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Robyn Gulliver , Susilo Wibisono , Kelly S. Fielding , Winnifred R. Louis
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1 Introduction

Collective action can change the world. It is the basis of social movements and, at its best, transforms society by providing the means through which individuals can express dissent and demand a better future. It can take place offline on the streets, online via social media platforms, in a politician's office, or in homes in quiet suburban blocks. It can involve violent or non-violent force. Whatever form it takes, those who engage in collective action share one aspiration: to play a part in generating, celebrating or resisting social change.

At first it may seem obvious what effective collective action would look like. The labour and union movements have a proud history of demanding and winning economic gains for workers, for example (Bradley, 2011). Women around the world have engaged in hunger strikes, demonstrations, and community canvassing to secure the same rights as their male counterparts, with a century of achievements accrued in response (Gouws & Coetzee, 2019). In more recent decades, new movements have won LGBTIQA+ and disability rights, or elevated demands for the rights of nature (e.g., Della Porta & Rucht, 1995; Louis et al., 2020). When looking back on the arc of social movements over the centuries it is tempting to consider these movements as irresistible, unstoppable forces, united in their demands and united in action.

Yet this surface analysis ignores the complex dynamics of social movements, which are composed of a multitude of actions undertaken by a multitude of actors, operating within disparate groups and factions, all with potentially different motivations and goals (Louis & Montiel, 2018; Smith, Livingstone, & Thomas, 2019; Sweetman, Leach, Spears, Pratto, & Saab, 2013; Uluğ & Acar, 2018; van Zomeren & Louis, 2017). Thus, to understand the effectiveness of collective action it is also necessary to understand the psychological processes and aims of individuals and groups that undertake that action.

There is a rich tradition of research investigating the psychological processes linked to collective action. Some research seeks to identify the characteristics that distinguish activists from non-activists, for example, whether activists and non-activists differ in personality characteristics (e.g., Digman, 1990). Others investigate how feelings of economic, political, or social deprivation (e.g., Relative Deprivation Theory; Runciman, 1966), or specific psychological drivers such as identification with a group and group-based anger, link to collective action (see van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008, 2012). Sociological approaches, such as Resource Mobilisation Theory (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004; McCarthy & Zald, 1977) and the Political Process Theory (McAdam, 1982), consider the role of organisations and the political sphere in explaining how collective action actually occurs. More recently, research

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investigating the transition to activism has considered the extent to which particular political and cultural contexts may unlock collective action potential in individuals (e.g., van Zomeren & Louis, 2017), or set the point at which individuals decide 'enough is enough' and decide to take action (Livingstone, 2014). Perceived efficacy has been identified as a critical factor in driving motivations to engage in collective action, highlighting how the effectiveness of collective action matters both to society and to activists themselves (e.g., Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; van Zomeren et al., 2008, 2013).

Further, within this complex, dynamic environment, collective action involves a range of diverse individuals, each of whom may have multiple allegiances, and may engage in multiple groups with differing levels of commitment. Working together and apart, activists design and implement collective actions against a range of opponents, who in turn may or may not hold significant power to wield against them. Activists must simultaneously seek support from third parties, such as the media and other interest groups, while attempting to avoid counter-mobilisation from their opponents, and manage the challenges of radicalisation and factionalism within their own ranks. Adding to the complexity, activists for any one cause do not all share the same game plan. Some may act independently as 'lone wolves' on behalf of groups. Others may operate within highly diverse organisational structures, ranging from informal teams of friends, to loosely structured 'grassroots' organisations, to large NGOs or formal networks. These groups and structures may have differing access to resources and different abilities to use those resources to maximise the effectiveness of their activities. The larger political context also matters for collective action: activists may agitate for change within democratic and authoritarian states, where their activism may either gain support or attract repression.

How can one make sense of 'the effectiveness of collective action' in such complex and dynamic contexts? This is the question our Element seeks to answer. In this Element we focus primarily on the social psychological aspects of effective activism, although naturally we acknowledge the vital importance of other approaches, including political science, sociology, history, communication studies, and more. Given the critical role individuals play in driving the ebb and flow of broader social movements, this psychological focus may also help other disciplines seeking to understand the processes and outcomes of collective action. Our starting point is to explore 'effective' activism from the individual activist's perspective. We then consider how activists seek to influence the psychological responses of four distinct audiences: we term these audiences supporters, bystanders, opponents, and third parties.

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1.1 Defining Collective Action

There are many different formulations of collective action, as it has been investigated extensively across fields spanning the natural and social sciences (e.g., see van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009; Louis et al., 2020). Collective action has been defined in social psychology as any *action aiming to improve the status, power, or influence of a group* (Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). A group can be any collection of two or more individuals with a shared collective identity, and thus can include a wide range of organisational structures including professional workplaces, grassroots collectives, or online communities. Individual actions, even when enacted alone, become collective through this shared goal and the individual's self-categorisation as a group member (van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009; van Zomeren & Spears, 2009). As a result, in this approach, collective action does not require a certain threshold of participants in order to count as a collective, and instead is defined by its goal of collectively solving a common problem (Wright et al., 1990).

Collective action tactics are diverse and constantly changing, ranging from marches to memes. Despite the constant and effervescent emergence of new forms of actions, scholars have put forward various typologies and subtypes to represent activists' 'action repertoires' (Sweetman et al., 2013; Tilly, 1999). Our approach within this Element is to group collective actions primarily into two types, which we contrast: *conventional actions* and *radical actions* (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009; see also normative versus non-normative, Tausch et al., 2011; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990; or moderate versus militant, Louis, 2009).

The terms 'conventional' and 'radical' are subjective and what constitutes them may differ across causes and contexts (Louis et al., 2003; see also Tausch et al., 2011; Teixeira, Spears, & Yzerbyt, 2019; Wright et al., 1990). However, in general, conventional collective actions are those that follow advantaged groups' established rules or norms for civic engagement. In democratic societies, conventional actions may take the form of legal or political acts of expression and participation (e.g., signing petitions, peaceful and state-sanctioned demonstrations, and lobbying). Conversely, radical collective actions are those that violate advantaged groups' rules or norms (Louis et al., 2020; Tausch et al., 2011). Radical collective action tactics can thus include disruptive non-violent actions, illegal actions such as sabotage and civil disobedience, or violent events such as attacks and riots. However, as noted previously, the extent to which an action is considered to be conventional or radical is subjective in the eyes of the actors and the specific cause, historical period, and context (Louis, Mavor, & Terry, 2003; Louis et al., 2020).

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Excerpt
More Information

Another central characteristic of collective action as we explore it in this Element is its *dynamic* nature. Action causes reaction, and response generates counter-response; the evaluation of these actions and responses then differs according to the particular groups and contexts involved. Activists adjust their repertoires of actions according to the audiences they seek to influence, the opportunities that arise, and the responses that they receive, sometimes working within an overarching strategy for effecting the change they seek, and sometimes choosing more impulsively or reactively (Louis, 2009; Louis et al., 2020; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Tilly, 1999). As such, understanding effective collective action also requires understanding how actions are perceived according to the different audiences that are engaged, as well as the responses that the actions generate.

Finally, we note that there is often great *change and contestation* within activist groups (Louis, Chonu, Achia, Chapman, & Rhee, 2018; Louis et al., 2020). For many activists, as we shall see in this Element, a single collective action is just one part of a long-term strategy to achieve social change (Gulliver et al., 2019; Ulug & Acar, 2018). Accordingly, a failure may be a learning experience on the path to victory, and conversely a success is no time to relax, lest counter-mobilisation sweep away the gains achieved. As well as this constant vigilance, activists themselves undergo personal psychological trajectories as they participate in collective action over the longer term, and these internal changes affect the way that effectiveness is perceived (Drury & Reicher, 2009; Vestergren, Drury, & Chiriac, 2018; Hornsey et al., 2006).

This Element holds these central points in mind, while attempting to delve into the complexity of how effective collective action might actually be conceptualised and operationalised by activists and by researchers. This is a project that builds on many other scholars' work (e.g., Duncan, 2012; Drury & Reicher, 2000; Klandermans, 1984, 1997; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; Louis et al., 2020; Thomas, Mavor, & McGarty, 2012; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008; Wright et al., 1990), and that sets out to address the spirit of the times as movements around the world seek to create profound, transformative consequences for societies (Louis, 2009; Louis & Montiel, 2018; Moghaddam, 2018; Smith, Livingstone, & Thomas, 2019).

1.2 The Following Sections

The structure of this Element is as follows. In Section 2 we will explore the notion of effective collective action and attempt the challenge of defining effective collective action in relation to specific activist audiences and time frames. In doing so, we establish a structured set of outcomes for scholars to

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consider, presented in two frameworks. In the subsequent four sections we then examine conceptualisations of effective activism for the four groups we have already identified: supporters, bystanders, opponents, and third parties. We review the literature (or lack of it) on effective collective action for each of these groups or targets, with an eye to identifying confirmed findings, establishing novel hypotheses, and identifying gaps. Specifically, in Section 3, we consider effective collective action for self and supporters; in Section 4, for bystanders; in Section 5, for opponents; and in Section 6, for third parties. Throughout this Element we also include examples in text boxes of effective (and ineffective) collective action taken from a range of social movements including Black Lives Matter, the far right, and the women's, peace, and environmental movements. Our goal in including these examples is to highlight how different movements have aimed to achieve effective outcomes in relation to different audiences; how the desired outcomes change in relation to the time frame envisaged; and how these outcomes are achieved within the particular social, economic, and political arenas in which they have occurred. We close with an agenda for future research and a set of key takeaways in Section 7. In this section we propose a research agenda that highlights key gaps in the literature and identifies directions for future research.

2 What Is Effective Collective Action?

One of us (Louis) is fond of telling a story from 2003, during the time of the peace rallies against the soon-to-erupt Iraq War. Louis and her office mate had both gone to the anti-war rallies in February 2003, which in Australia as elsewhere had mobilised hundreds of thousands of protestors against the imminent invasion of Iraq (Blackwood & Louis, 2012). But the huge protests failed to deter the conservative government of Australia from swiftly joining the invasion as part of the 'Coalition of the Willing'. The following month, after the war broke out and Australia was embroiled in the invasion, another protest rally was called, and Louis asked her office mate if he was going. 'No', he replied, 'I went to the rally, and it didn't work!'

This anecdote highlights the challenge of defining effective collective action. For Louis, a long-term activist, the failure of one rally to achieve peace was not a deterrent to engaging in future peace-related collective action. For her colleague, the failure of one rally identified the ineffectiveness of the action, and this lack of efficacy deterred him from engaging in future action. Their differences in aims and experiences led them to think differently about the success or failure of the collective action. In this section we expand on this point to dive into the challenges of defining what constitutes effective collective action. We

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More Information

then present a theoretical framework that helps to identify the diversity of goals and audiences against which effectiveness can be judged. We also consider how failure to achieve collective action goals can help to explain activist pathways towards radicalisation and towards leaving a movement, before introducing our approach to the following sections.

2.1 Defining Effective Collective Action

In this Element we define ‘effectiveness’ as the extent to which any one single collective action or series of such actions achieves the intended goal(s). While seemingly simple in theory, what makes this definition challenging to apply in practice is the sheer multitude of goals that individuals and groups can hold for any one collective action or sustained series of collective actions. As highlighted by our example just mentioned, these goals can range from stopping a war, to building a movement able to effect change, to feeling that you are part of something meaningful. To help structure these diverse collective action goals, researchers have highlighted three broad levels of outcome analysis: macro, meso, and micro (e.g., see van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009). Much research on collective action outcomes considers the dynamics and outcomes in the macro political–administrative context, while meso-level analysis focuses on interactions and processes at the group or organisational level. In this Element we focus primarily on micro- and meso-level analyses: the dynamics of individuals and groups. However, we acknowledge the importance of examining macro-level factors that also affect and define what social movements value and achieve (Jasper, 2004).

To help to understand effectiveness within this complex situation, we first review how individuals evaluating the effectiveness of a collective action might differ in their evaluations based on goals which are aligned to particular perceived audiences of the action, and perceived timescales for effecting change. In the case of the anti-war rally in Australia we have just highlighted, one participant’s audience was the decision makers who were making the choice for the country to join the invasion of Iraq or not, and their time frame for effective change was immediate. The other participant’s audience was the potential new recruits to the cause of peace activism, drawn from bystanders and third parties, and their timescale for change was long-term. Table 1 maps these diverse activist perceptions regarding the range of effective outcomes across two axes (see also Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; Oegema & Klandermans, 1994) of ‘audiences’ (self, supporters, bystanders, third parties, and opponents) and ‘timescales’ (immediate, short- to medium-term, and long-term).

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Table 1 Selected effectiveness metrics for collective action audiences.

Audience	Timescale: Immediate	Timescale: Short- and medium-term	Timescale: Long-term
Self	Self-affirmation, self-empowerment, emotional experiences, meaning making, expressing loyalty and solidarity	Friendships, self-efficacy, consciousness raising, security, resources, status, sustaining action	Revolutionary change System transformation
Supporters	Expressing group values, affirming group identities, caring, supporting, and empowering group members	Generating intentions, actions, and sustaining actions	
Bystanders	Raising awareness, building sympathy	Generating intentions and action, coalition building, avoiding counter-mobilisation	
Third parties	Raising awareness, building sympathy, creating cross-cutting identities	Generating intentions and action, coalition building, avoiding counter-mobilisation	
Opponents	Rejecting other groups' values, affirming opposition	Avoiding counter-mobilisation, initiating harm or destruction of the group, appeasing, conciliating, converting, provoking, or diverting the group	

The first and most commonly researched audience is self and supporters. Collective action directed at the self and supporters can be effective in terms of the extent to which it generates different psychological responses. These psychological responses might include enabling the expression of a group's values and identities, building identities, the generation of emotional experiences, or increasing self-efficacy perceptions. These outcomes can also be experienced as consequences of engaging in collective action. For example, collective action may be considered effective in the shorter term when it enables expressions of solidarity (i.e., directly assisting and supporting other group members and people who share a common identity), or allyship (i.e., assisting and empowering other groups; see Droogendyk, Wright, Lubensky, & Louis, 2016; Iyer & Ryan, 2009; Louis et al., 2019; McGarty, Bliuc, Thomas, & Bongiorno, 2009; Subasic, Schmitt, & Reynolds, 2011). As elaborated later, the mobilisation process, which is a key goal for supporters within the short to medium term, involves building supporters' awareness and sympathy for the cause, and eliciting concrete intentions and actions (Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; van Zomeren et al., 2008, 2012).

Turning to the longer term, another measure of effective collective action directed at the self and supporters may be the extent to which activists sustain their participation over time. Sustained collective action is critical for two reasons: first, to achieve longer-term outcomes such as policy changes over months, years, or decades; and second, simply to ensure the continuity of the

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group and grow the movement (Gulliver, Fielding, & Louis, 2019; Hornsey et al., 2006). Activists who sustain their participation are needed to acquire material resources, attract and support new members, and organise collective actions (e.g., see Edwards & McCarthy, 2004; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Persisting in the face of repeated experiences of failure and rejection is also a vital challenge faced by groups (Lizzio-Wilson, Thomas, Louis, Wilcockson, Amiot, Moghaddam, & McGarty, 2021; Louis et al., 2020). Groups must manage the impact of failure both in terms of maintaining groups' existence and members' motivation to engage, but also in effectively managing the innovation process to select appropriate collective actions to leverage change over longer periods of time. Demonstrating the ability to leverage this change is also important in sustaining individuals' visions and hope for their collective future, which has been linked to willingness to take action (e.g., see Bain et al., 2013).

Beyond the self and supporters, collective action may also seek to mobilise bystanders and individuals in other interest groups ('third parties'). In this Element we distinguish between bystanders and third parties in terms of their collective identities. Bystanders are neutral observers with no known affiliation with collective action groups, whereas third parties are groups of individuals with a shared identity, who may see themselves as outside the activist group, with distinct interests, goals, and values. As a result, collective action directed towards bystanders and third parties may seek different outcomes. For bystanders, activists may seek to progress the tasks of mobilisation: raising awareness, generating sympathy for the cause, triggering intentions to engage in collective action, and eliciting actual actions (see also Louis et al., 2020). Such mobilisation efforts seek, in effect, to convert bystanders to supporters. With regard to third parties, activists may attempt a different task: to build coalitions that more narrowly seek to extend the 'chain of trust' (Louis et al., 2020) to reach and sway decision makers. More broadly, activists and third parties respond to, engage with, and co-create the social structures and norms of the wider society. For example, they respond to and participate in trends towards greater democratisation and openness, or greater authoritarianism and repression.

Finally, activists may also choose to engage opponents. Activists may seek to demobilise or convert opponents, or some factions of them, or simply seek to avoid opponents' counter-mobilisation – that is, when opponents are motivated to engage in backlash and push back (e.g., Giugni, 1998). Activists may also seek to manage opponents' radicalisation – for example, in seeking to deradicalise them. Alternatively, activists may have goals such as diverting opponents' attention, reconciling with them, or appeasing their hostility; or may have goals such as affirming rejection, shaming and stigmatising them, or even harming or destroying the opponents (Louis, Taylor, & Neil, 2004; Louis, Taylor, & Douglas, 2005).

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Excerpt
More Information

Box 1, which considers the women's movement, also reminds us that collective action audiences and criteria of effectiveness can change as a movement advances and retreats. It also demonstrates how movements may not progress linearly, but can stagnate, jump ahead, and loop backwards as a result of dynamic events (see, e.g., Louis et al., 2020; Mundt, Ross, & Burnett, 2018). Changes in individual agency and social structures can also play an important role in understanding social change processes. For example, individuals possess

Box 1 The Many Waves of the Women's Movement

The women's rights movement (also known as the feminist movement) demonstrates how collective action goals can change over different time periods and timescales as highlighted in Table 1. The first wave, emerging in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in a number of Western nations, focused on obtaining full economic and political citizenship: that is, gaining the right for women to vote, and eliminating barriers to opportunities in education and employment (e.g., Ferree & Mueller 2004). In this early wave, organised activism used a diverse collective action repertoire including rallies as well as disruptive action. Over the following decades, the movement became international and grew in both size and strength, increasing the supporter base and building alliances. The second wave occurred in the context of the broader social revolution during the 1960s and 1970s. This wave sought to increase women's inclusion in politics, but also addressed a range of other issues including working conditions, family obligations, and sexuality (Paxton, Hughes, & Green, 2006). The third wave (from the mid-1990s) moved from citizenship and inclusion to advocating for targets for women's representation, whether through gender quotas or laws (Paxton et al., 2006). More recently, some scholars have identified a fourth wave of feminism, heralded online through hashtags such as #MeToo, which both argues for the inclusion of more diverse voices, and promotes sharing of experiences of normalised, everyday sexism (e.g., Munro, 2013).

While the narrative of movement waves may imply a progression in goals and achievements, researchers highlight, however, that each wave has focused on different audiences while also navigating countermobilisation and dissenting voices. This process has set contested parameters around who was included in the movement and who was not, and also achieved substantial gains while negotiating internal disagreement and external discrimination (e.g., Lizzio-Wilson, Masser, Hornsey, & Iyer, 2020).

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Excerpt
More Information

different elements of agency – that is, different capacity and capabilities to act, which are linked to social structures that are incrementally changing around us (May, 2011). The war is not the battle: an event may fail in the short term but still progress the broader agenda, enhance individuals' agency, alter social structures, or slow the pace or likelihood of a looming defeat.

Taken together, the diversity of goals in Table 1 reminds us that social change requires long-term collective action. As such, better understanding these individual and group-level dynamics is critical to any analysis of the social psychology of effective collective action.

2.2 Frameworks for Conceptualisations of Effectiveness and Failure

As Table 1 suggests, the perceived aims and effectiveness of a movement or an action depend upon the eye of the beholder. As a result, in the present Element we seek to identify the shared psychological processes which individuals experience when responding to, and engaging in, collective action broadly. We propose two frameworks that may be useful for a new scholarship of dynamic collective action. Specifically, we propose a framework for understanding effectiveness in relation to collective action audiences across two subsets of tasks: mobilising individuals, and persisting to power (the ABIASCA framework). Following this, we then turn our attention to how activists may respond to collective action failure, and present a second model, DIME.

2.3 A Framework for Understanding Effectiveness in Different Tasks: ABIASCA

Our framework was inspired by the work of Klandermans and Oegema (1987), who reviewed key factors that had prevented people from mobilising in a peace campaign for a rally within a particular Dutch community. These authors identified four barriers to engaging in collective action: lack of awareness of the campaign; lack of sympathy with the goals of the movement; not having formed an intention to act; and not implementing their intentions (Figure 1).

Klandermans and Oegema's (1987) analysis suggests a series of tasks that activists need to undertake as they seek to mobilise people, from addressing ignorance or opposition through to encouraging attitude and behaviour change. These tasks include awareness raising, building sympathy, turning sympathy into intentions, and turning intentions into actions. In the present model, we adopt this framework to propose that progressing individuals through these tasks is required to effectively *mobilise* individuals in collective action regardless of which audience they may be in: self, supporters, bystanders, third parties, or even opponent groups.

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