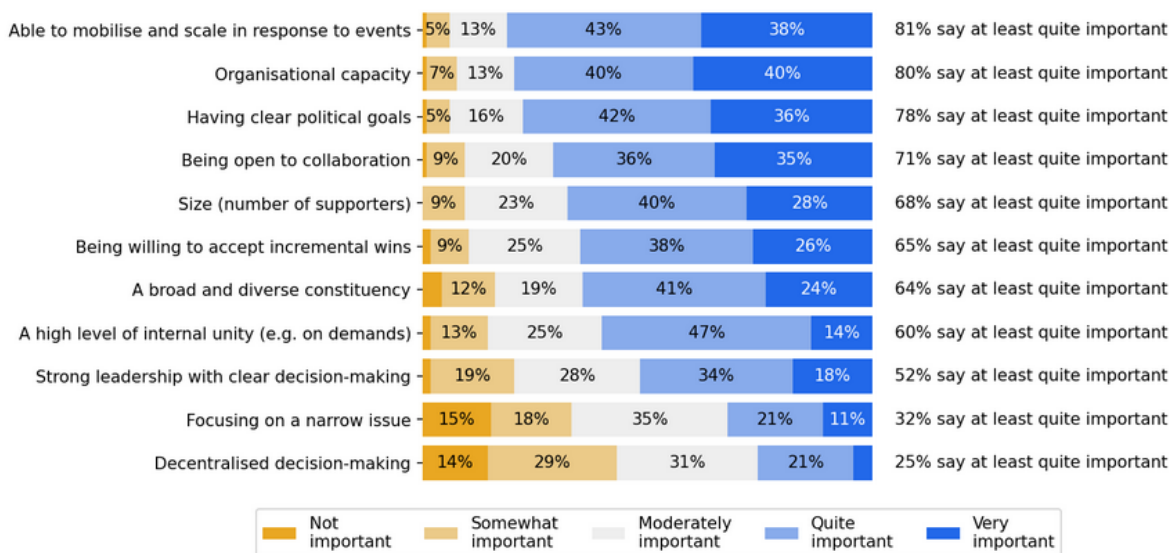
Fig. 6. Importance of tactical and strategic factors in a social movement’s success

On governance and organisation, experts felt strongly about the importance of social movements being able to mobilise and scale quickly in response to events - citing this as the most important (81%) success factor. This was closely followed by organisational capacity (which 80% thought was at least ‘quite important’) and having clear political goals (78%). Interestingly, these factors were deemed more important than size, perhaps surprising given [how much evidence](#) exists showing the significance of numbers. Issues concerning leadership and decision making were deemed of lower importance, with ‘decentralised decision-making’ - often considered important by

members of social movement organisations - scoring lowest of all (just 25% of experts believing it to be at least 'quite important').

Some respondents pointed to the importance of organisations being flexible enough to operate successfully at different levels. Philipp Altmann of Universidad Central del Ecuador said 'The movement needs to combine small-scale achievements with larger goals, a centralized decision-making process that connects to more local and decentralized processes, and the ability to unite a wide diversity of actors around some central ideas.'

*How important do you think the following governance and organisational factors are in contributing to a social movement's success?*



*Fig. 7. Importance of organisational and governance factors in a social movement's success*

In this question, experts were particularly troubled by having to give simple answers to what they considered highly context dependent questions. For example, Winnifred Louis, University of Queensland pointed out that 'What is a win to some people in some contexts is a failure to others.' Elle Rochford, University of Delaware said, 'This is so issue dependent, a relatively small number of ActUP activists made a huge impact; a larger (by numbers) protest like Occupy Wall Street did not achieve policy success but did introduce a generation of trained activists and organizers into the larger movement.' Several respondents also raised the question as to what exactly was meant by a 'social movement'. For example, some asked whether it referred to a single social movement organisation or a cluster of connected organisations focused on the same broad goal: 'it depends on what type of an SM and SMO configuration you have in mind' (Regina Werum, University of Nebraska-Lincoln).

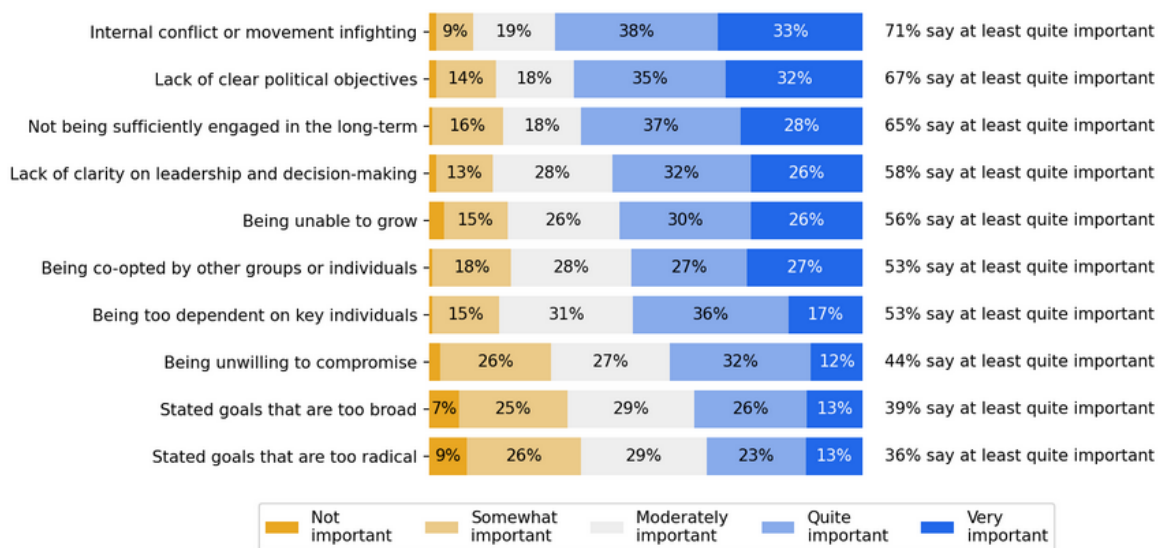
We also asked an open question about success, namely 'What has been the most successful social movement in the last 20 years and to what do you attribute its success?' The two movements most commonly named were the LGBTQ+ (20%) and BLM (17%) movements. The success of the LGBTQ+ movement was attributed to support from high profile individuals as well as the public (many of whom already 'know and love someone who is queer'), supportive media coverage, and vibrant national campaigns which 'mobilised around love'. BLM was successful in causing a shift in public opinion towards police brutality and racism, after the 'moral shock' of the killing of George Floyd. Experts thought that the 'disruption to the quotidian' (that is, to typical everyday life) caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and the ease with which video footage of police brutality was captured and shared on social media led to fast mass mobilisations. They thought that the movement's success can be measured both in direct policy changes (such as in the police use of force) and in widespread changes to organisations implementing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives.

Other movements which several experts cited as most successful in recent years were the Radical Right movement, 'by taking over the Republican Party', getting Trump elected and 'in avoiding state repression, securing policy victories and gaining mainstream approval' and the feminist movement which has seen a 'slow but steady cohort replacement of supporters among youth.' Climate movements, including Fridays for Future and XR were also cited as successful in 'raising awareness of the urgency around climate change' and 'prompting debate around climate justice.'

## 2. Factors contributing to failure

We wanted to know what experts thought was most likely to contribute to social movements failing to achieve their goals. Their answers suggest that internal conflict or movement infighting is a common difficulty experienced by social movements, with 71% of experts believing this to be a 'quite important' factor (90% if we include those rating it 'moderately important' too). A lack of clear political objectives and insufficient long term engagement were also high on the list, with 67% and 65% of experts finding them at least quite important.

*How important are the following internal factors in threatening social movement success?*



*Fig. 8. The main reasons social movements fail to achieve their goals*

Some respondents pointed to the fact that, depending on what is meant by a social movement, answers to this question might differ. For example, Dr Robyn E Gulliver, University of Queensland pointed out that, ‘At an organisation scale lots of these points really matter - e.g. it really matters for a group if they can't make decisions and have internal conflict. But for the movement as a whole it can be beneficial, as these challenges lead to splinter groups which diversify the movement, potentially increase radical flanks, potentially grow the leadership base etc etc. So one thing can be bad for an organisation but quite good for the movement.’ Others went further, suggesting that internal conflict can be an important positive factor: ‘Dissent (or infighting) can be hugely important in creating inclusive movements and achieving intersectional solidarity’ (Elle Rochford, University of Delaware) or that how movements manage it is pivotal to their success: ‘The central problem is the inability to maintain a diverse group of actors united around a set of large-scale ideas that include smaller goals.’ Philipp Altmann, Universidad Central del Ecuador.

### 3. Disruptive protest

We were particularly interested in expert views on disruptive protest given that public disruption has become a feature of many recent protests e.g., by Just Stop Oil and Animal Rising in the UK, Last Generation (Letzte Generation) in Germany, and Les Soulèvements de la Terre (Earth Uprising) in France. There is a common conception, given often angry reactions of the public and dismissive and derogatory media reports, that these sort of tactics are self-defeating. We were interested in whether experts shared these views.

We asked them about disruptive protests in several parts of the survey - in general questions about tactics as well as in the sections about climate protests and the animal advocacy movement (we consider these in the relevant sections that follow). We also dug in deeper to try to get at whether there were particular conditions, protest concerns or targets of protest that might make disruptive tactics more or less likely to be effective.

Beginning with the general question, we asked experts to rate a list of factors which contribute to a social movement's success. As we discussed under success factors (see Figure 6 above), 'The strategic use of nonviolent disruptive tactics' was rated the most important (88% saying it was at least 'moderately important' and 69% saying it was 'quite' or 'very' important). They ranked this as even more important than some things commonly thought to be crucial, such as focusing on gaining media coverage - which here 52% of experts felt was 'at least quite important'.

Matthew Williams from Loyola University Chicago put it, 'Since movements, by definition, don't have institutional power, they usually need to use tactics that disrupt institutional routines to put pressure on power-holders.'

Experts believed that the degree to which disruptive protest is effective varies according to existing public attitudes towards the issue being protested. For example,

- For issues (such as climate change) that have high public awareness and support, 70% of experts thought that disruptive tactics were effective.
- For issues (such as animal advocacy) with low public awareness and support, only 47% thought disruptive tactics were effective.
- For issues (such as anti-vaccination) that have high public awareness but low levels of support, still fewer (30%) thought that disruptive tactics were effective.

Please indicate how effective **disruptive** protest might be in the following contexts

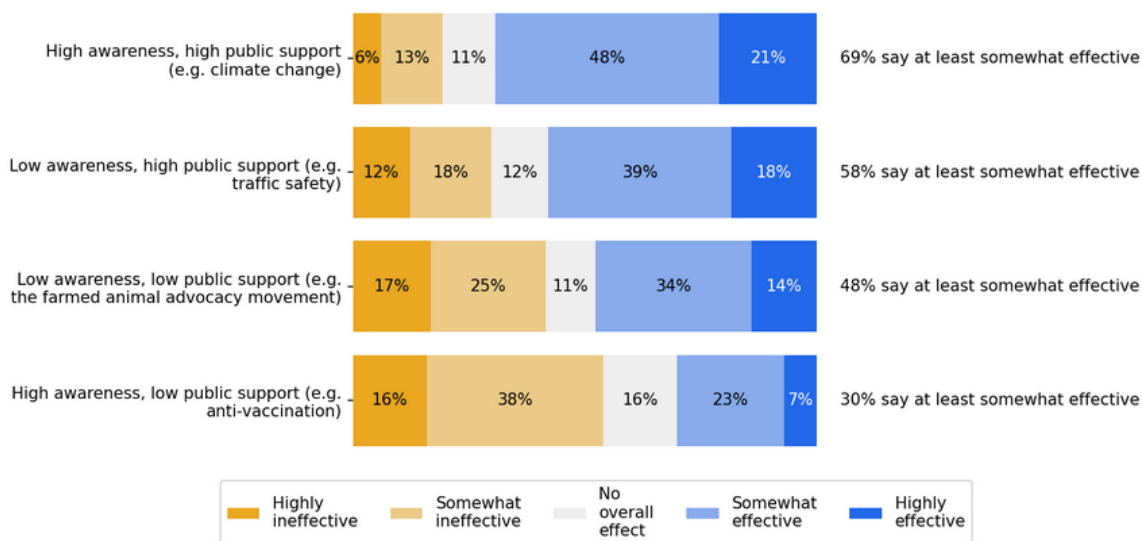


Fig. 9. Effectiveness of **disruptive protest** in different contexts

The views of experts are surprising given the stark contrast with how the public and media view disruptive protest. For example, [polling by YouGov](#) found that 78% of the UK public think that disruptive protest hinders the cause (61% believing it hinders it ‘a lot’). Much of the media reporting of disruptive protests is also negative, for example characterising protesters as ‘[eco clowns](#)’ or ‘[vegan mobs](#)’. But many experts remain convinced that disruption is an effective tactic. As one respondent, Bart Cammaerts from the London School of Economics and Political Science put it, “Without disruption nothing changes, so in all instances, I think creating disruption to everyday life and generating protest spectacles is useful and effective.” Louise Parks, from the University of Trento in Italy, elaborated, “If we are talking about long-term effects rather than immediate reactions there is space to talk about possible cultural change that could be provoked by disruptive climate protests even if they drive some short-term backfire effects. The example of soup is quite a sophisticated comment on what we as a society protect and value, and what we don’t. But that might take time to get through the outrage.”

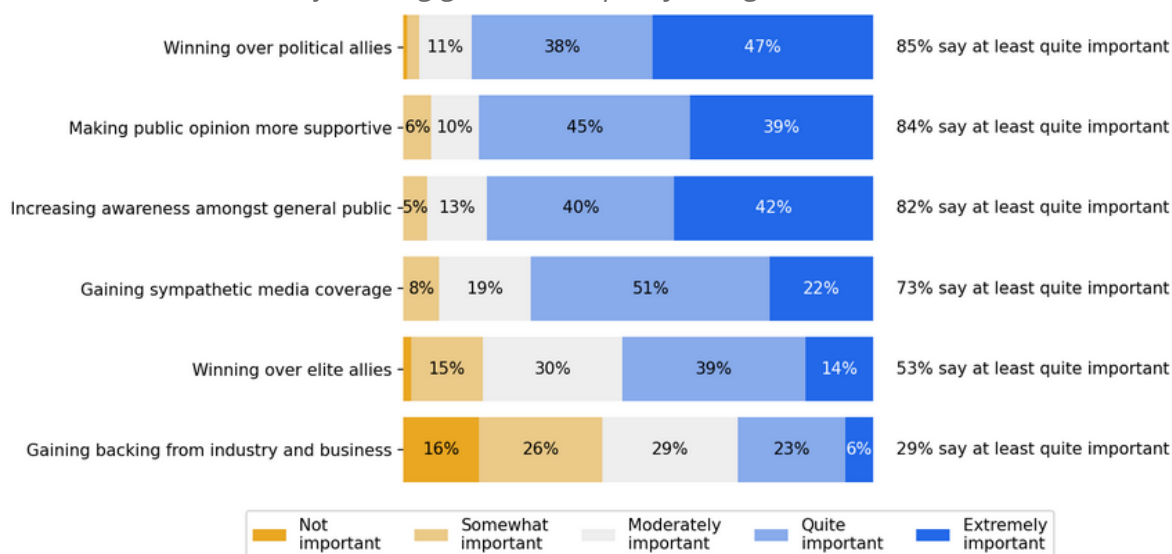
#### 4. Goals of social movements

We asked experts about the importance of various intermediate goals a social movement might target to help the longer term goal of influencing policy and legislation. Nearly half of respondents (47%) thought that winning over political allies was ‘extremely important’ as an intermediate goal, with another 38% believing it to be ‘quite important’, a total of 85%. Not far behind was the goal of making public opinion more supportive, something 84% of experts thought was at least ‘quite important’ to the longer term goal of influencing national policy or legislation. Increasing awareness

amongst the general public was also considered ‘at least quite important’ by 82% of experts.

Relying on sympathetic media might not be the best bet in reaching the general public - just 22% of experts felt that gaining sympathetic media coverage was ‘extremely important’ as an intermediate goal. Winning over elite allies or gaining backing from industry were rated even lower (14% and 6% respectively believing these are ‘extremely important’ intermediate goals).

*How important are the following intermediate goals in contributing to an ultimate goal of influencing government policy or legislation?*

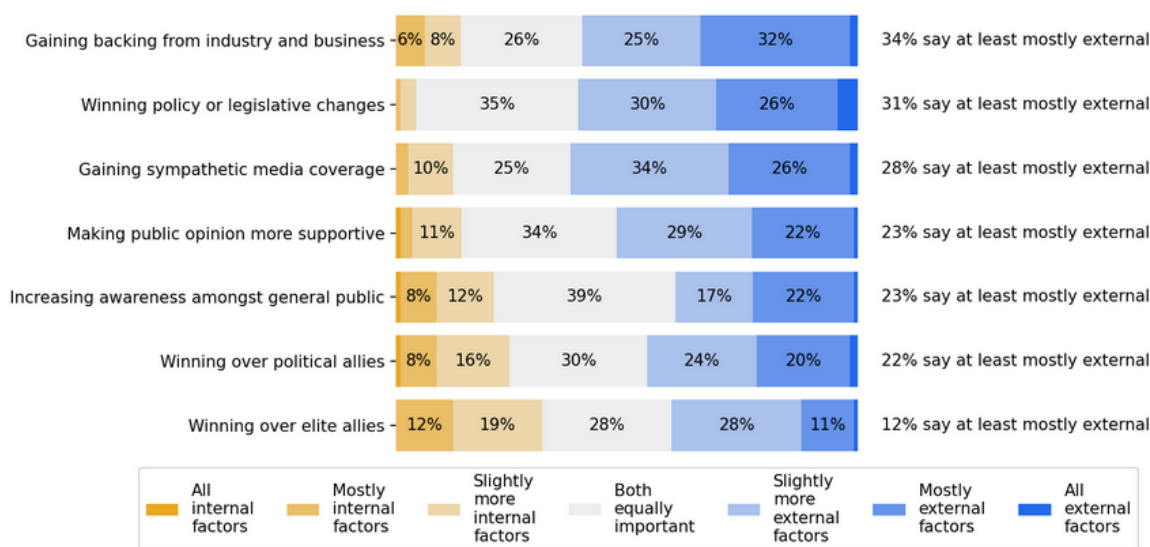


*Fig. 10. The importance of a range of intermediate goals in contributing to the main goal*

We were interested in expert views of the extent to which social movements have control over achieving their goals - that is, the extent to which factors are under a movement’s control vs determined by external factors, such as the environment they are operating in. The responses indicate that experts think external context is more important than is commonly thought; for all factors, experts thought that outcomes were due more to external than internal factors.

The overall pattern suggests that experts believe social movements have slightly more influence over raising awareness amongst the general public than over the media or industry/business backers. Interestingly, winning over elite allies was the factor thought to be most within a movement’s control (31% thinking this factor is ‘mostly’ under the control of a movement compared to 12% who think it is mostly determined by outside factors).

*How important do you think factors inside a movement's control (e.g. tactics and strategy) are compared to factors outside its control (e.g. political context) in achieving the following goals?*



*Fig. 11. Balance of influence between factors within and outside a movement's control in achieving a range of intermediate and longer term goals*

Experts believed that factors external to a protest group (such as the political climate) had a much stronger influence on winning policy or legislative changes than internal factors (such as a protest group's strategy and tactics). 31% thought that policy changes were 'mostly' or 'all' down to external factors, compared to less than 1% who thought these were mostly or all down to factors within a protest group's control. Winning over political allies was also felt to be more under the influence of external factors, but more experts considered internal factors important here (22% thought winning over political allies was mostly or all due to external factors, compared to 9% who thought it was mostly or all due to internal ones).

The general sense here was that movements were invariably bound to respond to more powerful external factors. As Simone Durham from the University of Maryland put it, "I think external factors tend to hold a lot of weight in this era. Public opinion & cancel culture are powerful, as are the long standing structures of the political and social environment in which the movement exists. Internal factors are important to the movement's functioning in general, but functions are always in response to those external conditions, giving them a lot of weight." Louisa Parks, from the University of Trento elaborated on the complex interplay between internal and external factors, "On winning policy/legislative changes I have found that external factors are key, but without internal qualities that allow a movement to create and exploit external factors of different kinds they are never enough."

## 5. The climate movement

Specifically considering climate protests, experts thought that disruptive tactics have 'somewhat positive' effects in many cases. This might be due to the fact that disruptive tactics tend to have much higher salience due to typically much higher levels of media coverage. Also, disruptive groups often turn to disruption when traditional tactics have failed to achieve their goals.

However, experts thought that non-disruptive protests were consistently likely to be more effective across a range of outcomes. For example:

- For movement building 94% thought that non-disruptive tactics had at least a somewhat positive effect (compared to 53% for disruptive tactics)
- On public opinion 81% thought that non-disruptive tactics had at least a somewhat positive effect (compared to 31% for disruptive tactics)
- For supportive media coverage, 79% thought that non-disruptive tactics had at least a somewhat positive effect (compared to 30% for disruptive tactics)

Some experts alluded to the complexity of how different tactics play out over the longer term. For example, Kevin Gillan from the University of Manchester said that disruptive protests and even "violence (where deliberately perpetrated by activists) will almost certainly lead to less positive media coverage for instance, in the UK at least. But it'll also likely drive the issue up the policy agenda, with possibly a greater chance of more moderate voices being heard."

What overall effect do you think **non-disruptive protests** are likely to have on the following outcomes, in relation to the goals of the activists?

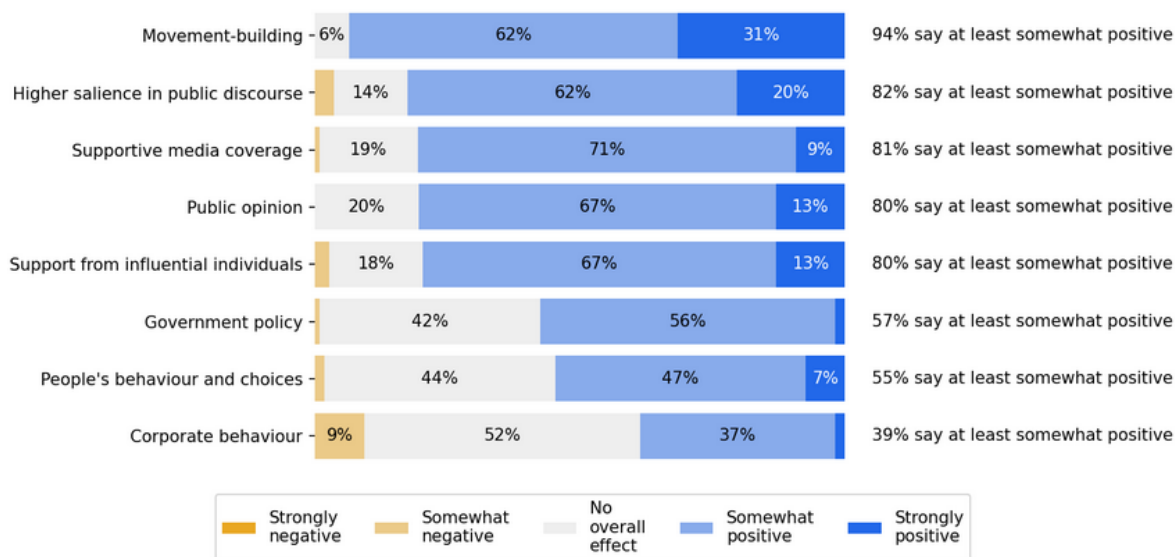


Fig. 12. Effectiveness of **non-disruptive** tactics on a range of goals.

What overall effect do you think **disruptive protests** are likely to have on the following outcomes, in relation to the goals of the activists?

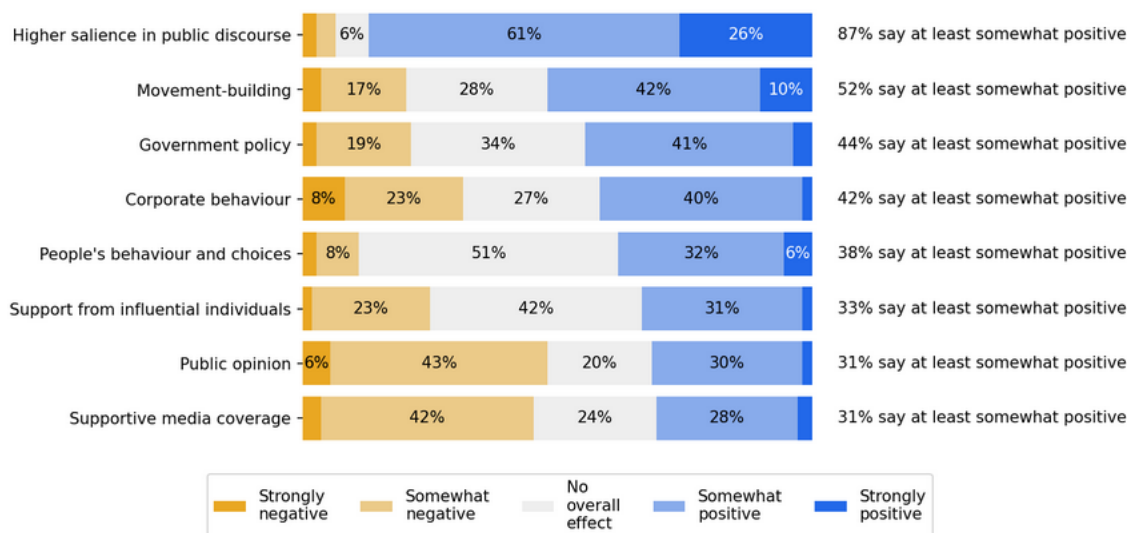


Fig. 13. Effectiveness of **disruptive tactics** on a range of goals.

We were interested in expert views on the importance of [‘action logic’](#) in climate actions - that is the extent to which specific actions make sense to the public, with a clear message and target. According to experts, action logic is an important determinant of the type of media coverage protests are given; media coverage for protests with strong underlying logic (such as blockading oil depots) is likely to be beneficial for the issue of climate change (80% at least somewhat agreed). This compared with just 23% believing

the same was true for protests with little underlying action logic (such as disrupting art galleries). 80% of experts thought that disruptive protests with clear action logic underlying them (e.g. a climate protest targeting fossil fuel companies) were more likely to be effective than those with no little or no clear logic (e.g. throwing soup at paintings).

78% of experts felt that protests with strong logic were likely to have positive overall outcomes - and some pointed out strong logic might protect against some specific negative consequences. For example, Viktoria Spaiser, University of Leeds said, 'I think the backfire effect depends strongly whether the disruptive and/or violent climate protest has an action logic.'

*Some disruptive protests have a clear 'action logic' whereby the reason and goals of the protest is obvious (e.g. climate activists targeting fossil fuel companies). Others have less clear logic (e.g., climate activists throwing soup at paintings). This question concerns your agreement with various statements on the action logic of disruptive protests.*

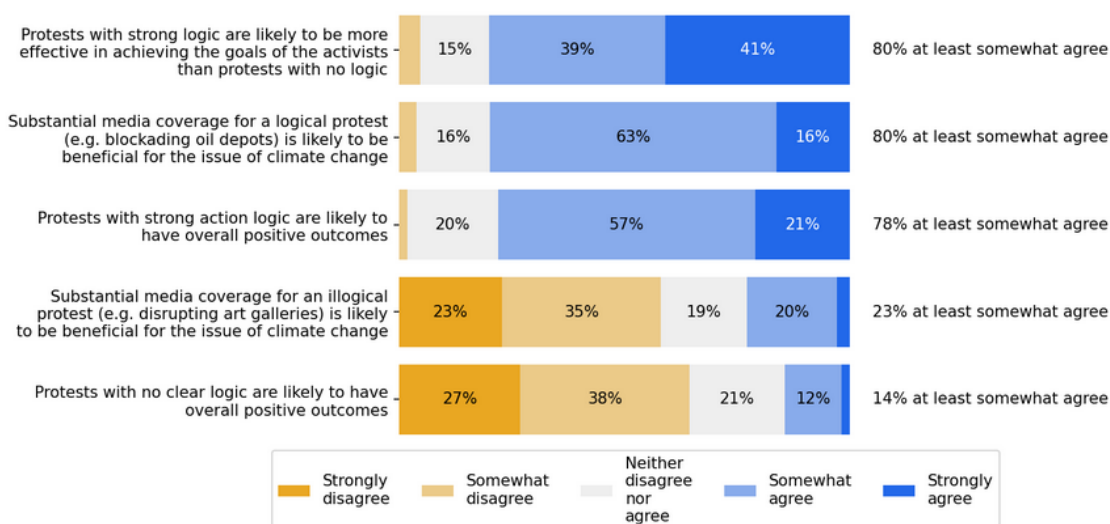


Fig. 14. The effect of different levels of action logic in protest actions

Experts were asked to consider the 'overall effectiveness' (meaning a wide range of possible outcomes, including increased media coverage, shifting public opinion, policy change, movement building), of non-violent protests targeted on different stakeholders. There was considerable variance in their views about who to target: a vast majority (90%) said that targeting the government directly was 'at least somewhat effective' and 75% that targeting the fossil fuel industry was. Experts were split on whether targeting the public was effective (50% thought it was at least 'somewhat effective' but 39% thought it at least 'somewhat counterproductive') and targeting unrelated venues (such as sports events or art galleries) was thought to be least effective - with 50% believing it to be at least somewhat counterproductive.

Assuming all are non-violent and are similar in other respects (e.g. same number of participants), how effective do you think the following tactics are likely to be?

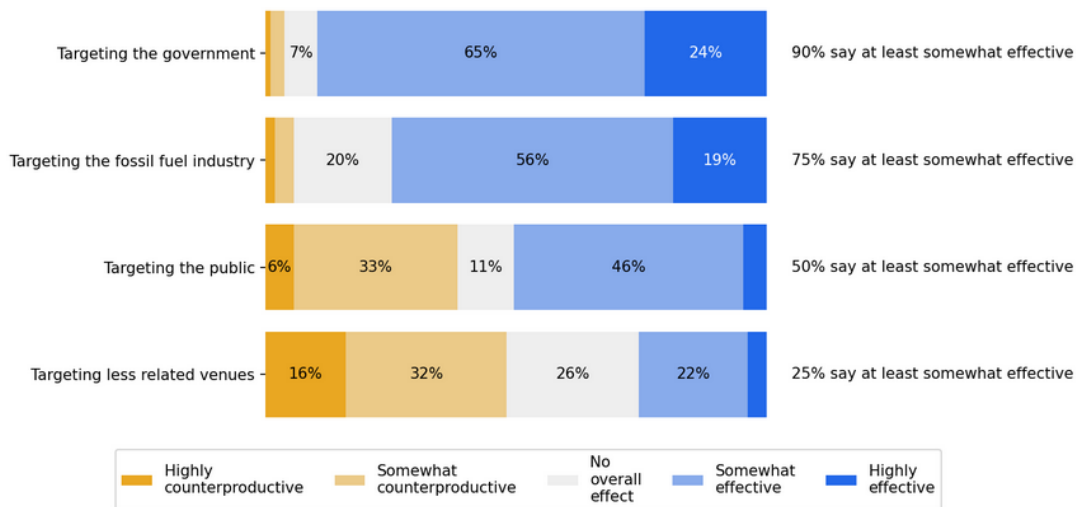
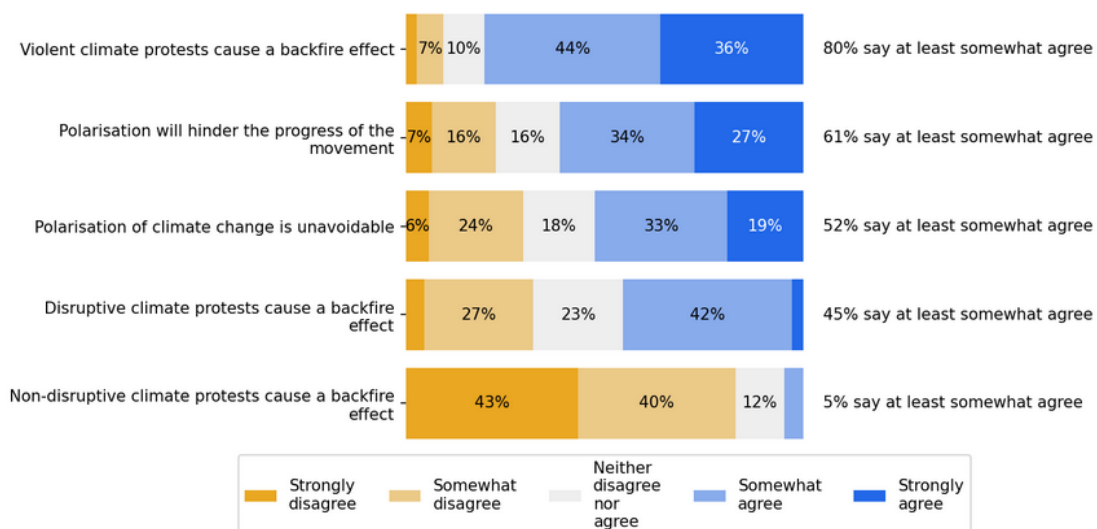


Fig. 15. Effectiveness of targeting different stakeholders

We asked experts about potential negative consequences of protests in the shape of backfire effects and polarisation. By a ‘backfire effect’ we mean an overall negative consequence such as a reduction in public support or lower chance of policy implementation. By ‘polarisation’ we mean an increase in highly contrasting opinions on an issue.

We are now going to ask your views on some potential negative consequences which can arise from climate protests. By a ‘backfire effect’ we mean an overall negative consequence such as a reduction in public support or lower chance of policy implementation. By ‘polarisation’ we mean an increase in highly contrasting opinions on a cause.



*Fig. 16. Backfire effects and polarisation as a result of climate protests*

Expert responses suggest a clear hierarchy in the level of backfire effects they expect to be caused by different types of protest. While just 5% thought that non-violent climate protests caused backfire, this figure went up to 45% for disruptive protests and 80% for violent protests. It is worth noting an apparent discrepancy here: experts think both that disruptive protest is effective for climate issues and that there will be a backfire effect for disruptive protest. This might be because people interpreted the question as specifically meaning disruptive protests 'can' rather than 'will' cause backfire effects. Or it might be that experts see social change as messy, with the effects of disruption causing both forward and backward steps simultaneously.

Over half (52%) of experts thought that polarisation on climate change is unavoidable and a substantial minority (39%) disagreed with the statement that 'polarisation will hinder the progress of the movement.' It seems that for some, polarisation is seen as a necessary step, an essential part of a long term strategy to force people to pick a side. (For example, Frances Fox Piven argues for a kind of 'dissensus politics' as outlined in [this piece](#)). One anonymous respondent said, "Movements "work" (are successful) because they polarize people and an issue(s) (i.e., "you have to make a choice here...do we do "B" or do we keep "A"?)." (our emphasis).

Other experts talked in more specific terms about what they saw as specific backfire effects. "In the UK context the climate change protests have provoked a counter movement on the mainstream right of politics and the media of global warming deniers. In addition the government has introduced more restrictive legislation on protest specifically aimed at the tactics used by groups such as Extinction Rebellion and this legislation was first proposed and promoted by a right wing think tank - Policy Exchange - funded by amongst others Exxon-Mobil." Paul Bagguley, University of Leeds

## 6. The animal advocacy movement

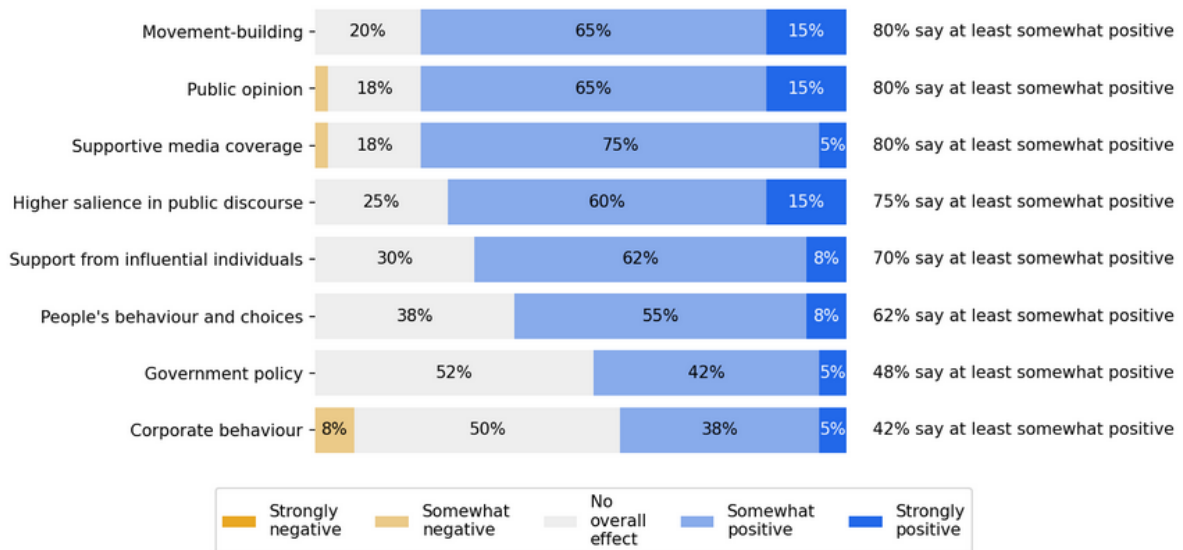
We recognised that fewer respondents would have specific knowledge of the animal advocacy movement and this set of questions was optional. The number of experts responding to this part of the survey was 42. We asked them the same set of questions as in the climate movement section.

Given that the animal advocacy movement is much less known than the climate movement, we were surprised at how highly experts rated the likely positive effects of animal protests on a range of outcomes. 80% felt that non-disruptive protests were likely to be at least 'somewhat effective' for the goals of movement building, improving

public opinion and gaining supportive media coverage. In all these cases, the likely positive effect was considerably lower for disruptive protests (movement building: 57%, public opinion: 41% and supportive media coverage just 20%). There were two cases where a majority of experts agreed that even disruptive protests were likely to be at least somewhat effective - and that was for movement building and increasing the salience of the issue in public discourse.

For all outcomes considered, experts thought that non-disruptive protests were consistently likely to be more effective than disruptive protests.

*What overall effect do you think **non-disruptive protests** are likely to have on the following outcomes, in relation to the goals of the activists?*



What overall effect do you think **disruptive protests** are likely to have on the following outcomes, in relation to the goals of the activists?

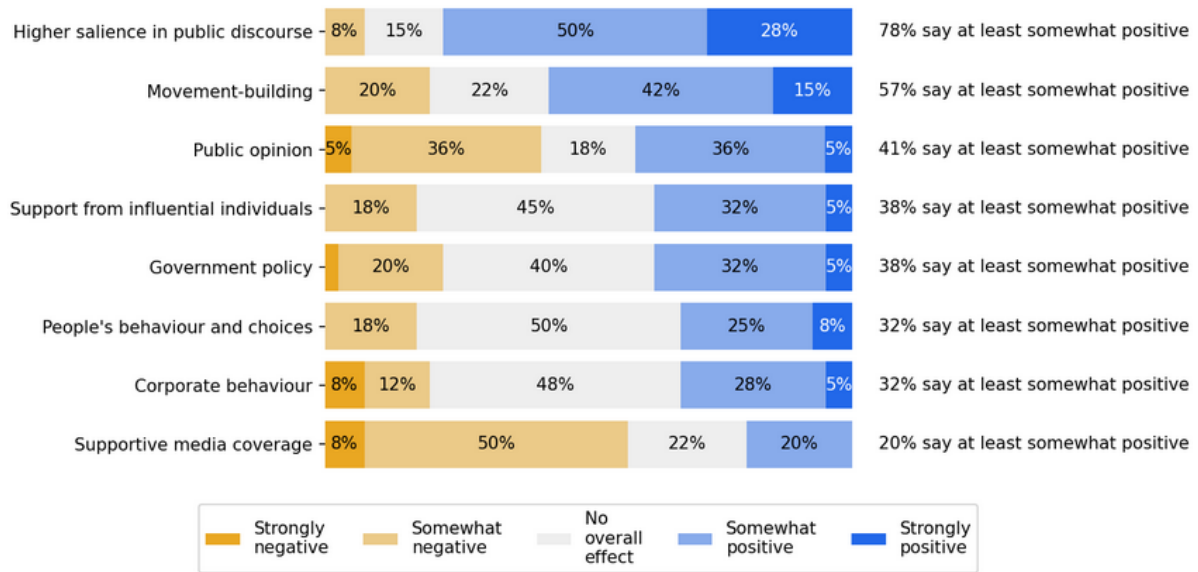


Fig. 17. Comparison of likely outcomes of non-disruptive (top) with disruptive (bottom) protests

As with the climate movement, we asked respondents about the likely effectiveness of animal advocacy protests targeting different stakeholders. The pattern we saw with climate protest targets was repeated, with experts believing that direct targets such as the government and the animal agriculture industry were much more effective (78% and 64% respectively) compared to indirect targets such as the public or less related venues (29% and 17% respectively).

Assuming all are non-violent and are similar in other respects (e.g. same number of participants), how effective do you think the following tactics are likely to be?

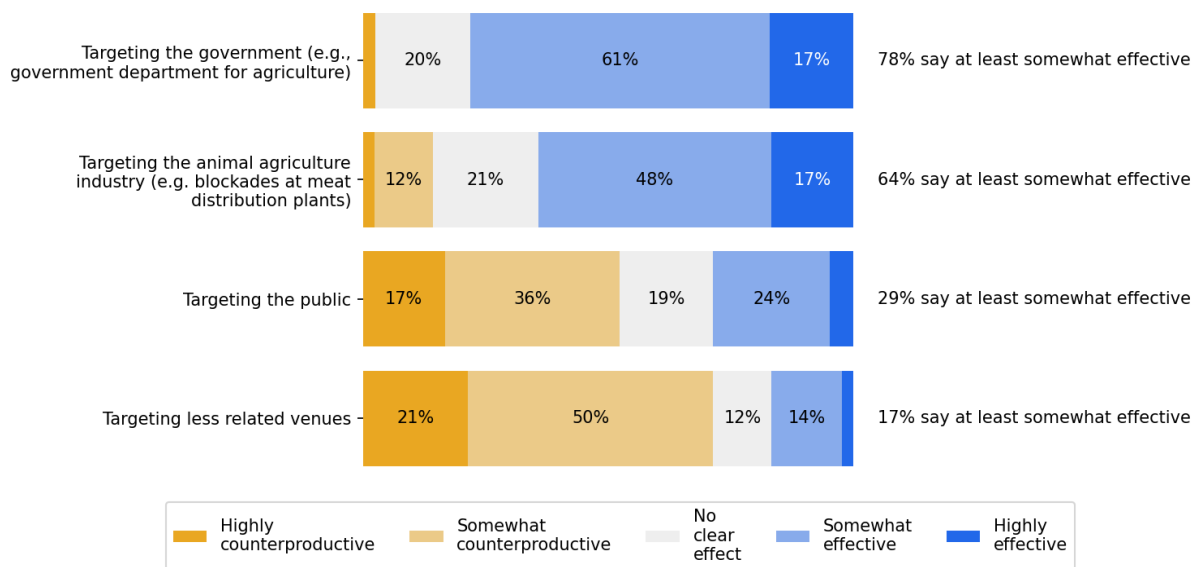


Fig. 18. Likely effectiveness of animal advocacy protests on different targets

The logic of actions was also considered an important success factor for the animal movement. 90% of experts believed that protests with a strong logic (e.g., animal activists targeting industrial meat producers) were likely to have overall positive outcomes, with the great majority (88%) believing that logical protests were more likely to be effective than protests without clear logic. Just 12% felt that protests without clear logic were likely to be effective overall. They also believed that the level of logic translated powerfully into the nature and effect of the media coverage of it. Just 8% thought that media coverage for non logical protests (such as disrupting a football match) was likely to benefit the cause, compared to 75% who felt that coverage for logical protests (such as blockading meat distribution facilities) was likely to be beneficial for the issue of animal advocacy.

Some disruptive protests have a clear ‘action logic’ whereby the reason and goals of the protest is obvious (e.g. climate activists targeting fossil fuel companies). Others have less clear logic (e.g., climate activists throwing soup at paintings). This question concerns your agreement with various statements on the action logic of disruptive protests.

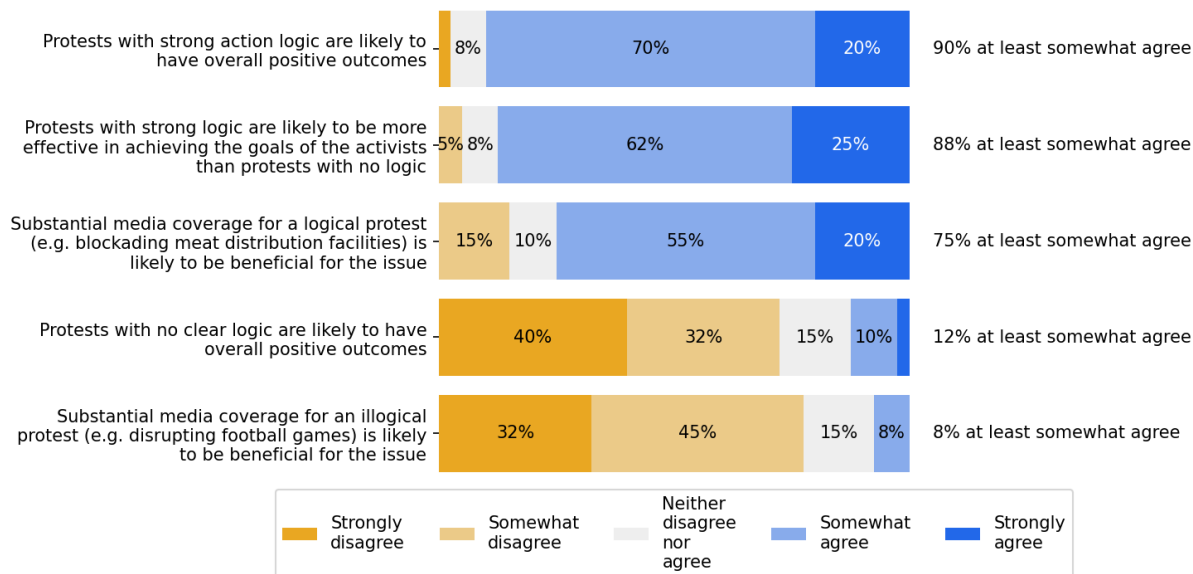


Fig. 19. The effect of action logic within animal-related protests on a range of outcomes

Finally, we were interested in potential negative consequences, in the form of backfire effects and polarisation, of animal advocacy protests. Again there was a huge difference in the perceived likelihood of backfire effects depending on the nature of the protests: while 88% of experts agreed that violent animal advocacy protests cause a backfire, 65% felt that disruptive protests would and that number fell to just 5% for non-disruptive protests. On polarisation, just under half (45%) felt it was unavoidable and just over half (52%) that polarisation is likely to hinder the movement’s progress. Some felt that polarisation would go the other way; one respondent said, ‘Polarization of animal rights would actually increase support for the movement as people with leftist self-identities come to see humane treatment of animals as part of their self construction.’ Elle Rochford, University of Delaware, agreed that polarisation is not necessarily a bad thing: ‘I think the media cycle and social media algorithmic reward systems make polarization somewhat inevitable, the more visible an issue the more entrenched people's opinions will become; however, polarization does not mean the movement cannot achieve policy goals and often public opinion follows policy not the other way around (see same sex marriage opinions in the US).’

*We are now going to ask your views on some potential negative consequences which can arise from climate protests. By ‘backfire effect’ we mean an overall negative consequence such as a reduction in public support or lower chance of policy implementation. By ‘polarisation’ we mean an increase in highly contrasting opinions on a cause.’*

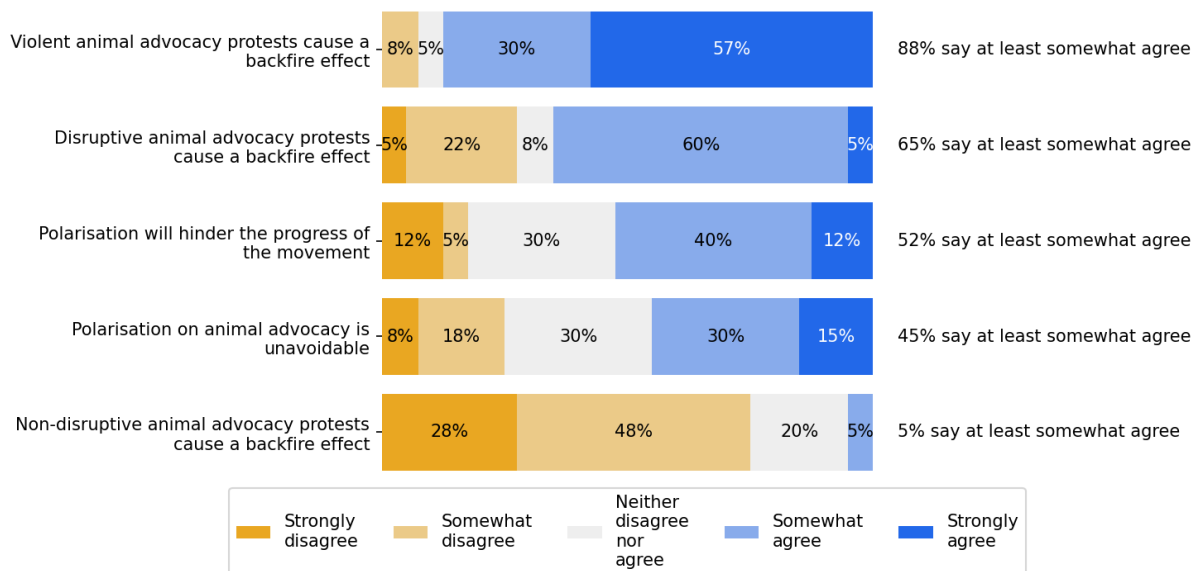


Fig. 20. Likelihood of negative consequences from animal advocacy protests.

## 7. Advice for social movements

We asked respondents a final open response question, ‘What is the single most important piece of advice you would give to organisers of protest movements?’ Full answers are available in the complete responses on Apollo [here](#), towards the bottom of the page. Here, we will outline certain recurring themes that respondents thought it important for movement organisers to bear in mind.

- Clarity - of message, of goals, of objectives - was emphasised by many. “Actionable goals”. “Set a goal that can be summarized as a motto/slogan.”
- Framing and the idea of developing framing with a sense of drama and storytelling, good guys and bad guys. “Identify the villains”, “Sell it as a valence issue.” (A valence issue being one which has broad consensus among voters).
- Persistence and tenacity. Several respondents emphasised the need to never give up, to persevere, to think long term and to build in long term sustainability of the movement. “Keep fighting the good fight!”
- Diversity. To build a mass movement you need to collaborate and accept different views and respect the tactics of others. “Build solidarity across difference.” Diversity of tactics, goals, and targets creates opportunities for participation of varying levels, duration, and risk.
- Organise, organise, organise - and learn from other organisers (“Listen to very experienced movement organisers with a proven track record more closely than

to social scientists.”). Organisation applies to the macro level (the constant organising needed to build long term relationships with other stakeholders and partners) and to the micro level (“Check the date of the action is on the flyer before you print thousands of them!”)

- Form alliances. For some, this means making and developing political allies and engaging in policy processes; for others it means building deep roots in communities to enhance resilience. For some it means both: “Reach out to everyone.”
- Be well-informed. Learn from the past. Learn from “watching the crowd”. “Listen to people.” Learn from the latest social science about effective protest and “question intuitions...The stakes of making activism work are too high to just “wing it”.”
- Play BOTH the inside and outside game
- Build carefully and take time to sort out internal disagreements which will arise
- Don't be violent but “don't be afraid to be disruptive” . “Combine disruptive and non-disruptive protests with a well thought communication strategy.”
- Know your rights according to the law. “Always have a safety plan and consult with a lawyer familiar with protesting.”
- Stay hopeful. “Focus on clear achievable goals that can take you to the next goal”, “Keep your sense of humour and make sure you have fun together. Live to fight another day.”

## Appendix

### Questions

The full set of questions in the survey can be found [here](#).

### Participating Experts

The following list of those experts who agreed to be named; others remained anonymous.

Wisnu Adihartono (Ecole des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales), Paul Almeida (University of California, Merced), Philipp Altmann (Universidad Central del Ecuador), Shamsul Arefin (University of Massachusetts Amherst), Elizabeth A. Armstrong (University of Michigan), Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur (Rhode Island College), Matthew Baggetta (Indiana University), Paul Bagguley (University of Leeds), Joshua A. Basseches (Tulane University), Colin J. Beck (Pomona College), Karen Beckwith (Case Western Reserve University), Oscar Berglund (University of Bristol), Luca Bernardi (University of Liverpool), Mary Bernstein (University of Connecticut), Michelle Beyeler (University of Zurich), Elizabeth Borland (The College of New Jersey), Cameron Brick (University of Amsterdam), Jorge Cadena-Roa (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), Bart Cammaerts (London School of Economics and Political Science), Alejandro Tirado Castro (Universidad Carlos III Madrid), Camilo Cristancho (Universitat de Barcelona), Colin Davis (University of Bristol), Michaela DeSoucey (North Carolina State University), Ivaylo Dinev (Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOIS)), Benjamin Duke (University of Leicester), Zackary Dunivin (Indiana University), Simone N. Durham (University of Maryland), Jan Willem Duyvendak (University of Amsterdam; Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study), Nella Van Dyke (University of California, Merced), Jennifer Earl (University of Delaware), Rachel L. Einwohner (Purdue University), Cornelia Butler Flora (Iowa State University/Kansas State University), Cristina Flesher Fominaya (Aarhus University), Carol Galais (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), Kevin Gillan (University of Manchester), Johan Gordillo-Garcia (Institute for Social Research - National Autonomous University of Mexico), Robyn E. Gulliver (University of Queensland), Selin Bengi Gumrukcu (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey), James F. Hamilton (University of Georgia), Christina Hansen (Malmö University), David J. Hess (Vanderbilt University), Elizabeth Humphrys (University of Technology Sydney), Maria Inclan (Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas), Larry W. Isaac (Vanderbilt University), Nicole Iturriaga (University of California Irvine), James M. Jasper (), Ben Kenward (Oxford Brookes University), Bert Klandermans (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam), Sarah Lockwood (University of Cambridge), Winnifred Louis (University of Queensland), Andrew Martin (Ohio State University), Setsuko Matsuzawa (The College of Wooster), Alice Mattoni

(Mattoni), Margarita López Maya (Universidad Central de Venezuela), Holly McCammon (Vanderbilt University), John McCarthy (Penn State University), Angela G. Mertig (Middle Tennessee State University), David S. Meyer (University of California, Irvine), Bishnu Prasad Mohapatra (MIT World Peace University, Pune, India), Joost de Moor (Sciences Po), Laura Morales (Sciences Po), Lorenzo Mosca (University of Milano), Lisa Mueller (Macalester College), Bariki Gwalugano Mwasaga (Prime Minister's Office), Erin O'Brien (Queensland University of Technology), Catharina O'Donnell (Harvard University), Pamela Oliver (University of Wisconsin, Madison), Susan Olzak (Stanford University), Michelle Oyakawa (Muskingum University), Louisa Parks (University of Trento), Katia Pilati (University of Trento), Daniel Platek (Polish Academy of Science), Martín Portos (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid), Jan-Erik Refle (University of Geneva & University of Lausanne), Heidi Reynolds-Stenson (Colorado State University Pueblo), Elle Rochford (University of Delaware), Conny Roggeband (University of Amsterdam), Deana A. Rohlinger (Florida State University), Eduardo Romanos (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), Teal Rothschild (Roger Williams University), Dieter Rucht (Berlin Social Science Center), Brent Simpson (University of South Carolina), Kim Scipes (Purdue University Northwest), Eric Selbin (Southwestern University), David C. Sorge (Bryn Mawr College), Sarah A. Soule (Stanford University), Viktoria Spaiser (University of Leeds), Anthony J. Spires (The University of Melbourne), Suzanne Staggenborg (University of Pittsburgh), Verta Taylor (University of California, Santa Barbara), Didem Turkoglu (Kadir Has University), Katrin Uba (Uppsala University), Dr Sara Vestergren (Keele University, UK), Katerina Vrablikova (University of Bath), Mattias Wahlström (University of Gothenburg), Stefaan Walgrave (University of Antwerp), Edward Walker (University of California, Los Angeles), Omar Wasow (University of California, Berkeley), Regina Werum (University of Nebraska-Lincoln), Åsa Wettergren (University of Gothenburg), Dr. Wayne T. Whitmore (Inver Hills Community College), Matthew S. Williams (Loyola University Chicago), Lesley Wood (York University), Michael C. Zeller (Universität Bielefeld)

## Respondent nationalities

USA	45.38%
UK	13.45%
Spain	5.04%
Australia	4.20%
Netherlands	3.36%
Sweden	3.36%
France	2.52%
Italy	2.52%
Mexico	2.52%
Belgium	1.68%

Canada	1.68%
Germany	1.68%
Hong Kong	1.68%
Switzerland	1.68%
Bangladesh	0.84%
Bulgaria	0.84%
Ecuador	0.84%
Finland	0.84%
Lithuania	0.84%
India	0.84%
New Zealand	0.84%
Poland	0.84%
Tanzania	0.84%
Turkey	0.84%
Venezuela	0.84%