

Title: Extreme Protest Tactics Reduce Popular Support for Social Movements

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## ABSTRACT

Social movements are critical agents of change that vary greatly in both tactics and popular support. Prior work shows that extreme protest tactics – actions that are highly counter-normative, disruptive, or harmful to others, including inflammatory rhetoric, blocking traffic, and damaging property – are effective for gaining publicity. However, we find across three experiments that extreme protest tactics decreased popular support for a given cause because they reduced feelings of identification with the movement. Though this effect obtained in tests of popular responses to extreme tactics used by animal rights, Black Lives Matter, and anti-Trump protests (Studies 1-3), we found that self-identified political activists were willing to use extreme tactics because they believed them to be effective for recruiting popular support (Studies 4a & 4b). The *activist's dilemma* – wherein tactics that raise awareness also tend to reduce popular support – highlights a key challenge faced by social movements struggling to affect progressive change.

Individuals organize social movements to collectively protest social ills and advocate for change. Social movements fight to realign the power structure of a society, mobilizing to empower those they see as disadvantaged by the current system (1, 2). While each movement has its own, unique approach for achieving its agenda, research highlights two major goals most activists pursue in their attempts to transform the status quo. First, most social movement activists aim to gain widespread attention for their cause so that they can raise awareness about the problems they are fighting to address (e.g., 3). Second, most activists seek to recruit as much support for their cause as possible (e.g., 4).<sup>1</sup> Here we point to a critical tension between these goals that challenges the tactical efforts of social movements.

In advocating for their cause, many activists engage in extreme protest behaviors – defined here as protest behaviors that are highly counter-normative, disruptive, or harmful to others, for example the use of inflammatory rhetoric, blocking traffic, damaging property, and disrupting other citizens' everyday activities (c.f., 5). Past research suggests such tactics are effective in attracting media coverage of a movement, helping draw attention to its central concerns (6-9). However, here we argue that while extreme tactics may succeed in attracting attention, they typically reduce popular public support for the movement by eroding bystanders' identification with the movement, ultimately deterring bystanders from supporting the cause or becoming activists themselves. Below we discuss in more depth these two aims social movement activists commonly pursue and layout the trade-off we hypothesize social movements face when they employ extreme protest tactics.

To transform a democratic society, where policy is shaped in part by the attitudes and beliefs of the populace, activists must generate widespread awareness about their cause to raise

consciousness (10-12). Failing to do so means the social problem a movement is organizing to address may go unnoticed or remain a minor issue (8, 11, 13). Thus, a key goal of many activists is to ensure their grievances are broadcast as widely as possible (3, 11). To do this, activists seek publicity through media coverage. The media serves as a “master forum” where movements broach a conversation with the public about issues that would otherwise remain undiscussed (8, 10, 11, 14, 15). How does a social movement gain publicity? Research finds that the media commonly covers events that are novel, dramatic, and sensational (3, 7, 16, 17), and, because many actors vie for limited space in major news outlets (11), it behooves social movement activists to engage in such behaviors to attract coverage. Not surprisingly, then, many movement activists engage in extreme protest tactics (10, 18), and past research finds that such behavior effectively attracts widespread coverage (6-8, 19).

Social movement activists also aim to win popular support for their cause (4). The bigger the movement’s base of support, the more likely that it will affect change in the long-term because larger numbers afford the mobilization of greater physical, economic, and human resources (20-23). Further, larger numbers signal the seriousness and strength of a movement to economic and political elites (24-26). According to research on minority-group influence, majority-group members become less dismissive of dissenting opinions as the minority group’s size grows (27, 28), and as more majority-group members convert to a minority opinion, it becomes more likely that other majority-group members will also convert (29). Thus, social movement activists typically aim to positively shape public opinion about their cause and recruit additional members to join their movement.

The collective action literature emphasizes three underlying reasons why individuals support and join social movements: perceived injustice, group efficacy, and shared social identity

(30, 31). First, the more individuals perceive injustice, the more likely they are to endorse and engage in collective action, propelled in part by strong emotional reactions (32). Second, individuals are more likely to mobilize if they believe a collective action is likely to succeed (33-35). Finally, a strong sense of social identification with the movement prompts mobilization (36-38). Importantly, identifying with activists engaged in the collective action is a stronger predictor of collective action and mobilization than identifying with a disadvantaged group for which activists may be fighting (37, 39). A meta-analysis (30) found that, of these three determinants, social identity processes were most central to collective action because they lead to mobilization for the cause directly, and also help drive perceptions of injustice and efficacy.

To recruit popular support for their cause, then, social movement activists must trigger feelings of common identity in bystanders (40). According to Social Identity Theory (41), individuals separate groups into “we” versus “them”, prompting favorable views of ingroups and more negative views of outgroups. Individuals typically align themselves with groups whose members are most similar to them, who share common values, characteristics, and behaviors (e.g., 42, 43). Thus, to create a shared social identity, a movement must convince bystanders that they share these characteristics with members already in the group.

Although raising awareness and recruiting support are both crucial aims for social movement activists, we hypothesize that use of the extreme protest tactics that many activists employ imposes an unanticipated trade-off between these two aims. To raise awareness and “get the message out,” it is strategic to engage in extreme behaviors that will attract widespread attention and media coverage. However, such behaviors typically reduce movement credibility to the broader public, undermining efforts to recruit and mobilize popular support by alienating potential supporters.

In particular, extreme protest behavior likely undermines observers' sense of self-other overlap with a social movement, reducing observers' identification with activists, or even view activists as outgroup members (for similar reasoning, see 44, 45). Research finds that people dislike and distance themselves from those who disrupt social order and challenge the status quo (46-48). Further, extreme tactics may signal to observers that members of the social movement espouse extreme positions. If so, this could lead observers who hold more moderate stances to feel disconnected from, and unsupportive of, the movement because they view it as advocating for a position very different from their own.

Overall, it is well-established that extreme protest behaviors, such as inflammatory rhetoric, forming blockades, rioting, damaging property, and taking over buildings can be an effective strategy for getting media coverage and gaining widespread attention (7, 8), but little is known about how these tactics impact bystanders' support, largely because the study of social movements has occurred mainly outside the realm of psychological inquiry and methodology. Rather, the social movements literature, rooted strongly in sociology and political science, largely focuses on movements as the unit of analysis, typically exploring what cultural, economic, and political factors lead to the rise and fall of movements. Research exploring social movements using the individual as the primary unit of analysis is far less well-established (49; but see 44, 50). Thus our understanding of the effectiveness of different movement tactics on popular support, and the motives for using such tactics, is limited (51).

Here, we address this gap. In Studies 1-3, we explore the effects of extreme behavior on bystanders' perceptions and attitudes, hypothesizing that these tactics lead bystanders to feel dissimilar from activists and not socially identified with them, leading in turn to decreased support for the movement. Next, we explore why supporters and activists might impose this

detrimental trade-off upon themselves (Studies 4a & 4b), hypothesizing that activists and strong advocates for a cause are willing to engage in extreme behaviors because they incorrectly believe these behaviors are effective both for gaining attention and recruiting popular support.

## **Results**

**Study 1.** Participants read about a fictional animal rights activist group called Free the Vulnerable (FTV). The extremity of the movement's protest behavior was manipulated at three levels: Moderate Protest, Extreme Protest, or Highly Extreme Protest conditions. The protesters in the two extreme protest conditions engaged in unlawful activities (e.g., breaking into an animal testing facility) modeled after protest activities of real-life activists, while the activists in the Moderate Protest condition peacefully marched in protest. Including two extreme protest conditions allowed us to examine whether protest extremity has a linear impact on bystanders' support, or whether there might be a threshold at which point bystanders' negative impression of the movement holds constant, such that any increase in extremity beyond the threshold does not further influence support for a movement. After participants read their assigned article, they completed measures of perceived extremity, social identification with the movement and support for it.

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and results of one-way ANOVAs and pairwise tests examining the impact of experimental condition. The effect of condition on perceived extremity yielded a significant omnibus effect, such that participants in the Moderate Protest condition viewed the protesters' behavior as less extreme than did participants in either the Extreme Protest condition or the Highly Extreme Protest condition. Additionally, participants in the Extreme Protest condition viewed the protesters' behavior as being less extreme than

participants in the Highly Extreme Protest condition. These results suggest that the manipulation successfully affected perceptions of how extreme the protesters' tactics were.

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations, and effects due to experimental condition (Study 1).

	Moderate Protest Condition Mean (SD)	Extreme Protest Condition Mean (SD)	Highly Extreme Protest Condition Mean (SD)	Omnibus test	Moderate vs. Extreme Protest Conditions t-test	Moderate vs. Highly Extreme Protest Conditions t-test	Extreme vs. Highly Extreme Protest Condition t-test	Combined Extreme Protest Conditions Mean (SD)	Combined Extreme vs. Moderate Conditions t-test
Extremity	3.25 (.87)	3.88 (1.03)	4.16 (.96)	$F = 23.54$ $p < .001$	$t = 4.66$ $p < .001$	$t = 6.74$ $p < .001$	$t = 2.14$ $p = .033$	4.02 (1.00)	$t = -6.48$ $p < .001$
Social Identification	2.70 (1.32)	2.48 (1.30)	2.28 (1.16)	$F = 2.74$ $p = .066$	$t = -1.25$ $p = .212$	$t = -2.34$ $p = .019$	$t = -1.12$ $p = .262$	2.38 (1.23)	$t = -2.05$ $p = .041$
Support Movement	3.07 (1.11)	2.60 (1.17)	2.62 (1.15)	$F = 5.44$ $p = .005$	$t = -2.96$ $p = .003$	$t = -2.80$ $p = .005$	$t = 0.16$ $p = .876$	2.61 (1.15)	$t = -3.30$ $p = .001$

When looking at the effects of condition on social identification and movement support, we found nonsignificant differences between the Extreme and Highly Extreme Protest conditions. Thus, while protesters in the Extreme Protest condition were viewed as significantly less extreme than those in the Highly Extreme Protest condition, they were judged in a similar light. This result is in line with research arguing that the perceived inappropriateness of many acts does not occur linearly, but as a step function, where behaviors that cross a given threshold are categorized in a similarly negative manner (52). With this in mind, we collapsed the Extreme and Highly Extreme Protest conditions together and treated them as one condition, the Combined Extreme Protest condition. As shown in Table 1, participants in the Combined Extreme Protest condition identified less with and were less willing to support the movement than those in the Moderate Protest condition.

A bootstrap mediation analysis examining whether our experimental condition affected participants' scores on the support movement composite through participants' feelings of shared social identity indicated that 0 was not in the 95% confidence interval, CI[-.48,-.01]. This result,



therefore, suggests that participants in the Combined Extreme condition were reluctant to support the FTV movement, at least in part, because they felt less social identification with it (Figure S1).

**Study 2.** Participants read an excerpt from a published news article regarding a protest march of the social movement Black Lives Matter (BLM). BLM is a movement started in 2012 “working for the validity of Black life” (53). All participants read the same news article except for one small difference; participants in the Extreme Protest condition read the article in its published form which described BLM protesters chanting rhetoric apparently encouraging violence against police officers. Participants in the Moderate Protest condition read an edited version in which protesters chanted anti-racist slogans. Participants then completed measures of identification with and support for the movement. Additionally, since BLM may be uniquely persuasive to African American participants, we over-sampled this segment of the American population and tested whether participant race might interact with the experimental manipulation in predicting perceptions of the protesters as well as differences in movement support. Similarly, since responses to BLM likely vary by political ideology, we examined whether participants’ liberalism versus conservatism interacted with experimental condition.

Results indicated that participants in the Extreme Protest condition viewed the protesters as more extreme,  $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ , than did participants in the Moderate Protest condition,  $M = 3.17$ ,  $SD = .88$ ,  $t(388) = 4.44$ ,  $p < .001$ , suggesting that the manipulation successfully affected perceptions of how extreme the protesters’ tactics were. Additionally, we found that participants in the Extreme Protest condition felt significantly less identified with the movement,  $M = 2.60$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ , than participants in the Moderate Protest condition,  $M = 2.94$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ,  $t(387) = 2.33$ ,

$p = .021$ . Likewise, participants in the Extreme Protest condition indicated significantly less support for the movement,  $M = 2.83$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ , than those in the Moderate Protest condition,  $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ,  $t(388) = 3.20$ ,  $p = .001$ . Furthermore, a bootstrap analysis confirmed that the decrease in shared social identity that participants in the Extreme Protest condition felt explained why participants in this condition also indicated less support for the movement, 95% CI[-.42, -.05] (Figure S2).

Regression analyses examining the potential moderating role of participant race (African American or not) in predicting how extreme participants viewed the protesters showed a main effect of race,  $b = -.52$ ,  $S.E. = .13$ ,  $p < .001$ ; African Americans perceived the protesters as less extreme,  $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = .91$ , than non-African American participants did,  $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = .92$ . However, there was no interaction with condition,  $b = -.24$ ,  $S.E. = .18$ ,  $p = .185$ . Likewise, when looking at differences in movement support, we found a main effect of race,  $b = .91$ ,  $S.E. = .17$ ,  $p < .001$ ; African Americans indicated greater support for the movement,  $M = 3.49$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ , than non-African Americans,  $M = 2.54$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ , but we found no interaction between condition and participant race,  $b = .08$ ,  $S.E. = .24$ ,  $p = .733$ . These results suggest that both African Americans and non-African Americans perceived protesters as more extreme and felt less support for them in the Extreme Protest condition.

Similarly, analyses examining the moderating role of political ideology in predicting how extreme participants viewed the protesters yielded a significant main effect of ideology,  $b = .15$ ,  $S.E. = .03$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating that more conservative participants viewed the protesters as extreme. However, there was no significant interaction with condition,  $b = .04$ ,  $S.E. = .06$ ,  $p = .550$ . Additionally, when looking at movement support, we again found an effect of political ideology,  $b = -.37$ ,  $S.E. = .04$ ,  $p < .001$ , such that more conservative participants supported the movement

less, but no significant interaction between condition and political ideology,  $b = .10$ ,  $S.E. = .08$ ,  $p = .17$ . Thus, as with participant race, these results suggest that participants, regardless of their political ideology, reacted negatively to extreme protests.<sup>2</sup>

**Study 3.** We next tested our hypotheses about the negative impact of extreme protest behavior by gauging participants' reactions to videos of activists protesting the presidential candidacy of Donald Trump. Along with gauging participants' level of identification with and support for the movement, we also included a longitudinal component where participants indicated their support for Trump as a candidate prior to any experimental manipulation, and then gauged their levels of support following the manipulation. Doing so enabled us to test whether exposure to extreme anti-Trump protests achieved their intended effect of decreasing support for Trump, or if such protests had little impact, or perhaps even increased support for Trump. Additionally, by including a pre-manipulation measure of Trump support, we were able to test whether prior attitudes about Trump moderated the effect of experimental condition. Pre-existing attitudes could shape how individuals judge extreme protests; those already supporting a cause might view these protest behaviors as less extreme and respond to them with increased support for the movement.

Results indicated that participants found the protesters presented in the Extreme Protest condition to be more extreme,  $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ , than the protesters presented in the Moderate Protest condition,  $M = 2.19$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ,  $t(213) = 7.93$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating our experimental manipulation succeeded in varying impressions of the extremity of the protest tactics. We also found participants in the Extreme Protest condition felt significantly less social identification with the movement,  $M = 2.16$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ , than participants in the Moderate Protest condition,  $M$

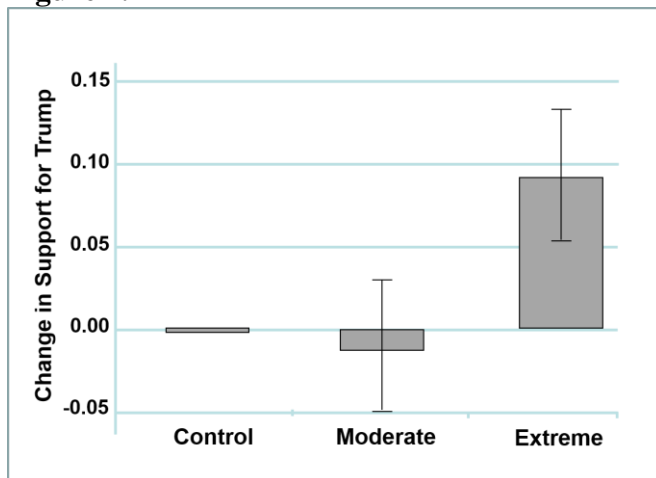
= 2.54,  $SD = 1.29$ ,  $t(213) = 2.17$ ,  $p = .031$ , and participants in the Extreme Protest condition supported the movement less,  $M = 2.05$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ , than participants in the Moderate Protest condition,  $M = 2.66$ ,  $SD = 1.25$ ,  $t(213) = 3.63$ ,  $p < .001$ . A mediation analysis found that exposure to the Extreme Protest condition decreased support for the anti-Trump cause, at least in part, because participants felt less social identification with it, 95% CI[-.60, -.03] (Figure S4).

We also tested whether prior attitudes toward Trump's candidacy moderated the effect of experimental condition on perceived extremity of the protests and support for the movement. We found a main effect of prior Trump support,  $b = .31$ ,  $S.E. = .05$ ,  $p < .001$ ; the more individuals initially supported Trump the more they viewed the protesters as extreme, but there was no interaction with condition,  $b = .02$ ,  $S.E. = .11$ ,  $p = .830$ . When looking at movement support scores, we found a significant effect of prior Trump support,  $b = -.39$ ,  $S.E. = .06$ ,  $p < .001$ , such that the more individuals supported Trump the less they supported the movement, but again no significant interaction,  $b = .06$ ,  $S.E. = .11$ ,  $p = .620$ . Together, these results suggest that regardless of pre-existing attitudes regarding Trump's candidacy, participants in the Extreme Protest condition viewed the protesters as more extreme and reported less support for the movement.<sup>3, 4</sup>

Finally, to explore whether support for Trump as a candidate was affected by the experimental manipulation, we conducted a mixed-design ANOVA, entering Trump Support at Time-1 and Time-2 as the within-subjects factor, and condition (Control, Moderate Protest, Extreme Protest) as the between-subjects factor. This analysis yielded a non-significant effect of Time,  $F(1, 315) = 2.35$ ,  $p = .127$ , but a significant Time x Condition interaction,  $F(2, 315) = 3.30$ ,  $p = .038$  (Figure 1), suggesting the change in support for Trump from time-1 to time-2 was different due to experimental condition. An examination of the changes in Trump support in each condition showed a non-significant change for both Control and Moderate Protest conditions,  $F$ s

$<.067$ ,  $ps >.797$ , but a significant increase in support in the Extreme Protest condition,  $F(1, 108) = 5.80$ ,  $p = .018$ . In other words, participants presented with extreme anti-Trump protesters responded by reporting greater support for Trump. Supplemental analyses found no evidence that our experimental manipulation significantly affected support for any of the other presidential candidates (see Supporting Information).

**Figure 1.**



Error bars represent 1 standard error above and below the mean.

**Study 4a.** Engaging in extreme behaviors, such as using inflammatory rhetoric, forming blockades, occupying buildings, and rioting, commonly gains public attention and media coverage according to past research. However, as Studies 1-3 demonstrate, such behavior can also decrease popular support for a movement. Given these results, why do many activists use extreme tactics rather than more moderate ones that might be more effective in recruiting support? One possibility is that activists accurately perceive this trade-off between attention and credibility, and those choosing extreme tactics have decided it is best to ensure their activities are at least noticed. Another possibility is activists do not perceive this trade-off, viewing extreme

protest tactics as effective in garnering attention and recruiting support. In Studies 4a and 4b we tested these competing possibilities by exploring what motivates strong advocates for a cause and social movement activists to support the use of extreme protest behaviors.

In Study 4a, participants indicated a social issue for which they felt some level of support and answered items measuring how strongly they advocated for the cause. They then indicated how willing they would be to engage in extreme behaviors for the sake of that cause, and finally answered items measuring “Why might you be willing to engage in these behaviors?”. Specifically, they read the prompt “I would be willing to engage in these behaviors *because...*” and then completed two composites measuring how much they believed extreme protest behaviors would help them *raise awareness* and *recruit support*. A reliability analysis examining participants’ willingness to engage in the different extreme behavior categories indicated that participants’ willingness across the different categories was highly correlated, so we averaged the items into a single *extreme behavior willingness* composite (see Supporting Information for analyses conducted on each item separately).

Table S6 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables. The relatively high means for the *raise awareness* ( $M = 3.66, SD = .88$ ) and *recruit support* ( $M = 3.87, SD = .72$ ) composites suggest that, overall, participants tended to believe that engaging in extreme protest behaviors would be effective both for recruiting support and raising awareness. Moreover, a comparison between those expressing the strongest support for their cause (i.e., those indicating “5”) and all other participants yielded a significant difference for the *raise awareness* composite  $t(259) = 4.44, p < .001$ , indicating that those expressing the strongest support scored significantly higher,  $M = 4.05, SD = .75$ , than everyone else,  $M = 3.74, SD = .67$ . Likewise, a comparison of the strongest supporters with everyone else on the *recruit support*

composite indicated that those expressing the most support scored significantly higher,  $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = .95$ , than everyone else,  $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = .81$ ,  $t(259) = 3.32$ ,  $p = .001$ . These results suggest that those expressing the most support for a cause were also the strongest believers that extreme protest behaviors are effective for recruiting support and raising awareness (see Table S7 for means of the two composites at each level of participant support). This conclusion is further bolstered by the fact that the correlation between *raise awareness* and *recruit support* was  $r = .66$ ,  $p < .001$ , and  $r = .70$ ,  $p < .001$ , for those expressing the highest levels of support. Additionally, a series of bootstrap analyses indicated that both composites separately mediated the relationship between strength of support and willingness to engage in extreme behaviors (95%  $CI_{\text{raise awareness}} [.03, .11]$ , 95%  $CI_{\text{recruit support}} [.04, .12]$ ).

**Study 4b.** Study 4a demonstrated that the more individuals supported a cause, the more willing they were to engage in extreme protest behaviors, and they were willing to do so because they believed these behaviors would help raise awareness and recruit support for the cause. However, participants in Study 4a did not necessarily have experience as activists, and therefore we cannot be sure their motivations and beliefs about protest behaviors are indicative of the motivations and beliefs of actual activists. Activists may think more deeply about how different protest behaviors might influence popular support. In Study 4b we explore the motivations and beliefs underlying protest behaviors of activists identifying as part of a social movement to determine whether they recognize extreme protest behaviors will result in a decrease in popular support.

From a prescreened sample of approximately 50,000 workers on Amazon Mechanical Turk, we invited those who identified as activists (“an active member of a social movement”;  $n = 2,125$ ) to participate. One hundred and twenty-one of these activists participated, answering

questionnaires paralleling those in Study 4a. We also asked how strongly participants identified as activists, and found that on a 5-point scale ranging from 1(not at all) to 5(a great deal), the mean response was 4.26 ( $SD = .84$ ), with a modal response of 5 ( $n = 58$ ), verifying that our participants were largely strong activists for their cause.

As in Study 4a, we averaged participants' answers to how willing they were to engage in the different categories of extreme behavior into an *extreme behavior willingness* composite; see Supporting Information for analyses conducted on items separately). We also measured participants' willingness to engage in six protest behaviors (e.g., strikes, riots, civil disobedience) which formed a *specific protest behavior willingness* composite. This composite was highly correlated with the extreme behavior willingness composite,  $r = .49, p < .001$ .

Table S9 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables. The mean scores on the *raise awareness* ( $M = 3.99, SD = .88$ ) and *recruit support* ( $M = 3.64, SD = 1.13$ ) composites indicate that activists were willing to engage in extreme protest behaviors because they expected such behaviors would result in increased awareness and support for their cause. Additionally, there was a strong correlation between the *raise awareness* and *recruit support* composites,  $r = .75, p < .001$ , and both the *extreme behavior willingness* and *specific protest behavior willingness* composites correlated with believing that engaging in such extreme behaviors would *raise awareness*,  $r = .37, p < .001$ , and  $.23, p = .015$ , and *recruit support* composites,  $r = .34, p < .001$ , and  $.27, p = .003$ , respectively.

To address the possibility that recruiting support and raising awareness might not be important to activists, we also asked to what extent these were goals for them and their movements. On a 5-point scale, ranging from 1(not at all) to 5(a great deal), the mean for raising awareness was 4.46 ( $SD = .79$ ), and the mean for recruiting support was 4.33 ( $SD = .93$ ). The



modal response for each item was 5 ( $n_{\text{raise\_awareness}} = 74$ ;  $n_{\text{recruit\_support}} = 70$ ). These very high scores suggest that these two goals were indeed key goals.

Altogether, the results from Studies 4a & 4b suggest that activists aim to raise awareness and garner support for their cause. In hopes of achieving these aims they are willing to engage in extreme protest behaviors, believing such behaviors effectively raise awareness *and* recruit support for the cause. Thus, these results suggest that these activists are unaware of the tactical trade-off between gaining attention and recruiting support that occurs when activists engage in extreme protest behaviors.

## **Discussion**

Although prior work has found extreme protest tactics help social movements gain attention and publicity (6-8, 19), thereby helping to raise awareness about the movement, our results highlight how such tactics can also impair a movement's ability to recruit popular support. Studies 1-3 provide consistent evidence that the use of extreme protest tactics led observers to feel less social identification with the movement and, as a result, support the movement less. This effect was found for a variety of extreme protest tactics – including the use of inflammatory rhetoric, blocking traffic, and vandalism – and affected perceptions of diverse movements. Finally, we explored the motives underlying the potential use of extreme protest tactics, finding that strong advocates for a cause and social movement activists believed extreme protest tactics would be effective not only for raising awareness of, but also recruiting popular support for, their cause (Studies 4a & 4b).

Overall, the present research highlights a trade-off activists commonly face when fighting to enact societal change. To succeed, social movements must raise awareness about their cause, typically through widespread media coverage. And, to help secure their place in the limited space of major news outlets, activists often engage in extreme protest behaviors. Yet, such behaviors alienate potential supporters, leading to less popular support for the movement. Moreover, this research indicates that activists do not realize this trade-off exists, believing rather that extreme behaviors not only assist in gaining attention, but also in garnering support. Together, then, these results may help explain why many activists and social movements develop negative reputations in the eyes of the general public (44). Although Study 4a and 4b's results indicate many are unaware of it, our research suggests that most social movements face this *activist's dilemma*, and overcoming it may be critical to a movement's chances to affect progressive change.

Our findings help fill important gaps in the literature around social movements. Many scholars have written about the advantages and disadvantages of various protest tactics and have theorized about the complicated choices social movements must make as they fight for change (4, 44, 51, 54, 55). Yet, scholars have rarely explored these empirically. Furthermore, since social movements research exists predominantly in sociology and political science, most scholars have attended to more macro-level variables, such as economic conditions and changing demographics, when trying to understand the motivations underlying the rise of different social movements and the public's reaction to them (e.g., 56, 57, but see 44, 50). Thus we know comparatively less about individual-level motives underlying activists' behavior and how bystanders respond to such behavior. Yet, as the present research indicates, examining social movements from the perspective of activists and bystanders is useful for understanding the effects of movement tactics. Further, the present research adds to a burgeoning literature utilizing

experimental methodology to study social movements (e.g.,58, 59), which is particularly useful for understanding how the behavior of activists directly causes the attitudes and behaviors of bystanders. Overall, then, the present research highlights the promising role psychological inquiry and methods could play in advancing our understanding of movements.

Of course, there are limitations to our studies. For internal validity purposes Studies 1-3 used highly controlled experiments where we provided specific information about protesters' behavior. Providing such information helped ensure participants were equally knowledgeable about the protest behaviors in question (except for the differences due to experimental condition). However, using such a controlled setting also removes many real-world contextual circumstances that can shape activists' choice of protest behaviors and bystanders' responses to those behaviors. Thus, while our results highlight the overarching trade-off between raising awareness and recruiting popular support, there are complex social forces not captured in our studies that might exacerbate or minimize this trade-off. Along these lines, there may be contexts where extreme protest behaviors win large-scale support. For instance, extreme protests that elicit unpopular responses (e.g., violent repression) from the state or other actors may win the sympathy of observers. Also, movements in contexts where high-levels of discontent have built up, as in repressive regimes, may succeed in triggering cascades of resistance, regardless of the specific protest tactics used (60).

It is also important to note that our research focuses on the effects of social movement tactics on popular opinion, though persuading the larger public is not the only means for affecting change and is not necessarily the primary aim of all movements. Rather activists may prioritize other goals such as winning funding, impacting powerful elites, psychologically empowering disadvantaged individuals, fostering commitment in existing supporters, and

cathartic expression (53, 54, 63). Though the activists in Study 4b indicated that recruiting popular support was an important goal and reason for engaging in extreme protest behaviors, we did not ask them to report all their movement's goals nor to rank them in terms of priority. Thus, we cannot know whether their willingness to engage in extreme behaviors was intended to achieve other goals.

Relatedly, it is unclear exactly how engaging in extreme protest behaviors might or might not assist activists in achieving other aims of the movement. One could imagine, for instance, that in a democratic society, because extreme protest behaviors impair popular support for the movement, elected officials representing the larger public might also respond negatively toward the movement. However, extreme protest behaviors may be particularly useful for psychologically empowering oppressed individuals, providing a tool for expressing anger and ensuring their voices are heard (63). In such cases, extreme protest behaviors may be thought of less as a strategic means for achieving a longer-term goal and more as an end in and of itself.

In addition, though we have emphasized that the same tactics that draw attention can often undermine support for a cause, some scholars have emphasized "agenda-setting" effects of social movements, arguing that the most viable path to social change is longer-term, by placing an issue in the consciousness of politicians and the public (16, 65-71). Studies 1-3 only investigated the immediate effects of extreme protest behaviors on popular support. Over time, people's attitudes may shift as their initial impressions give way to deeper thinking about the movement, ultimately evoking a more favorable stance. This may be particularly true for those who had already felt sympathy for the movement's cause.

Moreover, our studies did not examine the effect multiple protest occurrences might have. Social movements often consist of various groups employing diverse tactics, and scholars

have argued for the possibility of “radical flank” effects, whereby radical factions impact the effectiveness of more moderate factions (54, 72, 73). Extreme protest behaviors may undermine support for the faction doing the behavior, but indirectly increase the credibility of more moderate factions. Our findings, however, suggest observers may develop broader notions of who represents the movement and what it stands for based on the more attention-grabbing, radical elements.

In addition, the fact that social media has become a major source of news may impact how much extreme protests are necessary for gaining media attention. Unlike more traditional media, social media allows everyday people to publicize protest actions, which may reduce the need for activists to engage in extreme protest behaviors to gain publicity. However, social movements must compete with many more sources of information on social media, possibly exacerbating the need for activists to engage in extreme behaviors to ensure their message is noteworthy enough to gain attention.

Our findings from Studies 4a and 4b suggest that both strong supporters and activists were largely unaware of the trade-off between raising awareness and recruiting support, instead believing that engaging in extreme behaviors is effective in achieving both aims. However, it is important to note that our results are based on averages, leaving open the possibility that some activists, especially those most experienced as protesters, do recognize the trade-off. Indeed, in Study 4b, if we separate scores on both the *raising awareness* and the *recruiting support* composites into three levels: low, medium, and high, we find that 4 activists who reported high levels of belief that extreme protests would effectively raise awareness also reported low levels of belief that these protests would recruit popular support. Similarly, even though in Studies 2 and 3 we did not find evidence that individuals’ prior attitudes about a cause – or other key

variables such as race or political ideology – affected how people responded to extreme protest behavior, this should not be interpreted as suggesting all individuals will necessarily be turned off by extreme protests. Indeed, there is good reason to think that extreme protest behaviors may appeal to individuals who are sufficiently passionate about a cause and/or frustrated with the status-quo.

Overall, though the aim of our research was to explore the trade-off between raising awareness and recruiting support that activists face, we hope that our findings prove useful for activists in their efforts to enact positive social change. Along these lines, how might a social movement “thread the needle,” employing tactics that simultaneously promote awareness of and popular support for a cause? How can movements gain widespread media attention without using the sort of extreme protest tactics that we find reduce support? One answer is to maximize protest attendance, as past research finds this is positively related to subsequent media coverage (59, 74). In addition, strategically locating protests near events that are already likely to receive wide media coverage, like conventions, may be effective. It could also be that extreme protest tactics are effective in winning popular sympathy where they elicit violent repression. Thus, while on face our findings appear to paint a dim picture of a social movement’s strategic options, we believe instead they highlight the high stakes associated with the planning of protest actions. History shows social movements can successfully affect social change. Future movements are most likely to follow in their footsteps when they strategically consider the perspective of the general public and how to win its favor.

## **Methods**

### **Study 1.**

*Participants.* Three hundred and nine participants (171 male, 138 female) were recruited from the U.S. on Amazon Mechanical Turk (see Supporting Information for more about the sample and Mechanical Turk).

*Procedure.* Participants completed a demographic questionnaire and learned that they would read a transcript from a news broadcast and answer questions about it afterward. The transcript described a recent FTV-led protest. In the Moderate Protest condition, FTV picketed outside a cosmetic company's building. In the Extreme Protest condition, FTV activists illegally snuck into the building and freed the animals held inside. In the Highly Extreme Protest condition, the activists drugged the building's security guard, vandalized the building, and freed the animals held there (see Supporting Information for full text). In both extreme protest conditions, the activists' behavior was counter-normative, disruptive, and harmful to others, though to a greater extent in the Highly Extreme Protest condition.

After reading their assigned article, participants indicated how extreme they perceived the behavior of members of the social movement to be, how much they identified with members of the movement, and completed a three-item *support movement* composite ( $\alpha = .88$ ) measuring various aspects of support for the movement (see Supporting Information for exact wording). Finally, participants answered a few exploratory questions unrelated to the present research (see Supporting Information).

## **Study 2.**

*Participants.* Three hundred and ninety participants (176 male, 214 female) were recruited from the U.S. on Amazon Mechanical Turk (see Supporting Information for details).

*Procedure.* After a demographic questionnaire, participants read a news article about a protest march BLM members engaged in to protest police violence against Blacks in Minnesota. In the Extreme Protest condition, participants were presented with the exact wording of an excerpt from an article published online after the event (75) that described protesters chanting “Pigs in a blanket, fry ‘em like bacon,” in reference to police officers, a chant which could be viewed as a call for violence against police officers. Participants in the Moderate Protest condition read an edited version of the same article in which protesters instead chanted “Black lives matter.” (see Supporting Information for full text). We used an actual news article to ensure high external validity. Additionally, to reduce the risk of experimental confounds and maximize internal validity, we sought to make a very minimal experimental manipulation, systematically varying how extreme the content of protesters’ reported chants were and nothing else. After reading the article participants answered a series of questions modeled after those used in Study 1 (see Supporting Information).

### **Study 3.**

*Participants* Three hundred and twenty-five participants (178 male, 146 female, 1 did not indicate) were recruited from the U.S. on Amazon Mechanical Turk (see Supporting Information).

*Procedure.* Following a demographic questionnaire, participants indicated their support for the five 2016 presidential candidates then running (Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Ted Cruz, Bernie Sanders, and John Kasich) on 5-point scales ranging from 1(Not at all) to 5(Very much). Participants then learned that they would be shown a video clip and asked about their impressions of it. In the Control condition participants watched a 90-second video of men



building a deck, which pretesting indicated elicited minimal emotional reaction. In the Moderate Protest condition, participants watched a video of a news report covering protesters outside of a Trump campaign event holding up signs and loudly chanting at Trump advocates. The protesters did not act in an aggressive or confrontational manner and the reporter in the video describes the protests as “heated” but “civil.” Participants in the Extreme Protest condition watched news coverage of anti-Trump protesters gathering in the middle of a busy street, physically blocking carloads of Trump supporters from reaching a Trump campaign event and causing a traffic jam. The reporter covering the event describes the protesters as creating “a potentially dangerous situation” because their “actions are causing motorists to drive into oncoming traffic”.

Participants in the Moderate and Extreme Protest conditions then answered the same series of questions as those administered in Studies 1-2 with slightly altered wording to fit with the present study, as well as a second identification item (“How much do you identify with these activists?”) included to form an improved social identification composite ( $\alpha = .96$ ). Finally, all participants completed a time-2 measure of support for the five 2016 presidential candidates.

#### **Study 4a.**

*Participants.* Two hundred and ninety-four (146 male, 147 female, 1 did not indicate) participants were recruited from the U.S. on Amazon Mechanical Turk (see Supporting Information for details).

*Procedure.* Following a demographic questionnaire, the survey informed participants what a social cause is and asked them to indicate a cause for which they felt some level of support (see Supporting Information for detailed instructions and a breakdown of social causes indicated).

Participants then answered “To what extent would you classify yourself as an advocate for this social cause?” on a scale from 1(Not at all) to 5(A great deal).

Participants also answered questions measuring how willing they would be to engage in four categories of extreme behaviors for the sake of their cause: “non-normative/unusual”, “extreme”, “disrupt everyday life for other people,” and “result in some form of property damage” ( $\alpha = .84$ ; see Supporting Information for full item text). Participants responded to each item using a scale ranging from 1(Not willing at all) to 5(Very willing).

Participants who reported being at least slightly willing to engage in any of the extreme behaviors listed (i.e., selecting a “2” or higher on any of the four items,  $n = 264$ ), were then presented with a series of items assessing why they would be willing to engage in such behaviors. The 4-item *raise awareness* composite ( $\alpha = .82$ ) measured how much participants believed the behaviors would get attention and raise awareness and the 3-item *recruit support* composite ( $\alpha = .87$ ) measured beliefs that the behaviors would recruit popular support for the cause (see Supplementary Information for exact wording of instructions and items).

#### **Study 4b.**

*Participants.* One hundred and twenty-one (male 68, female 53) participants were recruited from a prescreened sample ( $n = 2125$ ) of Amazon Mechanical Turk workers (see Supplementary Information).

*Procedure.* Participants were first asked to “indicate the social movement group or activist organization that you are involved with” and to provide a brief description of this social movement’s arguments, goals, and objectives. Then participants indicated the extent to which they believed their social movement’s goals involved raising widespread awareness and

garnering widespread support, as well as how much they considered themselves to be an activist (see Supporting Information).

Following this participants responded to a slightly modified version of the 4-item *extreme behavior willingness* composite ( $\alpha = .84$ ) that gauged participants' willingness to engaging in behaviors that are unusual, extreme, disruptive to everyday life, and could result in property damage (see Supporting Information for full item text). As in Study 4a, participants who reported being at least slightly willing to engage in any of the extreme behaviors listed ( $n = 114$ ) were asked to answer the same *raise awareness* ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and *recruit support* ( $\alpha = .90$ ) composites from Study 4a. Additionally, participants answered a 6-item *specific protest behavior willingness* scale ( $\alpha = .76$ ) asking how willing they would be to engage in each of the following protest behaviors: civil disobedience, public demonstrations, protest fasts and hunger strikes, protest marches, take riots, strikes (see Supporting Information for full item text).

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Note that although gaining attention and recruiting support are key aims of many social movements, these are not the only aims movement activists pursue in their efforts to enact social change. Other goals activists might pursue include agenda setting, signalling seriousness and urgency, influencing powerful elites, psychologically empowering disadvantaged individuals, and cathartic expression. We discuss these and other potential aims further in the General Discussion.

<sup>2</sup> An exploratory analysis examining the interaction between protest condition and political ideology for only the non-African American participants did provide some trending evidence of an interaction,  $b = .14$ ,  $S.E. = .09$ ,  $p = .110$ . Simple slope analyses indicated that the protest condition did not significantly affect the more conservative participants (+1 SD above the mean),  $b = -.29$ ,  $S.E. = .21$ ,  $p = .170$ , but did strongly impact the more liberal participants (-1 SD below mean),  $b = -.77$ ,  $S.E. = .21$ ,  $p = .0003$ . This result suggests that liberals were the ones most negatively affected by the extreme protests, demonstrating the greatest decrease in movement support due to the extreme protesters. Please see Supplementary Materials (Figure S3) for a graphical depiction of this interaction.

<sup>3</sup> Even though there were no omnibus interactions between pre-existing Trump support and experimental condition, extreme protests might positively affected only those with the strongest anti-Trump sentiments. Simple slope analyses for those at 2 standard deviations below the mean on prior Trump support, when in the extreme protest condition, rated the protesters as more extreme,  $b = 1.25$ ,  $S.E. = .33$ ,  $p < .001$ , and reported significantly less support for the movement,  $b = -.87$ ,  $S.E. = .34$ ,  $p = .012$ .

<sup>4</sup> Tests for the moderating role of political ideology yielded non-significant interaction results for perceived extremity of the protesters,  $b = .06$ ,  $S.E. = .08$ ,  $p = .431$ , movement support,  $b = -.05$ ,  $S.E. = .09$ ,  $p = .602$ , and change in Trump Support from Time-1 to Time-2,  $b = -.01$ ,  $S.E. = .02$ ,  $p = .63$ .

## 1 – Supporting Information – Text

### Study 1

#### **Demographic Information.**

Two hundred and fifty-three participants (82%) reported being white, twenty-three (7%) reported being black, eight (3%) reported being Hispanic, eighteen (6%) reported being Asian, and seven (2%) reported being “other”.

Participant age ranged from 18 to 74 years, with a mean of 35.00 years (SD = 12.32).

#### **Information Regarding Mechanical Turk Workers as a Reliable Sample**

Past research has demonstrated that Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (Mturk) consistently produces highly reliable data (Buhrmester, Kwang & Gosling 2011; Paolacci, Chandler & Ipeirotis, 2010; Rand, 2011; Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). Time-lagged measures collected from the same participants demonstrated high internal reliability and test-retest reliability (Shapiro, Chandler & Mueller, 2013), and multiple replication studies have established that Mturk participants produce the same results as in-lab experiments (Berinsky, Huber & Lenz, 2012; Paolacci et al., 2010). Additionally, Mturk has demonstrated high levels of representativeness and generalizability. For instance, Mturk has been found to be more demographically representative of the population of the United States than convenience samples (Berinsky, Huber & Lenz, 2012; Weinberg, Freese & McElhattan, 2014). Furthermore, evidence indicates that the psychological dispositions of Mturk workers in relation to political ideology can be considered very similar to the general public (Clifford, Jewell & Waggoner, 2015). It is also important to note that research has established that high quality Mturk data can be ensured by using high quality workers with approval ratings of 95% or above (Goodman, Cryder & Cheema, 2013; Peer, Vosgerau & Acquisti, 2014) – a procedure we used in the present research.

#### **Full Text of News Transcript.**

Moderate Protest Condition:

We are outside of MCC Cosmetics testing lab on this chaotic morning where a group of animal advocates calling themselves *Free the Vulnerable* are marching to demand that all the animals kept here for testing of cosmetic products be freed from captivity. The MCC Cosmetics public relations manager here tells me about thirty people have trespassed onto the property as they march back and forth in protest.

We’ve learned that these animal rights advocates plan to stay here until the hundreds of animals including hamsters, guinea pigs, sheep, and two chimpanzees are either released back into the wild or taken to animal refuges to live out the remainder of their days.

To gain further insight, this morning I spoke with a man named Andrew who claims to be the leader of *Free the Vulnerable*. Here’s what he had to say:

*“It is about time we recognize that animals do not belong to us. They are not ours to torture however we want. They deserve to have a happy, fulfilled life, free of cages and pain. Today we fight to restore justice. To make things right. Everyone should join us! FREE THE VULNERABLE!”*

Back to you Tom and Linda

### Extreme Protest Condition

We are outside of MCC Cosmetics testing lab on this chaotic morning where last night a group of animal advocates calling themselves *Free the Vulnerable* snuck into the testing lab and freed all the animals from captivity. The MCC Cosmetics public relations manager here tells me their security cameras caught about thirty people trespassing onto the property, breaking open the cages, and releasing the animals.

We've learned that these animal rights advocates waited until all employees had gone home for the night except for a security guard. Apparently they snuck past him somehow and then they rigged open the locks of the back of the building and quietly freed the hundreds of animals including hamsters, guinea pigs, sheep, and two chimpanzees. The advocates, we've been told gathered all of the animals together and brought them to the woods to release some. Others they took to undisclosed animal refuges.

To gain further insight, this morning I spoke with a man named Andrew who claims to be the leader of *Free the Vulnerable*. Here's what he had to say:

*"It is about time we recognize that animals do not belong to us. They are not ours to torture however we want. They deserve to have a happy, fulfilled life, free of cages and pain. Today we restored justice. We made things right. Everyone should join us! FREE THE VULNERABLE!"*

Back to you Tom and Linda

### Highly Extreme Protest Condition

We are outside of MCC Cosmetics testing lab on this chaotic morning where last night a group of animal advocates calling themselves *Free the Vulnerable* snuck into the testing lab and freed all the animals from captivity. The MCC Cosmetics public relations manager here tells me their security cameras caught about thirty people trespassing onto the property, breaking open the cages, and releasing the animals.

We've learned that these animal rights advocates waited until all employees had gone home for the night except for a security guard. Then they broke open the front door of the building and drugged the security guard so he was incapacitated while they ransacked the place and spray painted the walls of the building with the word "IMMORAL" all over, as you can see behind me. Finally, the advocates freed the hundreds of animals including hamsters, guinea pigs, sheep, and two chimpanzees. We've been told they gathered all of the animals together and brought them to the woods to release some. Others they took to undisclosed animal refuges.

To gain further insight, this morning I spoke with a man named Andrew who claims to be the leader of *Free the Vulnerable*. Here's what he had to say:

*"It is about time we recognize that animals do not belong to us. They are not ours to torture however we want. They deserve to have a happy, fulfilled life, free of cages and pain. Today we restored justice. We made things right. Everyone should join us! FREE THE VULNERABLE!"*

Back to you Tom and Linda

### **Post-Manipulation Questions**

#### *Extremity*

How would you rate this group's behavior?

Participants answer on a 5-point scale ranging from 1(Not extreme at all) to 5(Very extreme).

#### *Social Identification*

How similar do you feel you are to these activists?

Participants answer on a 5-point scale ranging from 1(Not at all) to 5(A great deal).

#### *Support Movement composite*

How much do you support the activists described in the news report?

Overall, how much do you support FTV's cause (ending the use of animal testing)?

How willing or unwilling would you be to join this group as a member?

Participants responded to the first two items on a scale from 1(Not at all) to 5(A great deal), and the last item on a scale ranging from 1(Not willing at all) to 5(Completely willing).

### **Exploratory Items**

Although it was not a primary objective of the present research, we collected data on participants' emotional reactions following the manipulation out of curiosity about how extreme protest behaviors might affect observers of protests.

The items participants responded to in Studies 1-3 were:

When thinking about the protesters, how much do you feel each of the following emotions?

Sympathy

Compassion

Anger

Outrage

Participants answer on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 ("None at all") to 5 ("A great deal").

We averaged responses to the first two into a *sympathy* composite ( $\alpha = .94$ ), and the last two into an *anger* composite ( $\alpha = .94$ ) (See Table S1).

## Study 2

### Demographic Information.

One hundred and fifty-five participants (40%) reported being white, two hundred and three (52%) reported being black, nine (2%) reported being Hispanic, nineteen (5%) reported being Asian, three (1%) reported being “other”, and one did not indicate an ethnicity.

Participant age ranged from 18 to 75 years, with a mean of 35.92 years ( $SD = 11.78$ ).

The mean for political ideology score was 3.21 ( $SD = 1.52$ ) on a 7-item scale ranging from 1 (“Extremely liberal”) to 7 (“Extremely conservative”).

### Full Text of News Article.

Original article excerpt used for Extreme Protest condition (60):

Black Lives Matter protesters marching on the Minnesota state fair on Saturday marched to protest police violence against Blacks.

“Pigs in a blanket, fry ’em like bacon,” activists with the St. Paul, Minn. Branch of Black Lives Matter chanted while marching behind a group of police officers down a highway just south of the state fair grounds.

Carrying signs reading “End White Supremacy” and “Stop Racism Now,” the protesters railed against racial inequality, the criminal justice system and policing. Besides issuing the chant calling cops by the pejorative “pig,” the protesters repeated the names of several blacks who have been killed by police in recent years.

Modified article excerpt used for Moderate Protest condition:

Black Lives Matter protesters marching on the Minnesota state fair on Saturday marched to protest police violence against Blacks.

“Black Lives Matter, Black Lives Matter” activists with the St. Paul, Minn. Branch of Black Lives Matter repeated while marching behind a group of police officers down a highway just south of the state fair grounds.

Carrying signs reading “End White Supremacy” and “Stop Racism Now,” the protesters railed against racial inequality, the criminal justice system and policing. Besides chanting “Black Lives Matter,” the protesters repeated the names of several blacks who have been killed by police in recent years.

### Full Text of Post Manipulation Questions.

How would you rate this group’s behavior?

(Not extreme at all...Somewhat extreme...Very extreme)

How similar do you feel you are to these activists?

(Not at all...Somewhat...A Great Deal)

How much do you support the activists described in the news report?

(Not at all...Somewhat...A Great Deal)

How much do you support the protesters’ cause?



(Not at all...Somewhat...A Great Deal)  
How willing or unwilling would you be to join this group as a member?  
(Not willing at all...Somewhat willing... Completely willing)

### **Study 3**

#### **Demographic Information.**

Two hundred and fifty-eight participants (79%) reported being white, sixteen (5%) reported being black, nineteen (6%) reported being Hispanic, twenty-one (7%) reported being Asian, eight (3%) reported being “other”, and three did not indicate an ethnicity.

Participant age ranged from 18 to 75 years, with a mean of 35.81 years ( $SD = 11.94$ ).

The mean for political ideology score was 3.39 ( $SD = 1.72$ ) on a 7-item scale ranging from 1 (“Extremely liberal”) to 7 (“Extremely conservative”).

### **Study 4a**

#### **Demographic Information.**

Two hundred and thirty-four participants (80%) reported being white, twenty (7%) reported being black, eleven (4%) reported being Hispanic, nineteen (7%) reported being Asian, and seven (2%) reported being “other”. Three participants (1%) did not indicate any racial/ethnic background.

Participant age ranged from 18 to 83 years, with a mean of 37.52 years ( $SD = 12.99$ ).

The mean for political ideology score was 3.46 ( $SD = 1.68$ ).

#### **Initial Survey Instructions.**

A social cause is an issue that people care about and rally around, often forming into a social movement. Please indicate a social cause that you feel support for. This cause could be one you strongly support, moderately support, or just support a little.

#### **Movements and Causes Participants Indicated by Category.**

Animal/Environment Movements 49 (17%)

Drugs 5 (2%)

Economic 49 (17%)

Guns 10 (3%)

Political 20 (7%)

Race 36 (12%)

Sexual/Gender Issues 85 (29%)

Other 40 (14%)

#### **Non-Normative and Extreme Behavior Items.**

*Overall, in the name of this cause, how willing are you to engage in behaviors that others might view as non-normative or unusual behaviors?*

(Not willing at all...Somewhat willing... Very willing)

*Overall, in the name of this cause, how willing are you to engage in behaviors that others might view as extreme behaviors?*

(Not willing at all...Somewhat willing... Very willing)

*In the name of this cause*, how willing are you to engage in behaviors that could disrupt everyday life for other people?

(Not willing at all...Somewhat willing... Very willing)

*In the name of this cause*, how willing are you to engage in behaviors that could result in some form of property damage?

(Not willing at all...Somewhat willing... Very willing)

### **Instructions introducing questions regarding why participants would be willing to engage in extreme protest behaviors.**

For the next set of questions, please consider the kinds of protest behaviors we just surveyed you about: behaviors that are unconventional or outside the norm, extreme, which could disrupt everyday life for others, or which could result in some form of property damage.

You have indicated that you'd be (at least slightly) willing to engage in some of these behaviors to support the cause you identified earlier.

Why might you be willing to engage in these behaviors? (Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements below)

I would be willing to engage in these behaviors *because*...

### **Items measuring reasons why participants would be willing to engage in extreme behaviors.**

#### Raise Awareness Composite

It will get people's attention.

It will increase the likelihood that the media will cover the social cause.

It will raise awareness about the cause.

It will make sure people in power pay attention to the cause.

#### Recruit Support Composite

It will get more people to support the cause.

It will recruit more people to join the cause.

It will get people to feel sympathy for the cause.

(strongly agree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree)

## **Study 4b**

### **Pre-screening**

Participants were recruited from a pool of participants who had answered “yes” to the question “Would you consider yourself an activist (i.e., an active member of a social movement advocating for social change)?” and also provided a coherent answer when asked to “Please tell us what movement(s) you consider yourself an activist for”.

**Demographic Information.** Participant age ranged from 19 to 65 years, with a mean of 32.37 years ( $SD = 9.47$ ).

**Movements and Causes Participants Indicated by Category.**

Animal/Environment Movements 26 (21%)

Drugs 3 (3%)

Economic 8 (7%)

Political 21 (17%)

Race 20 (16%)

Sexual/Gender Issues 29 (24%)

Other 14 (12%)

**Measures of the Movement’s Aims.**

Overall, how much would you say that it is a goal of your social movement/organization to raise widespread awareness about your cause?

Overall, how much would you say that it is a goal of your social movement/organization to garner widespread popular support for your cause (i.e., to get people who do not currently support your movement/organization to become supporters of it)?

Participants responded to each of these items on a 5-point scale ranging from 1(not at all) to 5(very much).

**Measure of Identification as Activist.**

To what extent do you consider yourself an *activist* for this social cause?

Participants responded on a 5-point scale ranging from 1(not at all) to 5(a great deal).

**Non-Normative and Extreme Behavior Items.**

*Overall, in the name of this cause, how willing are you to engage in protest behaviors that others might view as unconventional, outside the norm, or unusual?*

(Not willing at all...Somewhat willing... Very willing)

*Overall, in the name of this cause, how willing are you to engage in protest behaviors that others might view as extreme?*

(Not willing at all...Somewhat willing... Very willing)

*Overall, in the name of this cause, how willing are you to engage in protest behaviors that could disrupt everyday life for other people?*

(Not willing at all...Somewhat willing... Very willing)

*Overall, in the name of this cause, how willing are you to engage in protest behaviors that could result in some form of property damage?*

(Not willing at all...Somewhat willing... Very willing)

### **Specific protest behavior willingness composite items**

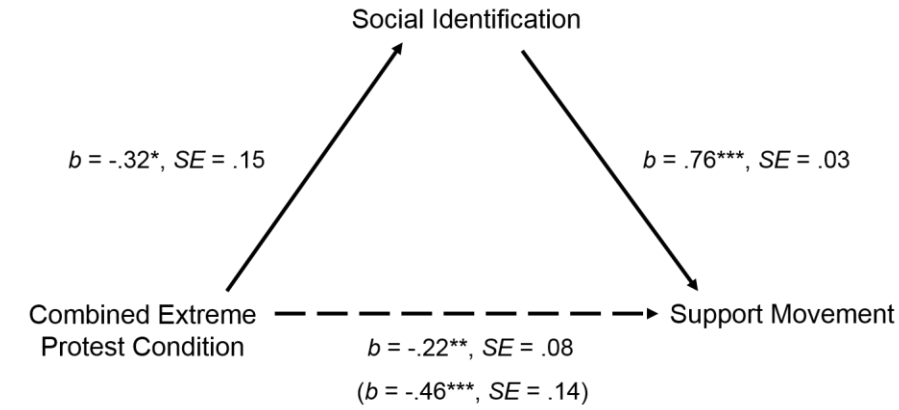
We are now curious about some of specific behaviors you would be willing to engage in for the cause you identified earlier. Overall, to support this cause, how willing are you to engage in each of the following protest behaviors?

- Engage in Civil Disobedience
- Engage in Public Demonstrations
- Engage in Protest fasts and hunger strikes
- Engage in Protest Marches
- Take part in Riots
- Take part in Strikes

Participants responded on a 5-point scale ranging from 1(not willing at all) to 5(very willing).

2 – Supporting Information Figure S1

**Figure S1.** Mediation analysis depicting the role of social identification in explaining why more extreme protest behaviors elicit less support for the social movement (Study 1).



<sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ ,  $*p < .05$ ,  $**p < .01$ ,  $***p < .001$ .

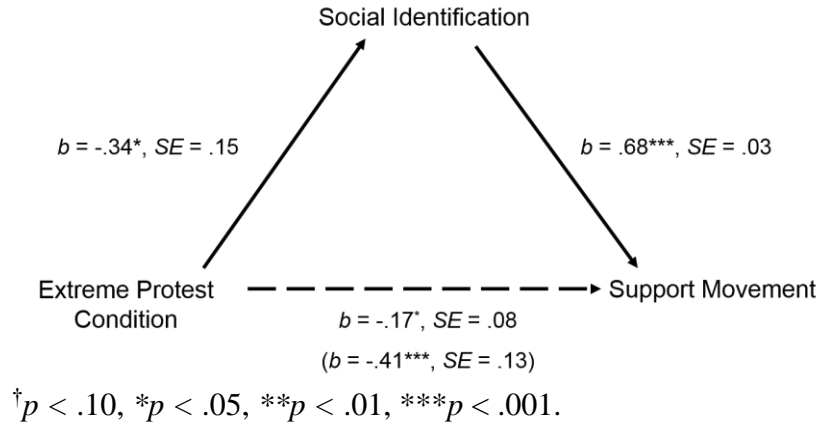
### 3 – Supporting Information Table S1

**Table S1.** Means, Standard Deviations, and effects of experimental condition for *sympathy* and *anger* composites (Study 1).

	Moderate Condition Mean (SD)	Extreme Mean (SD)	Highly Extreme Mean (SD)	Omnibus test	Moderate vs. Extreme t-test	Moderate vs. Highly Extreme t-test	Extreme vs. Highly Extreme t-test		General Extreme Mean (SD)	General Extreme vs. Moderate t-test
Sympathy	3.20 (1.29)	2.85 (1.36)	2.75 (1.33)	$F = 3.29$ $p = .041$ $\eta^2 = .02$	$t = -1.92$ $p = .056$ $d = .26$	$t = -2.43$ $p = .016$ $d = .34$	$t = -0.53$ $p = .598$ $d = .07$		2.80 (1.34)	$t = -2.49$ $p = .013$ $d = .30$
Anger	1.91 (1.04)	2.28 (1.15)	2.49 (1.33)	$F = 6.12$ $p = .002$ $\eta^2 = .04$	$t = 2.22$ $p = .028$ $d = .33$	$t = 3.47$ $p = .001$ $d = .49$	$t = 1.30$ $p = .196$ $d = .17$		2.39 (1.24)	$t = 3.25$ $p = .001$ $d = .42$

4 – Supporting Information Figure S2

**Figure S2.** Mediation analysis depicting the role of social identification in explaining why more extreme behavior elicits less support for the BLM movement (Study 2).



5 – Supporting Information Table S2

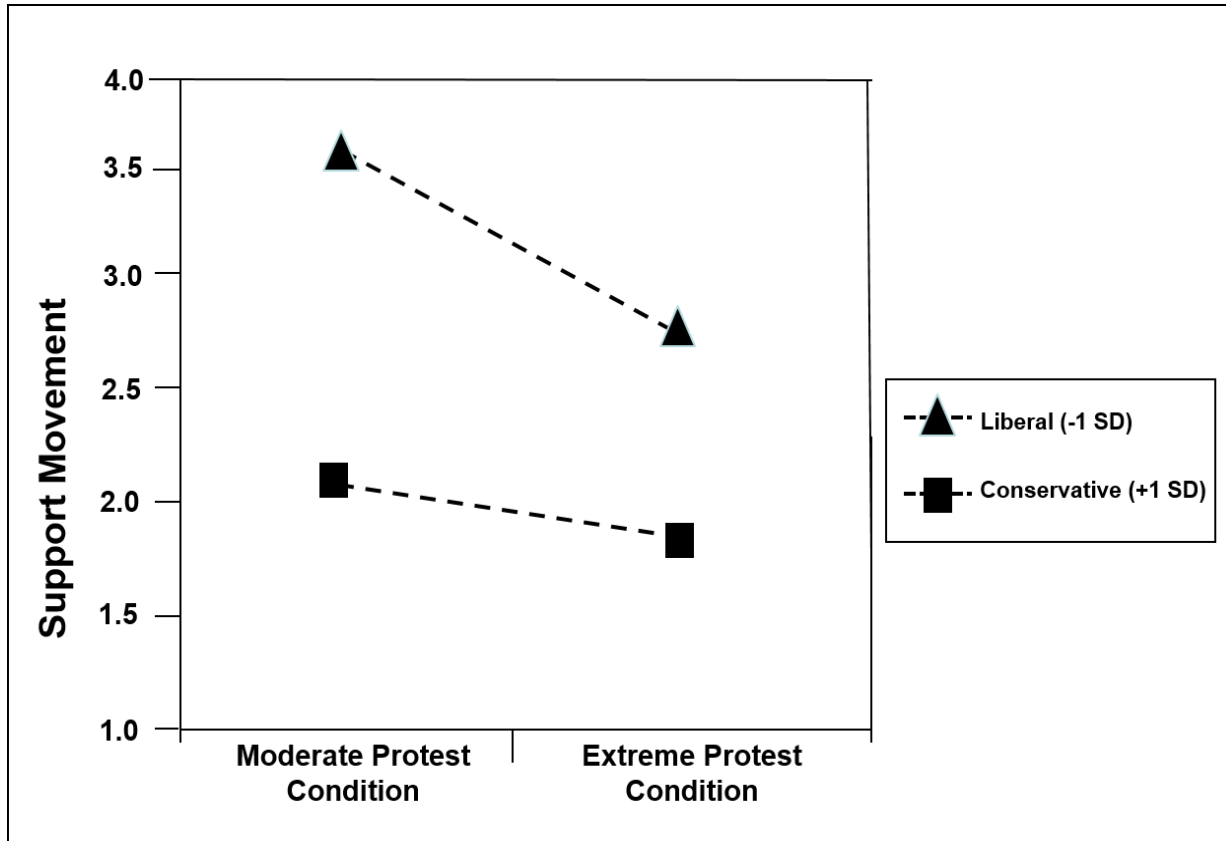
**Table S2.** Means, Standard Deviations, and effects of experimental condition for *sympathy* and *anger* composites (Study 2).

	Moderate Protest Tactics Mean (SD)	Extreme Protest Tactics Mean (SD)	t-statistic	p-value	<i>Cohen's d</i>
Sympathy	3.47 (1.41)	3.02 (1.36)	3.20	.001	.32
Anger	2.21 (1.37)	2.65 (1.30)	-3.26	.001	-.33

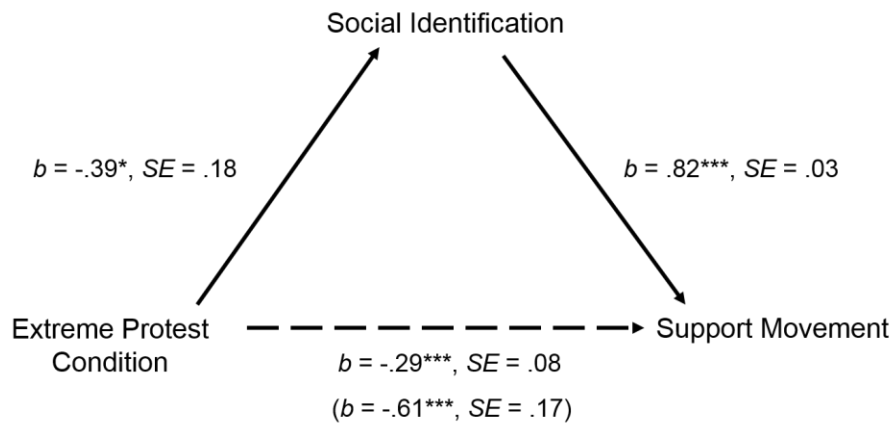


6 – Supporting Information Figure S3

**Figure S3.** Depiction of the interaction between protest condition and political ideology for non-African American participants (Study 2).



**Figure S4.** Mediation analysis depicting the role of social identification in explaining why more extreme behavior elicits less support for the anti-Trump movement (Study 3).



$^\dagger p < .10$ ,  $*p < .05$ ,  $**p < .01$ ,  $***p < .001$ .

7 – Supporting Information Table S3

**Table S3.** Means, Standard Deviations, and effects of experimental condition for *sympathy* and *anger* composites (Study 3).

	Moderate Protest Tactics Mean (SD)	Extreme Protest Tactics Mean (SD)	t-statistic	p-value	<i>Cohen's d</i>
Sympathy	2.54 (1.31)	2.08 (1.36)	2.53	.012	.35
Anger	2.08 (1.34)	2.62 (1.42)	-2.89	.004	-.40

8 – Supporting Information Table S4

**Table S4.** Means, Standard Deviations, and effects of experimental condition on support for presidential candidates (Study 3).

	Neutral Condition Mean (SD)		F-statistic p-value	Moderate Protest Mean (SD)		F-statistic p-value	Extreme Protest Mean (SD)		F-statistic p-value
	Time 1	Time 2		Time 1	Time 2		Time 1	Time 2	
Donald Trump	1.93 (1.29)	1.93 (1.29)	$F = 0.00$ $p = 1.00$	2.04 (1.46)	2.03 (1.50)	$F = .07$ $p = .798$	1.76 (1.25)	1.85 (1.31)	$F = 5.80$ $p = .018$
Hillary Clinton	2.46 (1.41)	2.54 (1.43)	$F = 1.00$ $p = .320$	2.12 (1.31)	2.15 (1.32)	$F = .60$ $p = .441$	2.27 (1.41)	2.28 (1.40)	$F = .33$ $p = .566$
Bernie Sanders	3.22 (1.53)	3.25 (1.50)	$F = .82$ $p = .368$	3.28 (1.61)	3.26 (1.64)	$F = 1.14$ $p = .287$	3.33 (1.59)	3.34 (1.57)	$F = .06$ $p = .810$
Ted Cruz	1.63 (.98)	1.61 (.94)	$F = 1.00$ $p = .320$	1.69 (1.07)	1.75 (1.16)	$F = 3.34$ $p = .071$	1.62 (1.09)	1.60 (1.09)	$F = .69$ $p = .408$
John Kasich	1.85 (1.02)	1.88 (1.00)	$F = 2.02$ $p = .158$	2.04 (1.10)	2.04 (1.11)	$F = .00$ $p = 1.00$	1.85 (1.15)	1.88 (1.14)	$F = .69$ $p = .408$

9 – Supporting Information Table S5

**Table S5.** Zero-order correlations between each of the extreme behavior categories and participants' reasons for engaging in them (Study 4a).

	Raise Awareness	Recruit Support
Non-Normative Behaviors	.32***	.40***
Extreme Behaviors	.29***	.39***
Disrupt Everyday Life for Others	.29***	.28***
Damage Property	.16**	.14*

†p < .10, \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.

10 – Supporting Information Table S6

**Table S6.** Means, standard deviations and correlations of all variables collected (Study 4a).

	Mean (SD)	Support	Extreme Behavior Willingness	Raise Awareness	Recruit Support
Support	4.03 (1.05)	--	.37***	.24***	.28***
Extreme Behavior Willingness	2.45 (1.00)		--	.38***	.33***
Raise Awareness	3.66 (.88)			--	.66***
Recruit Support	3.87 (.72)				--

\*\*\*p < .001.

11 – Supporting Information Table S7

**Table S7.** Means and standard deviations for both the *Raise Awareness* and *Recruit Support* composites separated by level of support indicated (Study 4a).

Support Score	Raise Awareness Means (SDs)	Recruit Support Means (SDs)
1	3.00 (.71)	3.11 (.89)
2	3.65 (.60)	3.43 (.79)
3	3.61 (.80)	3.24 (.87)
4	3.85 (.58)	3.69 (.75)
5	4.04 (.75)	3.85 (.95)

12 – Supporting Information Table S8

**Table S8.** Zero-order correlations between each of the extreme behavior categories and participants' reasons for engaging in them (Study 4b).

	Raise Awareness	Recruit Support
Non-Normative Behaviors	.34***	.25***
Extreme Behaviors	.33***	.30**
Disrupt Everyday Life for Others	.37***	.31***
Damage Property	.16 <sup>†</sup>	.23*

<sup>†</sup>p < .10, \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.



13 – Supporting Information Table S9

**Table S9.** Means, standard deviations and correlations of all variables collected (Study 4b).

	Mean (SD)	Activist	Extreme Behavior Willingness	Specific Protest Willingness	Raise Awareness	Recruit Support
Activist	4.26 (.84)	--	.23*	.05	.30***	.21*
Extreme Behavior Willingness	2.81 (1.09)		--	.49***	.37***	.34***
Specific Protest Willingness	3.00 (.90)			--	.23*	.27**
Raise Awareness	3.99 (.88)				--	.75***
Recruit Support	3.64 (1.13)					--

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.

