

Studying Large-Scale Protest: Understanding Mobilization and Participation at the People's Climate March

Dana R. Fisher
Professor of Sociology
University of Maryland



UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND



PROGRAM FOR SOCIETY & THE ENVIRONMENT

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND · A GRADUATE FIELD COMMITTEE



How can we make sense of 400,000 people?

- Projected turnout: 100,000
- Initial turnout estimate: 310,000
- Final turnout estimate: 400,000
- 1574 registered organizations
- 50,000 registered students
- It took more than 5 hours for everyone to pass the start



The People's Climate March: September 21, 2014

- Mass mobilization calling for international and national action on climate change, highlighted communities affected by climate change, and demonstrated public support for climate action; scheduled for Sunday before UN talks began in NYC.
- Framed as part of a larger movement for climate justice— called for action that “protects the poorest and most vulnerable in our society, and solutions that prioritize those who have born the brunt of those problems.”

In addition to all kinds of environmental activists, the People's Climate March brought out protesters from a diverse range of organizations and interests....



Diverse Participation at the People's Climate March

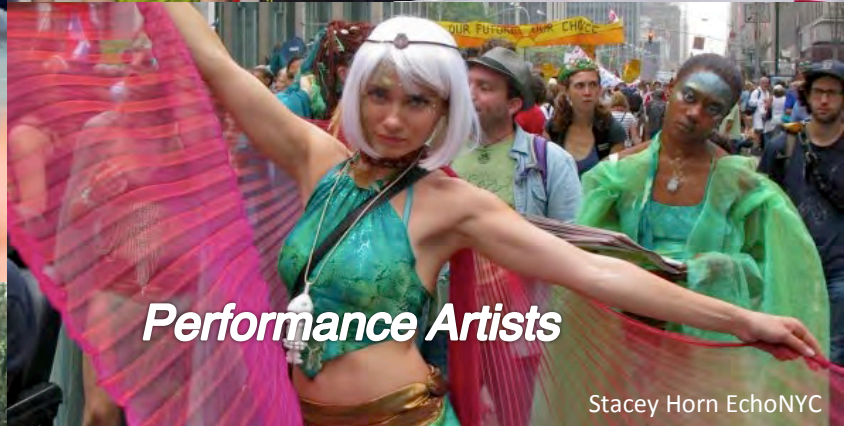


Indigenous Activists

Melina Laboucan-Massimo/Facebook



Anarchists & Anti Capitalists



Performance Artists

Stacey Horn EchoNYC



Anti-War Groups

CodePink



Vegans

EcoRazzi

MEAT IS KILLING THE PLANET



Young People

Shadia Fayne Wood | Sustain.Meatless

Shadia Fayne Wood

How Can We Study Such a Diverse Population?

*Because humans and social systems are not homogenous, we must make sure that our research takes into account the range of variation in the population and that it is represented in our sample of observations.
If not, then we can't generalize our findings!*

Accounting for this complexity takes a lot of legwork: 12 researchers from the University of Maryland, Columbia University, and the University of British Columbia were in the crowd at the People's Climate March to collect surveys from participants.

To get to the march, Maryland researchers were on a bus from DC at 5 am.



Surveying the Crowd at the Staging Area

Surveys were collected as protesters assembled for the march.

Research teams were positioned in each of the 6 staging sections established by march organizers.



Random Sampling of the Crowd

- Researchers worked horizontally across the crowd, collecting surveys from every 5th adult participant
- This method allowed researchers to select randomly respondents and to work more quickly and evenly through the massive crowd

Total Completed Surveys: 468

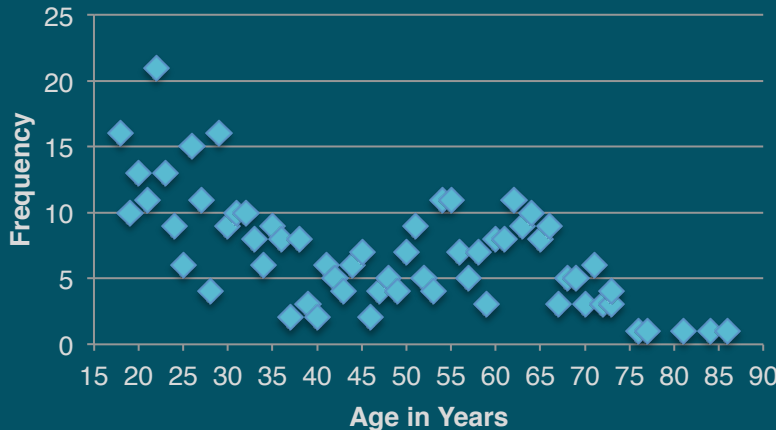
Response Rate: 84%



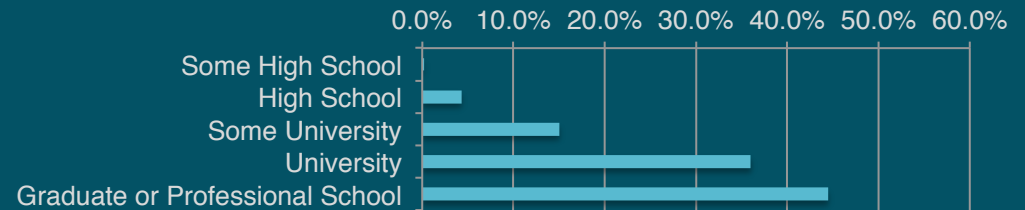
Sample Demographics

Respondents in our sample were highly educated, female, and politically liberal, which is consistent with other studies of volunteerism and the environmental movement. Respondents were most likely to be in their mid 20s or 60s.

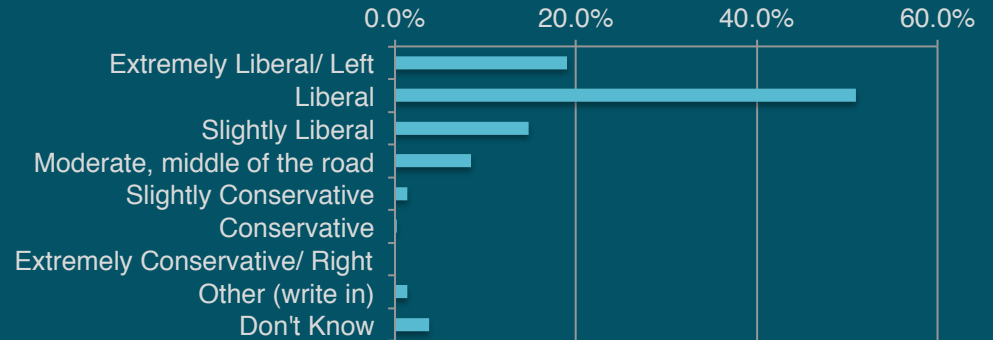
Age



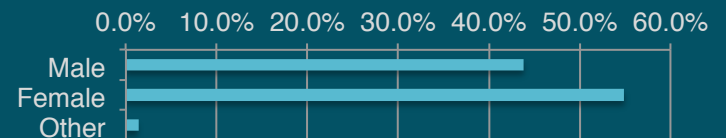
Highest Level of Education



Political Views

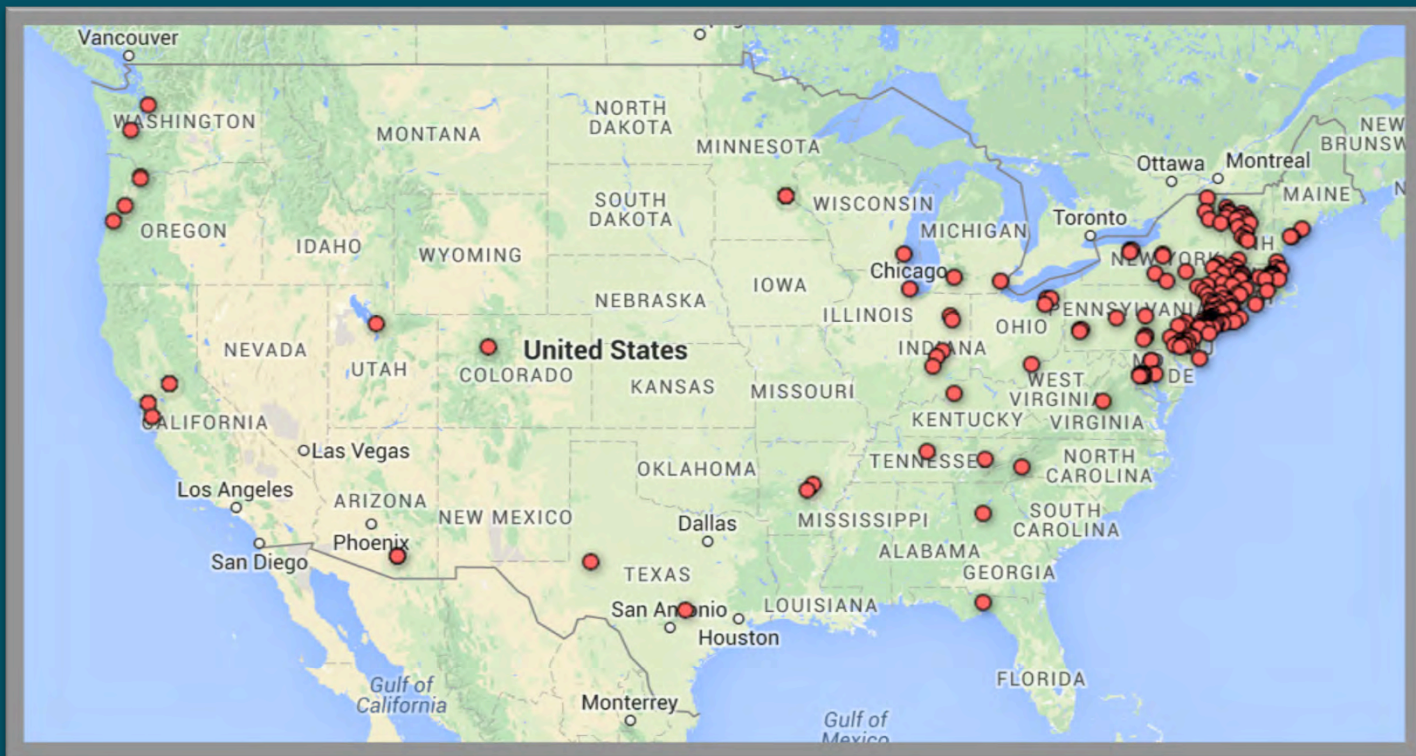


Gender



Where Did Protesters Travel From?

- 95% of participants lived in the United States
- 5% of participants traveled internationally
- 47% were from the New York City metropolitan / Tri-State area

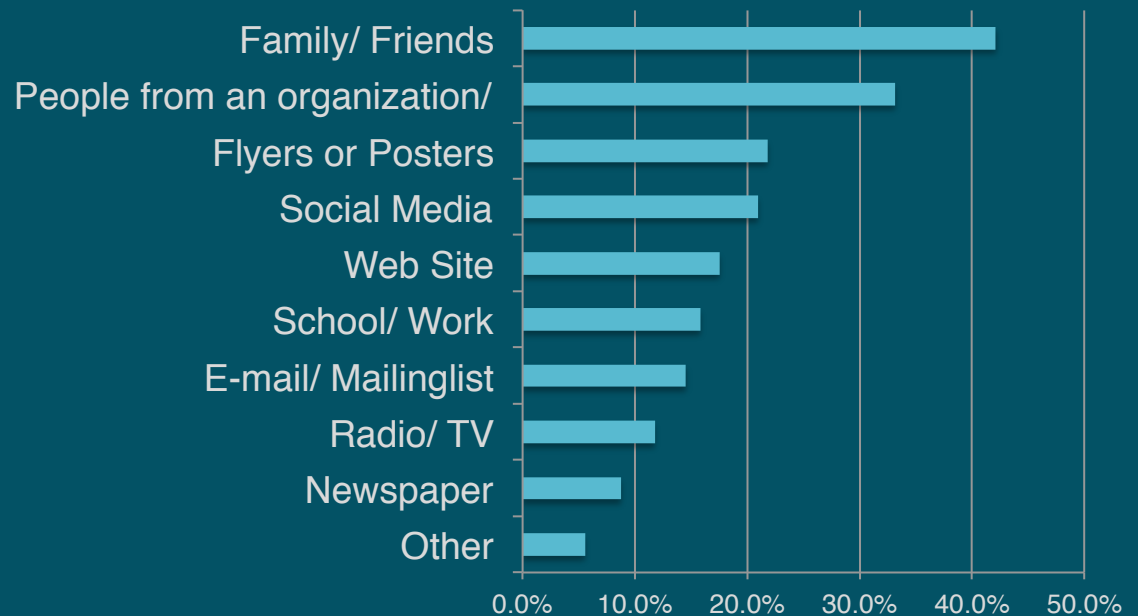


Map of zip codes of participants from the Continental US

How Did Protesters Find Out About the March?

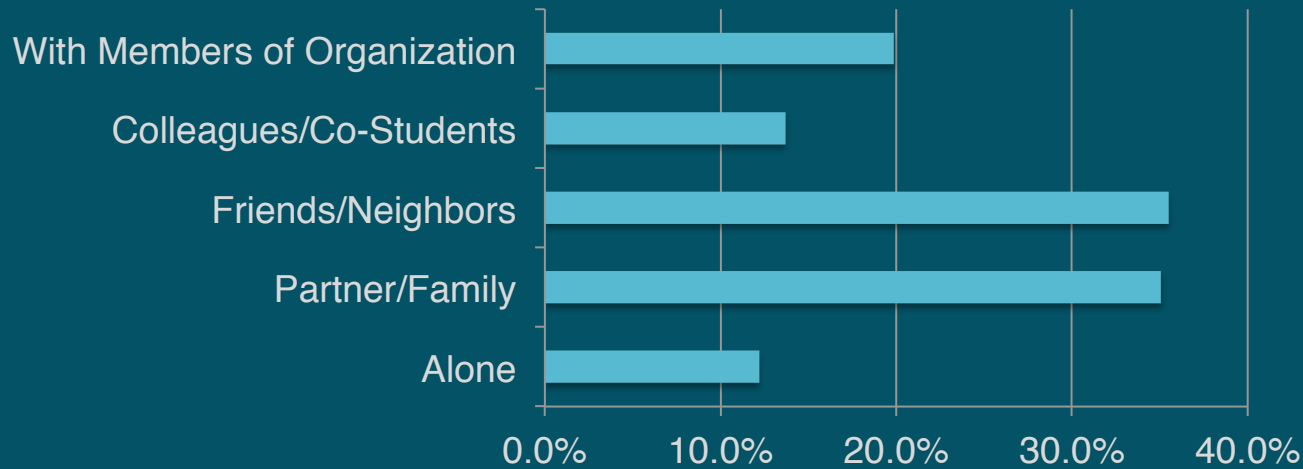
Nearly half of respondents heard about the protest from someone they knew, and about a third indicated that they found out from an organization or group.

Flyers and posters were the most common non-relational channel, followed by social media sites and websites.



Subway poster advertising the march

With Whom Did Protesters Attend the March?

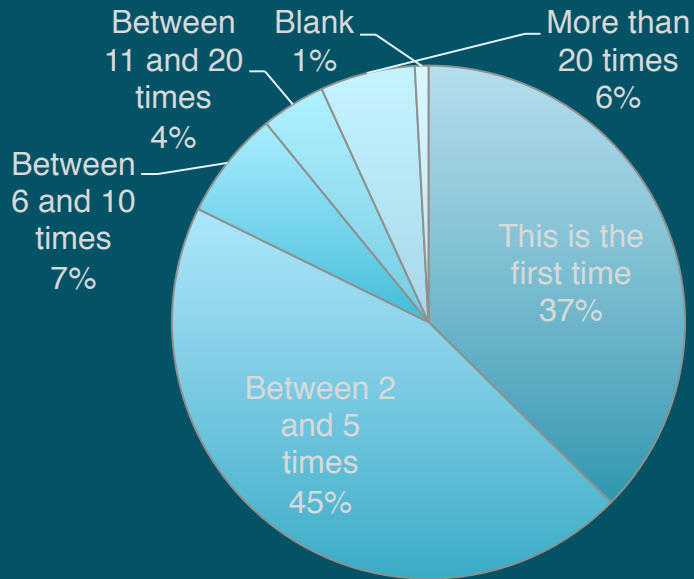


Most respondents came with someone they knew, or with an organization. Twelve percent came to the march alone.

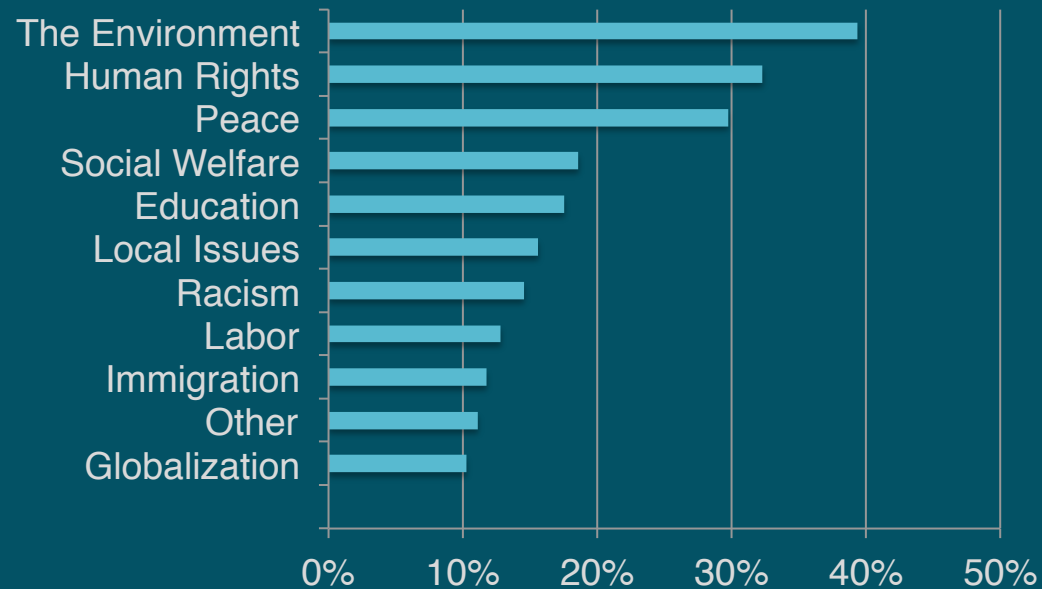


How Experienced Were Protesters?

How many times have you attended a protest and/or demonstration in the past five years?



Of the protests that you have attended in the past nine / years (since 2005), what have they been about?



To What Degree are Protesters Civically Active?

<i>Civic activities in the year prior to protest:</i>	<i>Percentage for National Population</i>	<i>Percentage for Climate March sample</i>
<i>Signed a petition</i>	35%	82%
<i>Contacted an elected government representative</i>	22%	57%
<i>Attended a public, town, community board, or school meeting</i>	24%	52%
<i>Wore or posted a button/flyer/sticker/poster of political campaign</i>	29%	48%
<i>Participated in a protest</i>	6%	23%
<i>Contacted the media to express view</i>	5%	31%
<i>Gave a speech</i>	4%	19%
<i>Held or ran for public office</i>	1%	4%
<i>Engaged in political discussion on the Internet</i>	5%	39%
<i>Worked for a political party</i>	19%	17%

Sources: General Social Survey, cumulative file 1972-2008; Roper Social Capital Community Survey, 2006; Roper Social and Political Trends Data, 1973-1994; National sample data from the CIRCLE Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey, 2006

Note: The “contacted the media to express view” variable reported here is derived from three survey question responses, aggregated to align with national survey question formats. The questions were: 1) Written a letter to a newspaper 2) Written an article for a magazine or newspaper 3) Contacted the national or local media in another way.

Next Steps

- Further analysis of PCM data for peer-reviewed paper
- Comparison of data from PCM in 2014 to survey data collected at previous climate marches in Copenhagen (2009) and the Hague (2000)
- Data collection at the protest that will take place during the climate negotiations in Paris in 2015.

TIME TO ACT!



Acknowledgements and Additional References

Research Team:

Joey Brown, Andrew Cheon, Denae Johnson, Anya Galli, Zachary Richer, Dave Strohecker, David Tindall, Johannes Urpelainen, Joseph Waggle, Moriah Willow, and William Yagatich

For More Information, see:

- Fisher, Dana R. and Anya M. Galli. In Press. "Civil Society Engagement in Climate Governance: Between Collaboration and Conflict." *Research Handbook on Climate Governance*, edited by Backstrand and Lovbrand, Editors. Edward Elgar Press.
- Fisher, Dana R. 2011. "Comment: The Limits of Civil Society's Participation and Influence at COP-15." *Global Environmental Politics*. Volume 11, Number 1: 8-11.
- Fisher, Dana R. 2010. "COP-15 in Copenhagen: How the Merging of Movements Left Civil Society Out In the Cold." *Global Environmental Politics*. Volume 10, Number 2: 11-17
- Fisher, Dana R. and Marije Boekkooi. 2010. "Mobilizing Friends and Strangers: Understanding the Role of the Internet in Days of Action." *Information, Communication & Society*. Volume 13, Number 2: 193-208.
- Fisher, Dana R. 2010. "On Social Networks and Social Protest: Understanding the Role of Social and Personal Ties in Large-Scale Protest Events" *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts, and Change*. Volume 30: 115-140.
- Fisher, Dana R. 2008. "Who Are Climate Change Activists in America?" *Environmental Law Reporter*. 38 (December): 10864-10867.
- Fisher, Dana R. 2006. "Taking Cover Beneath the Anti-Bush Umbrella: Cycles of Protest and Movement-to-Movement Transmission in an Era of Repressive Politics." *Research in Political Sociology*, Volume 15: 27-56.
- Fisher, Dana R., Kevin Stanley, David Berman, and Gina Neff. 2005. "How Do Organizations Matter? Mobilization and Support for Participants at Five Globalization Protests." *Social Problems*. Volume 52, Issue 1: 102-121.