

Protest Politics Today

DEVASHREE GUPTA

polity

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CHAPTER 2

The Activist

Objectives

- To examine how views of protestors have evolved over time, from early depictions of irrational groups to contemporary ideas of rational actors.
- To understand how demographic characteristics, including age and socio-economic status, affect how likely particular groups of people are to engage in social protest.
- To determine the role of grievances, social networks, environment, and organizations in mobilizing people to participate in social movements.
- To identify the obstacles to protest and activist retention.

Introduction

Writing in 1897, sociologist Albion Small tells us that “the social movement is, an unfriendly observer might say, a confusion of fussy, fidgety folk, blocking each other and everybody else with their foolishness” (Small 1897: 340). Unfriendly observers certainly were easy to find when it came to social movements of his own era – people who found protests and protestors bewildering, their causes threatening, their motives suspect, their tactics deplorable, and, ultimately, their efforts pointless. The diaries of Kate Frye, a member of the women’s suffrage movement in the United Kingdom provides us with a first-hand account of such views. From a middle-class background, Frye first became involved in the suffrage movement in 1906 and eventually became a paid organizer for the New Constitutional Society for Women’s Suffrage. Roughly one year after joining the movement, Frye attended a large march through the streets of London. She recounts that, as they moved through the muddy streets of the city, crowds of onlookers gathered to observe the spectacle; she overheard two of them – “quite smart men,” she says – remark “I say look at those nice girls – positively disgraceful I call it” (entry for February 9, 1907, in Crawford 2013). Newspaper

coverage of these protests also captured many of the antagonistic feelings among the public. In her analysis of stories about the movement in the *Daily Express*, Sadie Clifford noted, for example, that participants were “described as having temperaments of ‘folly and fury,’” perhaps crazy or frenzied, and “hooligan[s]. . . who prosecute a ‘campaign against society’” (Clifford 2000: 1–4). Fussy, fidgety, and foolish indeed!

Contemporary reactions to social movements in our own day and age would suggest that not much has changed in the century since Small wrote those words. Members of the public still react to protestors – especially people advocating for controversial causes – with confusion and contempt. Take, for example, two social movements that emerged in the United States at roughly similar times: OWS and the Tea Party Movement (TPM).

OWS formed in 2011, following the electrifying pro-democracy movements that had spread throughout the Arab world earlier in the year. Inspired by these Arab Spring uprisings and other grassroots movements against neoliberal economic orthodoxy (Castañeda 2012), the activist magazine *Adbusters* called for a public protest in the same spirit to take place on September 17. Their aim was to call attention to a range of interrelated issues: growing economic inequality (the widely adopted slogan “We are the 99%” stems from this focus), the malfeasance of large Wall Street financial companies, and the harmful influence of corporate interests on democracy. While the OWS movement spawned protests around the country and around the world, the epicenter of the movement was Zuccotti Park in New York City. Here, protestors set up an encampment, organized marches, held working groups, and generally tried to create a miniature society based on the movement’s core values.

While OWS had a decidedly left-leaning ideology, the TPM emerged out of popular frustration among conservatives at the political direction the country was taking under a newly elected President Obama and a Democratic-controlled legislature. Not only did the new administration’s signature policy proposals, such as health-care reform, worry conservatives, its efforts to help the economy, which had struggled in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, were seen as exorbitantly expensive and irresponsible. In February, CNBC television reporter Rick Santelli had had enough. Broadcasting from the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, Santelli railed against the administration’s plan to provide foreclosure relief to

many of the people facing eviction from their homes, shouting that “the government is rewarding bad behavior” and inviting people to a tea party to protest against the bill. The imagery of a tea party, which evoked the Boston Tea Party and its attendant symbolism of resisting tyrannical government, resonated with the public and his outburst quickly went viral. It sparked national interest in a wider movement that prioritized smaller government and sharp cuts in spending to reduce the deficit among other goals. While the TPM never created a public encampment, its members held rallies, protest marches, and disruptive displays to further the movement’s agenda.

Both OWS and the TPM captured the attention of national media outlets, which featured them in countless stories analyzing the two movements’ scope, goals, clout, and impact. There was also considerable curiosity about their participants and who they were. In keeping with Albion Small’s observation, many of the assumptions made by members of the public were uncharitable, especially when characterizing individuals belonging to the movement furthest from their own political beliefs. Individuals commenting on TPM-related stories on *alternet.org*, an ideologically left-leaning website that appeals to progressive activists described TPM supporters as a “crazy lot,” “willfully stupid,” “trailer trash,” and “racist.” Similarly, individuals commenting on OWS-related stories on *breitbart.org*, an ideologically right-wing website, described the movement’s activists as “parasites,” “scum,” “criminals,” and “animals.” The stereotypes coalesced quickly: to detractors, the TPM was full of uneducated rubes yearning for a bygone era of white supremacy, while OWS attracted freeloading layabouts looking to live off government handouts and taking no responsibility for their lives.

Empirical studies of OWS and TPM activists, however, challenge these stereotypes. Using in-depth interviews and surveys, researchers show that our assumptions about who activists are – especially activists who support causes with which we disagree – do not always match reality (for more on these research approaches, see this chapter’s methods spotlight). Using in-depth interviews and surveys, for example, Ruth Milkman, Stephanie Luce, and Penny Lewis (2013) found that, contrary to stereotypes that OWS was full of unemployed slackers, only 10% were unemployed. A further 6% were retired, 4% were full-time students, and the remaining 80% were employed, mostly in professional occupations like education. Rather than needing government handouts to make ends meet,

Methods Spotlight: Surveys and In-Depth Interviews

Surveys and in-depth interviews are two ways in which social movement scholars can gather information about the people who participate in social movements. Such techniques are particularly well suited to collecting micro-level data about activists: their knowledge, attitudes, experiences, and personal backgrounds (Klandermans and Smith 2002). One of the main differences between surveys and in-depth interviews is their scope; surveys tend to involve a focused set of questions that can be answered quickly and briefly by a range of people. In-depth interviews, on the other hand, involve a more extensive and open-ended conversation with a smaller group of people. A survey might ask respondents whether they had ever signed a petition before, and allow only a “yes” or “no” response; an in-depth interview, on the other hand, might probe for a respondent’s reasons for choosing to sign a petition or how signing that petition may have affected their future involvement in social protest. While surveys collect responses from a large number of people in order to find patterns and trends among the respondents and generalize from a sample to a larger population, in-depth interviews aim to produce rich, detailed narratives that capture particular respondents’ ideas and worldviews. Surveys tend to convert data for quantitative analysis; in-depth interviews tend to analyze data in more qualitative ways.

In-depth interviews tend to be carried out face-to-face; surveys can be conducted face-to-face as well but do not have to be; respondents can be given paper or online surveys to fill out on their own time. Both surveys and in-depth interviews require careful question formulation in order to achieve meaningful results. For surveys, vague wording, incomplete or confusing answer choices, and other pitfalls of design can produce poor-quality data. For in-depth interviews, question quality is also important, particularly since the questions must be constructed in order to open-up conversation and put the respondent at ease. Such interviews can include closed questions (i.e., ones with a finite list of possible responses, such as last level of school completed), open-ended ones (i.e., questions with no set answer choices), or a combination of the two (Blee and Taylor 2002). Survey questionnaires tend to use primarily closed questions.

In both surveys and in-depth interviews, selecting the right respondents is crucial. Because researchers who use surveys typically wish to make inferences about a larger population of subjects based on the responses of a smaller sample, researchers should recruit a random sample in order to correct for possible biases. Random sampling, however, is not always easy in face-to-face settings; researchers hoping to carry out surveys of activists at demonstrations – especially ones involving people marching or otherwise moving around – must plan well in advance and train survey workers well (Andretta and della Porta 2014: 320-1). Even with well-trained workers, researchers using this method must be aware of the possible bias introduced into the results when some groups of protestors refuse to answer questions more often than others (Walgrave et al. 2016). In-depth interviews usually involve a smaller number of respondents who are purposefully chosen rather than randomized. Such purposeful selection criteria may prioritize specialized knowledge or expertise – leaders of movements, individuals who participated in key events, people who were in the room or took part in a key decision – in addition to capturing

representative or typical responses (della Porta 2014b). While these two approaches are somewhat distinct, they can also complement one another. Survey data can, for example, paint a broad picture of general patterns and trends for a particular group; in-depth interviews with selected members of that group can further flesh out key details and insights that brief survey questions cannot uncover on their own.

Explore This Method

There are a number of datasets available online that provide survey data previously collected by scholars. Some datasets, like the World Values Survey (www.worldvaluessurvey.org) do not focus on social movements, but include questions about civic engagement, including how often people in different countries take part in different types of protest activity, from innocuous actions like signing petitions to more disruptive forms. To get an idea of what kinds of questions you might ask on a survey instrument, explore the questionnaire at Tufts University aimed at measuring the political and civic engagement of young people (<http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/questionnaire.pdf>). The actual data collected via this instrument are also available online (<http://activecitizen.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/FinalReport1.pdf>). Looking at these questions, what else might you want to ask people to understand their level of involvement with social movements and protest? Which questions might be best answered via another survey? Are there particular questions that would be better if asked in an in-depth interview?

more than a third of OWS activists earned more than \$100,000 per year – a proportion higher than in the overall population of New York City, where only 24% of households had income exceeding that amount. On the other side of the ideological spectrum, a survey of TPM members conducted by Gallup and USA Today found that 65% had at least some college education, which is at odds with the idea that its supporters are uneducated. Moreover, 31% had graduated from college, and, of those graduates, half received a postgraduate degree (Saad 2010). Rather than being rubes, the survey found that supporters were, on average, solidly middle-class, with 55% reporting incomes over \$50,000. These inconsistencies between the stereotypes about these two movements and the empirical data suggest that people do not always have a good sense of who joins social movements.

Historical Perspectives on Protestors

As discussed in the first chapter, protests prior to the late eighteenth century differed in some key respects compared to the protests associated with modern social movements. They tended to be

highly localized, brief, without organizational basis, and focused on violation of community moral norms and customs (Thompson 1971) or addressing momentary grievances without necessarily making political demands about larger, systemic concerns. E. P. Thompson provides one example of this type of protest from 1790, in which Alice Evans, the wife of a local weaver, raised the community's ire by berating him in public, faulting his behavior and lazy disposition. Thompson describes what happened next:

This conduct (of hers) the neighbouring lords of creation were determined to punish, fearing their own spouses might assume the same authority. They therefore mounted one of their body, dressed in female apparel, on the back of an old donkey, the man holding a spinning wheel on his lap, and his back towards the donkey's head. Two men led the animal through the neighbourhood, followed by scores of boys and idle men, tinkling kettles and frying pans, roaring with cows' horns, and making a most hideous hullabaloo.

(Thompson 1992: 5)

This type of protest, commonly referred to as "rough music" or "charivari," targeted members of the community who had committed some act beyond the pale – adultery, for example – using public mockery and humiliation to make them conform to local standards. Note in this example the lack of larger political claims, the absence of any coordinating organization, the short duration, and the narrowness of the grievance; after all, who outside this immediate community would take an interest in how Alice Evans treated her husband? Note, too, the disorderliness of the display, which was characteristic and intentional. In another incident, Thompson recounts how protestors converged on the target's house, banged on pots and pans, rang bells, threw stones at the doors and windows, dragged the target out of bed, and threw him in the mud (1992: 5). These were not polite demonstrations.

Given the unruliness of rough music or the disruption and violence of food riots, it is perhaps unsurprising that early theories about who protests and why tend to emphasize the chaotic, dangerous, and uncontrolled nature of protesting crowds. They stressed how participants could lose their individual faculties of reason and restraint when swept up in a large group. This was true not just for social miscreants but also for law-abiding citizens, who could also be influenced to act with reckless abandon. French sociologist Gustave Le Bon ([1895] 2001) set the tone for this line of analysis,

claiming that crowds transform people and exert an almost hypnotic effect that overrides critical thinking. Moreover, Le Bon also argued that crowds could be easily swayed by strong leaders who could turn these supporters into tools to be manipulated for their own nefarious ends. The result is that, in crowds, emotions run high and spread like a contagion, resulting in people who act without thought (Blumer 1951, 1971).

Less spontaneous but far deadlier than a bread riot were the mass ideological movements of the twentieth century – fascism and communism – that also seemed to illustrate the principle that participation in crowds can exert a hypnotic and de-individualizing effect on people that strips away their capacity to do anything more than reach simplistic conclusions about cause and effect, right and wrong. The idea of the madding crowd was an appealing way of understanding why, for example, so many students in China committed violence against their teachers, strangers on the street, and even their own family members during the Cultural Revolution, or why ordinary people living in the Nazi-occupied Polish town of Jedwabne turned on their Jewish neighbors and executed hundreds of people in a single day, or the countless other examples of people who seemed to suspend their individual moral faculties and give in to the collective madness of the moment.

The people who participate in such movements, collective behavior theorists argued, are highly alienated from the rest of society. Lacking meaningful bonds with others or a sense of purpose, they exist on the peripheral edges of social, economic, and political life. Because of their isolation, such individuals are drawn to join mass movements because of the sense of community and belonging they offer. As members, they develop a collective identity that connects them with others and provides emotional and psychological benefits as well as a sense of purpose (Blumer 1951; Kornhauser 1959). Participation in nationalist movements provides a good illustration of this dynamic. The popularity of nationalist ideas across many European countries in the nineteenth century was in part driven by major structural transformations that reshaped the social fabric. The Industrial Revolution, for example, prompted large migrations from rural to urban areas, and transformed a largely agricultural workforce into factory workers. Along the way, these changes meant that people were uprooted from the places in which they and their families had lived for generations and were suddenly thrust into anonymous cities, working and living in sometimes

deplorable conditions and without the kind of community bonds that gave them a sense of belonging and identity (Gellner 2009). Moreover, while these social and economic upheavals were taking place, the traditional power and role of organized religion was growing weaker as Enlightenment thinkers promoted secular, scientific values in the public sphere. This erosion of religiosity further weakened the traditional identities on which people could rely, while undermining a long-standing source of group solidarity (Anderson 2016). The result, Ernest Gellner argues, was a population alienated and hungry for a source of community and sense of belonging. Nationalism came along at the right time to fulfill this craving by offering a sense of comradeship and kinship with the members of an extended national "family." In its malignant forms, nationalism has certainly generated the kind of frenzied, destructive behavior that would be familiar to Le Bon and other theorists of the crowd: the genocide of Tutsis by their Hutu neighbors in Rwanda, or the lynching of Muslims suspected of eating beef by right-wing Hindu nationalists.

Compelling as these accounts may be, they also generate important criticisms. For one, scholars dispute the notion that crowds are irrational, emotional, and therefore erratic actors. Anthony Oberschall (1995) suggests that, rather than being simply absorbed into some kind of collective hive mind, crowds are composed of people with different motives, interests, and emotional responses; some of them are more committed to the crowd, and others less so. Some will disappear from the crowd when it starts to rain, others will be slower to abandon the cause. Moreover, individuals do not lose their capacity for rational thought in crowds; they behave with less restraint when surrounded by others because the potential costs of risky behavior are lower in crowds than outside them. Consider the potential costs of participating in a bread riot. If your objective is to voice your displeasure at the cost of bread by destroying the property of the people you feel are responsible for the price hike, you could join a crowd and do so, or you could act alone. If you act alone, the chances that you will get caught are fairly high. But in a crowd, the potential risk is much lower: even if the police turn out in force, it will be difficult for them to catch everyone, so it would be more rational to behave badly when surrounded by other people. Thus, it is not the crowd that generates irrational behavior; it just so happens that bad behavior is more rational in crowds (McPhail 1991; Oberschall 1995: 14–15).

A second line of critique disputes the idea that people who join large protests are somehow the most alienated among us and lack meaningful social connections to others. In fact, empirical studies suggest that those who join movements have strong social connections to others – ties that predate and, in fact, facilitate membership in the movement (Rule 1988; McAdam 1990). Data from OWS seems to point in a similar direction. Ruth Milkman and her collaborators found, for example, that 47 percent of those surveyed also belonged to other organizations, such as anti-war groups, women's groups, and groups working to organize local communities. About a third of respondents were union members, and many had also participated in more mainstream political activities such as donating money to political candidates or working on political campaigns (Milkman et al. 2013). The same could be said for members of the TPM. A CBS / *New York Times* survey found 43 percent reported working actively for political candidates or donating money to political campaigns. This prior experience suggests that “seasoned hands seem to be more common in Tea Party ranks than in the US citizenry as a whole” (Williamson et al. 2011: 27–8).

These figures paint a picture not of people who are isolated from society but of activists who are engaged in their communities, who care deeply about what happens in them, who work to improve them in multiple ways, and whose participation includes both institutional and non-institutional channels. While OWS sympathizers show marked skepticism of mainstream political actors and those who are deeply embedded in existing power structures, many of them have taken an active role in civil society and community institutions (Milkman et al. 2013: 4); the same could be said for many TPM members who, for example, attend church regularly at rates that are at least equal to, and usually far exceeding, those of the general American public (Deckman 2012: 182). These are hardly people who are adrift without ties to anchor them to local culture and society. If anything, it is their community ties that seem to make them more invested in working for change.

Accordingly, critics have questioned the CB argument that crowds are ultimately irrational, or that those who join social movements do so because social breakdowns perpetuate feelings of alienation from others in their community. Other CB theorists have subsequently sought to distance themselves from these two claims, rejecting the idea that crowds are impulsive and irrational, saying that they are instead collections of people whose actions

may seem impulsive to outsiders, but are actually entirely rational and consistent with the beliefs that emerge from the group as it comes together and confronts challenges collectively (Turner and Killian 1987). To understand how this theory of "emergent norms" works, consider the 2016 Venezuelan food riots, which erupted around the country in the wake of an economic collapse. Writing for the *New York Times*, Nicholas Casey paints a vivid and grim picture of the scene: "With delivery trucks under constant attack, the nation's food is now transported under armed guard. Soldiers stand watch over bakeries. The police fire rubber bullets at desperate mobs storming grocery stores, pharmacies, and butcher shops. A 4-year-old girl was shot to death as street gangs fought over food. Venezuela is convulsing from hunger" (Casey 2016). Le Bon might point out that these riots perfectly illustrate the irrationality of crowds, with all their violent and disruptive tendencies. Emergent norm theory, however, would argue that, 10 years ago, large crowds of Venezuelans were not roaming cities spontaneously looting food supplies; they did not need to when the economy was growing nearly 10 percent per year. What has changed from 2006 to 2016 is not the crowd, but the crisis environment in which Venezuelans now find themselves. Confronted by unexpected or unprecedented challenges, Turner and Killian argue, people may not initially know how to respond, but as they interact with others facing the same situation, they develop shared expectations and new norms that govern their behavior from that point forward. In the case of Venezuela, where the contemporary choice is understood to be "loot or starve," the norm that emerges from the crowd makes looting acceptable and rational, given the circumstances – not the actions of a crazed crowd.

Activist Traits, Activist Motives

Based on the preceding discussion, we cannot simply assume that protestors are anomic individuals at the fringes of society. But then what differentiates people who join movements and those who do not? Demographic factors do not provide much guidance on this question. For any given demographic variables we might select – age, gender, education, socio-economic status, etc. – we could find examples of people matching those characteristics both inside and outside movements. Most movements have gaps between people who are potential members and those who actually participate

by turning up to protest events (Klandermans and Oegema 1987, 1994), even though participants and non-participants may share many of the same personal characteristics and traits. In their study of protest participation between 1973 and 2008, Neal Caren, Raj Andrew Ghosal, and Vanesa Ribas (2011) found that people with certain demographic characteristics were more likely to join a protest or sign a petition than those outside those groups. City-dwellers, for example, had a 14.5% probability of joining a protest, compared to 11.7% for suburbanites or 10.3% for rural residents; union members had a 14.4% probability of joining a protest compared to 12.4% probability for non-union members. Those with college degrees had a 70.4% probability of signing a petition at least once, compared to just 38.5% probability for those without a high school diploma. And the richest 25% of respondents had a 63% probability of signing a petition, compared to just 48% probability for those in the lowest income quartile. On one hand, these results – which Caren and his co-authors argue tend to be mostly stable across generational cohorts – seem to suggest that there are demographic variations between participants and non-participants. At the same time, there are people who are college-educated who do not sign petitions as well as high school dropouts who do, just as there are urbanites who will never join a protest and rural dwellers who have joined more than one. Demographics alone are not wholly sufficient as a reason why people participate in social movements.

Grievances and Deprivation

If demographics cannot distinguish activists from bystanders, perhaps what separates activists from those who stand on the sidelines are the grievances they have about the status quo. Certainly, grievances seem like a requirement for participants in social protest; it is hard to imagine people who are content and satisfied with their lot in life taking to the streets to demand change, especially since protesting takes time and energy and sometimes entails serious risks. OWS protestors, for instance, cited a range of grievances they had with the status quo, including income inequality, corporate greed, unemployment, and the corrupting influence of money in politics (Milkman et al. 2013). For their part, TPM members refer repeatedly to their anger over government overreach, ballooning deficits, and specific policies like the Affordable Care Act and bailouts of Wall Street banks and the automobile industry during the Great

Recession (Williamson et al. 2011; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Note that these grievances are collective in nature; unlike an individual grievance (e.g. a noisy neighbor, a co-worker who hogs all the credit on projects, a classmate who does not contribute to group work), collective grievances are shared among two or more people and are expressed as a shared complaint that requires redress for those affected (Snow and Soule 2010).

Grievances, it should be noted, do not spring fully formed out of thin air. They are *socially constructed* insofar as people must interpret an existing set of conditions as being unfair or problematic and requiring change. Child labor, for example, was common in places like the United States and the UK before the twentieth century since factory owners preferred to hire children because they were cheaper and easier to control than adults. This was considered an unremarkable reality until growing labor movements in the mid nineteenth century started campaigning against the practice. Their efforts to delegitimize child labor helped to alter public attitudes, turning it from a routine and widespread custom to one that was regarded as cruel and unconscionable. Grievances can form in response to all types of conditions, even ones that may not seem objectionable to outsiders. Ted Gurr argues that relative deprivation, or the difference between what people experience and what they believe they *should* experience, produces high levels of frustration and anger (Gurr 1970). A worker who receives a 3 percent pay raise at the end of the year might be satisfied by this increase until she becomes aware that a co-worker received a 5 percent increase for comparable work. All of a sudden, that initial increase is not a cause for celebration but a reason for complaint; despite being objectively better off than she was before, she still feels wronged. Such grievances can be crystallized and amplified in multiple ways and by multiple actors; social movement groups can play a leading role in articulating and spreading grievances. Lance Bennett (2012) further proposes that individuals tied into dense social networks can, via their connection with others, share stories, form solidarities, and convert what might otherwise be idiosyncratic experiences and beliefs into highly personalized motivations to take action. Ultimately, grievances certainly play a role in motivating people to join movements, especially if they are deeply felt (Snow and Soule 2010: 23) and are culturally meaningful (Simmons 2014).

Participation and Differential Engagement

While grievances are important, they are not a complete explanation for why some people join movements and others do not, simply because activists do not have a monopoly on grievances. Think, for example, about the kinds of social problems you would like to fix if you had the power. Child hunger, human trafficking, environmental degradation, government corruption, underfunded public schools – the list of possible issues could potentially go on and on. Unless you think the world is perfect as is, you should be able to think of at least a few things you would change about the status quo. And yet, how many of those problems have moved you to join a social movement? For most people, the grievances they have about the world do not automatically compel them to join movements. Therein lies the problem: grievances are commonplace, but most people do not act on them by engaging in social protest. Table 2.1 shows how frequently people in different countries have participated in various forms of political action, from the fairly tame (signing a petition) to the more risky (participating in a strike).

As the table highlights, with just two exceptions (e.g., signing petitions in the United States and Sweden), the majority of people in these countries have not taken the kinds of action that we commonly associate with social movement participation. Of these different non-institutional political activities, the least intrusive, time-intensive, and costly – signing a petition – is the most popular; even so, only 21.3% of people on average have taken even this small step. While low participation numbers might make sense in repressive autocracies where putting your name on a petition might result in some unpleasant repercussions, even in democratic countries like Chile, Ghana, South Africa, and India, less than one quarter of the population reports ever signing a petition. The survey did not ask about participation in higher-risk forms of participation, but the percentage of people for those activities is likely to be minimal, given low participation in more innocuous forms of protest. Even if collective grievances are widely held in society, collective action does not automatically follow. Instead, as figure 2.1 suggests, subsets of the public have different levels of engagement with an issue, such that protestors form a small subset of all those who care about an issue, which is itself a subset of the overall population. The OWS case bears this out. Popular attitudes toward income inequality in the United States, for example, indicate that

a majority of people believe that the current gap between the rich and poor is unfair; a Gallup poll from April 2015 found that 63% of Americans – including 42% of conservatives, 67% of moderates, and 85% of liberals – believe that wealth should be more evenly spread throughout society. And yet most people in the US never took part in OWS protests, marches, or any other event. The grievance might be shared, but the desire to join a movement and protest is not.

Table 2.1 Comparative participation rates (percentages) for different protest forms

	Signed a petition	Joined in boycotts	Attended peaceful demonstration	Joined in a strike	Any other act of protest
Argentina	18.6	2.6	14.1	11.7	5.9
Brazil	44.0	4.6	15.9	13.1	9.0
Chile	21.4	4.0	23.1	16.4	15.7
China	4.5	2.6	1.7	1.4	1.2
Colombia	23.8	13.2	18.3	7.3	5.4
Egypt	1.8	4.6	6.8	1.2	0.5
Germany	42.7	12.9	21.1	11.9	10.9
Ghana	2.1	1.6	4.6	2.3	1.2
Hong Kong	33.9	9.6	16.0	2.9	4.5
India	15.7	14.6	19.7	14.9	14.1
Japan	28.0	1.4	3.6	3.5	1.7
Malaysia	1.9	1.0	2.3	0.5	0.5
Mexico	18.3	2.5	10.2	5.5	4.2
Netherlands	35.4	7.8	11.9	8.8	3.0
Nigeria	8.2	5.7	24.7	40.8	12.1
Pakistan	20.7	4.8	17.0	13.7	11.0
Philippines	10.5	3.2	7.5	2.4	1.7
Rwanda	8.6	0.6	0.9	0.6	1.3
South Africa	11.3	8.3	9.0	7.3	5.1
South Korea	26.4	5.4	9.5	5.3	4.0
Spain	22.1	5.8	24.9	19.5	0.4
Sweden	68.0	21.9	20.8	16.0	14.0
Turkey	9.8	4.5	4.8	3.0	3.3
United States	60.1	15.5	13.7	7.4	5.6
Zimbabwe	13.4	5.0	8.4	5.7	4.2
AVERAGE	21.3	7.4	12.4	9.2	6.2

Source: World Values Survey, Wave 6.