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# **Protesters On Message? Explaining Demonstrators'**

## **Differential Degrees of Frame Alignment**

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### **Abstract**

The frame alignment perspective emphasizes the importance of congruence in beliefs between protest participants and protest organizers. Although frame alignment is widely used in social movement research and matters for important movement processes, **it has remained largely unclear how we can explain different degrees of frame alignment among protesters.** We use empirical evidence regarding organizers' and participants' frames, surveying 4,000 protesters in twenty-nine demonstrations between 2009-2012 in Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. The results show that frame alignment depends on variables that tap into protesters' exposure to organizational and alternative messages. **Especially participants who are recruited by staging organizations and events organized by strong and more professionalized organizations display higher levels of frame alignment, whereas salience of the protest issue in the political arena severely constrains reaching high degrees of frame alignment.**

**Keywords:** frame alignment; street demonstrations; protest surveys; Western Europe; quantitative research

**Word count:** 8032

Since long, social movement scholars have realized that people can be members or participants of the same organization or movement with varying degrees of commitment and with varying degrees of alignment with the ideas and frames of the organizations they support (see e.g. Etzioni, 1975; and see Turner & Killian, 1987 on the “illusion of homogeneity”). Some recent studies have provided systematic empirical evidence for this observation. Wahlström and colleagues (2013), for instance, show that the frames rank-and-file climate change protesters hold often differ from how movement intellectuals frame the issue. In another study, Ketelaars et al. (2014) prove that there is great variation in the extent to which street demonstrators share the frames of social movement organizations staging the protests. While some protesters are fully aligned with the protest organizers, many also want to address other problems and put forward other demands.

The extent to which members or demonstrators are aligned with social movement organizations (SMOs) staging protest events is important. It arguably has significant consequences for SMOs and their constituents. For instance, frame alignment can affect internal cohesion. If activists make widely different claims or if particular groups put emphasis on different domains, movements run the risk to fall apart in various fractions. Diversity is not a problem per se, but if it surfaces repeatedly, schism might be the consequence. Following Tilly (2004) one might also argue that frame alignment matters for the impact of protest. Aligned and thus ‘unified’ groups of protesters should have a higher chance to succeed by broadcasting a clearer and stronger signal because it shows that they are a unified force politicians should pay attention to. Finally, degrees of alignment indicate how well the concerns of rank-and-file participants are represented by the movement elite. This is, for instance, important when organizations are invited by decision makers to talk about demands. The more grassroots protesters and leader activists care about the same issues, the

higher the chance that people on the ground are effectively represented in these meetings. As such, degrees of frame alignment are an indication of the extent to which participation in movement activities is a successful way for people to get information about their preferences across to politicians.

While it is clear that movement supporters are aligned with SMO messages in varying degrees, little research has actually tried to *explain* these differences. The goal of this study, therefore, is to investigate what factors account for varying levels of frame alignment. We draw on a large quantitative data set, consisting of protest surveys with about 4,000 participants in twenty-nine street demonstrations held between 2009 and 2012 in Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Participants were asked three open-ended questions about their reasons to protest. Their answers are compared with the official frames of the protest-staging organizations, captured by the formal platforms and pamphlets announcing the event.

To be clear, the study does not compare participants with nonparticipants, nor are we interested in the mobilizing capacities of frames. The contribution we make is showing that *within* the group of participants there is large variation in degrees of alignment, and we formulate expectations about the causes of different degrees of frame alignment. Up to now, framing scholars foremost focused on frame resonance, scrutinizing why some types of SMO frames are more successful than others in mobilizing support (see e.g. McCammon, 2001; McVeigh, Myers, & Sikkink, 2004; Ketelaars, 2016; or see Feinberg & Willer, 2011 outside the protest context). Without doubt, frame characteristics are important to account for differences in frame alignment. Yet, we shift focus here and look at the broader communicative context in which people decide to attend a demonstration rather than at

substantive characteristics of the frames themselves. Our research question is: *Which factors determine the degree to which the beliefs of protest participants are aligned with the mobilizing messages of the protest-staging organizations?* We expect that degrees of alignment relate to exposure to the organizers' messages on the one hand and exposure to alternative messages on the other. We argue that these factors vary both across individuals and across demonstrations.

### **Frame Alignment**

Since its development in the mid-1980s, the frame alignment approach has become one of the most influential theories within social movement research. Initially a response to the prevailing resource and organizational perspectives, framing scholars aimed to bring constructivist and cultural dimensions back into collective action research. They stressed 'collective action frames'—the language organizations use to gather support. Within this broad approach the frame *alignment* perspective deals with the congruence between participants' and organizers' frames. Frame alignment, according to Snow et al. (1986, p. 464), 'refers to the linkage of individual and social movement organizations' interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values, and beliefs and social movement organization activities, goals and ideologies are congruent and complementary'.

However, framing studies have analysed alignment mainly from a social movement perspective. Whether analysing framing strategies, processes, types, or consequences, the focus generally has been on the *organizations* communicating the frames (see e.g. Babb, 1996; Faupel & Werum, 2011; Gerhards & Rucht, 1992; Haydu, 2011). The receivers and their particular characteristics, were mostly discarded. Recently, framing studies started examining frames of individuals—of members (Ernst, 2009; Johnston & Aarelaid-Tart, 2000),

participants (Alkon, Cortez, & Sze, 2013; Hadler & McKay, 2013), and even non-activists (Mika, 2006). These studies, however, typically deal with individuals in an aggregated way without considering individual heterogeneity. These studies, therefore, cannot tell which features of individuals increase or decrease their degree of alignment.

Besides the shift to individuals the field has gradually become more explanatory. Instead of describing frames (Benford, 1997), scholars analyse what explains the types of frames social movement organizations use (McCammon, 2012; Snow, Vliegenthart, & Corrigan-Brown, 2007) and under which conditions particular frames are successful or not (see e.g. Cadena-Roa, 2002; Chakravarty & Chaudhuri, 2012; Mika, 2006). Still, framing work is mainly based on single cases. An overview of Snow and colleagues (2014), listing all important framing studies between 2000 and 2011, supports this point. While some framing articles compare different groups or organizations *within* movements, none of the forty listed studies compare *across* social movements or protest issues.

Inspired by the individualistic and explanatory turn in framing work and drawing on extant case studies, our aim is to take the next step. We tackle the phenomenon at the individual level and at the same time add a comparative account to the literature by systematically comparing across demonstrations. By scrutinizing the overlap of what protest organizers publicly state about the protest and what demonstration participants individually say, this paper gets back to the roots of frame alignment theory. We deal with the *linkage* between individuals and organizations and, most importantly, set out to *explain* the degree of congruence.

In line with most work on frame alignment we embrace a top-down logic: organizers' messages are (not) shared by potential participants and this leads to (non)alignment.

Alignment also depends on the opposite process, organizers adopting frames prevalent among potential constituents. Snow et al. (1986) call this process frame 'extension'. We do not deny this bottom-up process but since we only have cross-sectional data it is impossible to tease out who leads and who follows.

### **Explaining Degrees of Alignment**

We depart from the idea that people can have varying beliefs regarding the protest event in which they are participating and regarding the underlying problem against which they take arms (Wahlström et al., 2013). The frames participants hold—what the problem is, who is to blame for it and how it should be solved—are not always in line with the formal message propagated by the organizers (Ketelaars et al., 2014).

The possible causes for protesters *not* being aligned with the organizers' messages are manifold. Firstly, potential participants, even when engaged, may miss bits of information, be ignorant, or distracted. Individuals' cognitive capacities are limited and the amount of information they can process is constrained (Miller, 1956). Secondly, participants may consciously disagree with aspects of the organizers' messages but decide to participate anyway because they believe to have enough in common with the organizations staging the event or with the people attending. Thirdly, cognitive motives do not necessarily prevail in decisions to participate. Besides cognitions, emotions can be at play (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2009). In specific circumstances, participation in a demonstration can be a means to vent anger (Stürmer & Simon, 2009). Sharing emotions of outrage can then provide enough

motivation to protest even without sharing the frames of organizers. Positive emotions—feeling part of a larger group—can play a role as well (Sabucedo & Vilas, 2014).

As mentioned above, we only have cross-sectional data and therefore we cannot examine *processes* of alignment—i.e. how individual beliefs *become* congruent with organizers' views. Nonetheless, we try to explain the result of frame alignment processes, and we hold that alignment depends on the broader communicative context in which people decide to attend a demonstration. Firstly, we expect that alignment is a matter of exposure to organizational information. In line with the priming approach in psychology (see for example Althaus & Kim, 2006), individuals' adaptation to a message depends in part on the prominence of the message. The more frequent people get exposed to a message, the more accessible the message becomes, the more it 'sticks' and the more likely it affects their behaviour. Hence, we expect that protesters' exposure to messages of protest-staging organizations increases their level of frame alignment. This might seem a trivial expectation at first, but we expect this to vary greatly across individuals and across demonstrations. Different types of SMOs have different capacities to diffuse messages, protesters can be recruited by different actors (fellow members, friends, colleagues), and they can be informed about the demonstration by various information channels (flyers, newspapers, social media). These factors influence the extent to which protesters are exposed to the organizers' messages.

Secondly, frame alignment does not happen in a social vacuum in which organizers have the monopoly on communication. Potential participants are also exposed to a range of other, potentially confounding messages. Exposure to alternative frames can be expected to vary greatly across individuals and demonstration events as well. Protest mobilization implies a signifying struggle between organizers, targets and counter mobilizers, with observers and

commentators as third parties. Koopmans (2004) states that the forum *par excellence* for these framing wars are the modern mass media. Walsh (2004) shows that framing effects are attenuated when individuals are immersed in heterogeneous, crosscutting social networks. Knowing that many people are mobilized via so-called micro-mobilization networks consisting of colleagues and friends (Diani & McAdam, 2003) they may have been never directly confronted with the messages sent by the staging organizations but only with potentially biased or even entirely different interpretations by their personal recruiters. So, the more people are exposed to alternative messages and interpretations, the less their views are expected to be in line with those of the organizers.

In the next section, we further specify our expectations by presenting the data we use and by clarifying how we operationalized the rather abstract concept of exposure.

### **Data and Coding**

This study uses protest survey data gathered by *PROJECT*. Protest participants were randomly selected during the act of protest, asked to fill in a questionnaire at home and send it back via mail. We followed the standard protest survey procedure as spelled out by Walgrave and colleagues (Walgrave & Verhulst, 2011; Walgrave, Wouters, & Ketelaars, 2016). The present study covers twenty-nine demonstrations staged between 2009 and 2012 in three countries—eight in Belgium, ten in the Netherlands, and eleven in the United Kingdom. The selected protest events cover the most important and visible street demonstrations that were held in the countries during the research period. The aim of the project was to survey all significant demonstrations during this time. The selection of countries was mostly pragmatic, as coding frames requires sufficient knowledge of the language. Nevertheless, we think the three countries present a robust test for answering the goals set out for this study. More than

20,000 postal surveys were distributed and 6,096 were sent back. Overall, the response rate was thirty percent.<sup>1</sup> In total 4,438 people answered all questions used in the study. Sixteen of the twenty-nine demonstrations are anti-austerity events, which include various protests against austerity measures, and one May Day event. We cover four events on environmental issues—climate change demonstrations or protests against nuclear energy—, four anti-discrimination events, and five ‘democracy’ protests aiming for changes in the political system.<sup>2</sup>

### *Coding Participant and Organizational Frames*

Frames are defined and operationalized based on the work of social movement scholar Hank Johnston (1995, 2002, 2005). He defines frames as cognitive schemata that shape people’s behaviour and that consist of multiple elements. An important aspect of Johnston’s method are the various *components* that make up frames. Accordingly, instead of analysing frames as broad categories that cover a range of concepts, we identify and examine each component of a SMO frame scheme separately (see e.g. Gerhards & Rucht, 1992). The units of analysis hence are *frame components*. They all address one of the following questions: What is the problem? Who or what is to blame for it? And, how can the problem be solved?

We measure the degree of alignment between the frame sender (organizations) and the frame receiver (participants) by examining to what extent protest participants use the same arguments and motivations in their survey responses as the organizations did in their official campaign texts. Since framing is about meaning and interpretations we do not compare the exact words organizations and activists use. Rather, we examine the congruence of the *content*—the underlying idea or argument—of what is said.

In the first stage of the coding process we collect the platform texts of the twenty-nine protest events; these are the official claims and points of view put forward by the staging organizations, published online or in print flyers. We think such texts, representing a shared interpretation meant to be presented to the outside world, are the best available point of reference to empirically examine frame alignment. These texts are converted into a number of separate frame components. Each frame component is an argument, meaningful bit of text or comprehensible statement about the event, problem, solution, who is to blame, or underlying issue. On average, we counted twenty frame components per demonstration platform with a minimum of nine, and a maximum of 37. See the Appendix for an overview of all demonstrations and their number of frame elements.

The second stage of the coding process analyses the overlap between the frames of the organizations and participants' answers to three open questions in the survey: Q1 'Please tell us why you participated in this protest event?'; Q2 'In your opinion, who or what is to blame for [demonstration issue]?'; Q3 'What should be done to address this issue?' These written accounts only reveal part of the beliefs participants have regarding the event, but such an incomplete picture is not a disadvantage per se. Respondents mention what is most important to them and present us with the 'vocabularies of motive' (see e.g. Benford, 1993) they use to justify their participation to themselves and others. Following the widely used distinction between diagnosis (including blame attribution) and prognosis (Snow & Benford, 1988), Q1 asks for the diagnosis, the event or situation that is problematic and needs to be repaired. Granted, it does not literally do so. Respondents might interpret it differently and—instead of referring to the issue or problem underlying the protest event—mention other reasons why they participated. Still, of all arguments written down by respondents only six percent does not refer to the issue at stake. Q2 goes into blame attribution, who or what is responsible for

the problematic situation. Q3 elicits a prognosis, a possible solution for the problem. Our analyses only include respondents who answered all questions.

Coding is done by six coders.<sup>3</sup> Each demonstration is coded by at least two different people who each code the answers of approximately 1,000 respondents. The coding unit is a quasi-sentence containing one message. For every quasi-sentence, we examine whether it is congruent with an organizations' frame component or not. Table 1 shows the frame components that were identified in the organizers' pamphlet of *Scream for Culture* in Amsterdam. The right column lists the answers **of a single respondent** and shows how quasi-sentences were operationalized and which answers were coded as (in)congruent.

<Table 1 about here>

Ten percent of the sample is double coded and we measure Krippendorff's alpha (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007) for the number of identified quasi-sentences ( $K\text{-alpha}=.93$ ), the number of quasi-sentences congruent with the organizers ( $K\text{-alpha}=.72$ ) and the number of incongruent quasi-sentences ( $K\text{-alpha}=.71$ ). Quasi-sentences that are not related to the demonstration or issue—for instance 'I participated because my wife asked me to'—are not included to measure alignment. We do not deny that such issue-unrelated answers are meaningful but they rather indicate the degree to which people demonstrate for not directly content-related reasons. We will use these answers as a control variable.

### **Dependent Variables: Measuring Frame Alignment**

Both respondents' congruent and incongruent answers are informative for their frame alignment. This study therefore has two dependent variables: *Total Alignment*, which is the

number of congruent frame components a respondent mentions, and *Total Nonalignment*, the number of incongruent frame elements. These dependent variables are correlated but not very strongly (Pearson's  $R = -.385$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Figure 1 and 2 present their frequency distributions. On average, respondents produce four quasi-sentences: two that can be traced back to the organizers' frames (congruent), and two alternative elements (incongruent frame components). The dependent variables both follow a Poisson distribution; they are count variables skewed to the right. Tests reveal no sign of overdispersion so we run standard Poisson regressions. Since protest participants are nested in demonstrations we model the dependence within demonstrations using multilevel random-intercept regression models.<sup>4</sup>

<Figure 1 & Figure 2 about here>

### **Independent Variables**

*Exposure to Organizers' Frames* — Our first expectation was that respondents who are more exposed to frames put forward by organizers are more aligned. Applying this general idea to the demonstrations we study, we propose four organizational exposure indicators.

- (1) *Member Staging Organization*. Members of the staging organizations should be more exposed to the official claims via co-members and via targeted communication (like websites, meetings, mailing lists). We asked respondents to list the main staging organizations of the demonstrations and followed up with : '*Are you a member of any of these organizations*' (0=no, 1=yes).
- (2) *Mobilized Via Organization*. A second proxy measuring exposure to organizers' frames taps into participants' recruitment. Firstly, we ask respondents whether they were asked by someone to participate in the protest. Secondly, we ask how respondents found out about the demonstration and what their most important information channel was.<sup>5</sup>

Respondents were coded ‘1’ when they answered that they were only asked by co-members of an organization, or when their most important information channel was either an organization (magazine, meeting, website, mailing list), (fellow) members of an organization, or ads, flyers and/or posters. Others were coded 0.

(3) *Formal Organization*. A social movement’s structure influences the way protesters are mobilized and how information is disseminated (Rucht, 1996). We expect more exposure to the official protest frames when demonstrations are staged by strong, formal, professional organizations and expect less exposure when protests are initiated by organizations with a more loose and informal structure, characterized by more flexible forms of coordination. Formal Organization is a dummy variable with demonstrations dominated by centralized, formal and hierarchical coordinated organizations coded as 1 and demonstrations staged by more loose, decentralized organizations coded as 0. In the latter case, membership organizations were not leading the way, and the protest was mostly organized by ‘digitally mediated action networks’ (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 742). The coding is based on factsheets with descriptions of the main initiators of the demonstrations that were filled in by every country team in *PROJECT*.

(4) *Number of Organizers*. We expect that a larger number of organizers lead to higher levels of alignment. More organizers means more diffusion of the protest frames through more communication channels increasing the odds of frequent exposure to protest frames. The number of organizers is coded by counting the number of staging organizations on the demonstration’s official platform, up to a maximum of five.

*Exposure to Alternative Frames* — Our second expectation was that when supporters of a movement get exposed to alternative messages not controlled by the movement, they are on average less aligned. We present three indicators that grasp alternative exposure.

- (1) *Membership Diversity*. Activists who are member of various organizations—not only of organizations staging the event—are expected to be exposed to alternative frames (Heaney & Rojas, 2007). We ask respondents to indicate whether they are an active or passive member of any of twelve listed types of organizations.<sup>6</sup> To measure Membership Diversity we count the number of organization types that a respondent is engaged in, up to a maximum of five.
- (2) *Political Interest*. Activists with high levels of political interest are likely to be more exposed to alternative frames than people with little interest in politics. Politically interested are more informed about politicized issues, read and discuss more political news and are more exposed to various political viewpoints. We ask respondents: ‘*How interested are you in politics?*’ (1=not at all; 2=not very; 3=quite; 4=very).
- (3) *Political Attention for Issue*. A message-confounding factor at the demonstration level is the pre-existing political attention for the protest issue. If an issue already receives political attention and is the subject of political debate leading to the presence of pros and cons in the public domain, we expect the chance that potential participants picked up these alternative frames (or deem them salient) to grow. Political attention is tricky to measure, though. We rely on a survey question that each national research team had to answer before each demonstration: ‘*Now before the demonstration, do the major political institutions (government, parliament etc.) devote a lot of attention to the issue of the demonstration, or not?*’ (none at all, quite a bit, a lot). We merged the two first categories leading to a variable with ‘none at all’ and ‘quite a bit’ coded as 0, and ‘a lot’ coded as 1.

Our models also contain control variables. Apart from gender, age, and education, we control for the total number of quasi-sentences (congruent and incongruent) given by a respondent. Also, we account for whether or not (0-1) a participant gave one or more issue-unrelated

answers. Participants who write down not directly content-related reasons for their participation, are probably less aligned. On the demonstration level we control for the number of frame components in the protest pamphlet and we add issue dummies. Table 2 gives an overview of all variables' descriptives.

<Table 2 about here>

## **Results**

Table 3 shows two multilevel random-intercept Poisson regression models; Model 1 for Total Alignment (number of congruent frame components a respondent mentions), and Model 2 for Total *Nonalignment* (number of incongruent frame elements). The independent variables are divided into four groups. The first two panes correspond with our two main expectations. The third and fourth pane list control variables. Besides regression coefficients, standard errors and significance levels, we report incidence-rate ratios (IRR) to make sense of effect sizes. The model fit statistics at the bottom compare full with intercept-only models. The full models fit the data better.

The first pane of Table 3 tests the predictive power of exposure to the organizers' frames. Two of the four variables yield the expected positive and significant results in the Total Alignment model. Participants mobilized via the staging organizations are more aligned than participants recruited via other routes. However, the effect is rather small (IRR=1.051): people who were asked by (fellow) members or found out about the event via organizational information channels write down 5% more aligned frames than people for which this was not the case. This variable relates to Total *Nonalignment* as well: people who were recruited via the protest organizers write down 5% less alternative frames than their fellow participants

(IRR=.951). Surprisingly, membership in one of the staging organizations does not affect alignment. Members are not more aligned than non-members. Maybe not all members are highly involved per se. As check-book or passive affiliates they do not necessarily support the organization's goals and ideas more than non-member participants. Being recruited by staging organizers and (fellow) members matters, rather than being a member as such.

Demonstrations staged by strong formal organizations are populated by demonstrators that are on average more aligned. Compared to activists in more loose organized events, they mention almost twice as many congruent frames (IRR=1.787). Moreover, these participants also name about half less alternative frames, as can be seen in the Total Nonalignment model

(IRR=.592). Whether a demonstration is staged by formal and hierarchically coordinated organizations is the strongest predictor in both models. The number of organizers does not affect Total Alignment. However, Model 2 shows that protesters in events with more organizers—larger coalitions, more diverse frames—mention 4% less frames that are incongruent with the frames of the movement (IRR=.960). Our first hypothesis is generally confirmed. We find a positive correlation of the indicators of exposure to organizers' frames with Total Alignment and a negative relation with Total Nonalignment.

<Table 3 about here>

The second pane tests exposure to alternative frames. Membership Diversity does not yield significant results. Yet political interest matters. The Total Nonalignment model shows that participants with high political interest mention more alternative reasons for participation than respondents with low political interest, although they do not write down less congruent frames (Model 1). This seems logical: while political interest provides them with more alternative frames, there is no reason why these individuals would be less exposed to organizers' frames.

It must be noted however, that the effect is rather small (IRR=1.019). Political Attention, in contrast, correlates with both alignment measures. Demonstrations on issues that received a lot of political attention in the period before the event are populated with participants that, on average, mention more than twenty percent less congruent frames (IRR=.810) and about thirty percent more alternative frames (IRR=1.314). If an event is in the centre of a political debate, protest organizers cannot control the information flow; the informational environment becomes messy leading to lower frame alignment levels. Overall, the evidence supports the idea formulated in H2 that there is a negative relationship between frame alignment and the exposure to alternative interpretations and beliefs regarding the issue and/or event.

Finally, we take a short look at the control variables. Few significantly correlate with frame alignment. Yet, women seem to mention more frames in line with the organizers than men. We also find that respondents who write down issue-unrelated reasons for participation are less aligned and make more nonaligned statements as well. These participants probably primarily attend because of emotional attachments or social networks rather than because of cognitive motives. Regarding the different issues, people in democracy protests most closely stick to the official protest platforms. Compared to austerity protesters their arguments are about twice as often congruent (IRR=1.823). This might be explained by the fact that the claims of protests aiming for changes in the political system may be broader and contain more general principles that are easier to remember and reproduce.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

Recent social movement research has empirically shown that what protesters think not necessarily parallels what social movement organizations proclaim. The extent to which protesters' frames are in tune with organizers' mobilizing messages varies greatly. In this

study we have tried to explain this variation. We argued that frame alignment is a matter of exposure to organizational and alternative information. We found that being recruited by the organizers is associated with people's mentioning of the mobilizing messages. Also, when a demonstration is staged by strong formal organizations or by multiple organizers, participants' frames are more in line with the protest pamphlets. This suggests that SMOs have leverage in producing unified masses and that more professional organizations, and organizations that collaborate, via their joint recruitment efforts and other resources they possess, can succeed in getting a crowd behind the banner that is of one mind. Frame alignment thus is something malleable, that organizations can influence given their own efforts and strategic decisions. The broader political context, central in much theorizing about protest emergence, mobilization and impact, however, severely constraints movement agency as it exposes (potential) participants to alternative arguments and positions. If the issue of the demonstration is already salient in the political arena, organizations appear to have less control over what participants in their events stand for. This points to a dilemma organizations sooner or later are confronted with: if their topic of concern is salient and the momentum to make a difference is present (their issue is on the political agenda) their events are more likely to draw participants with diverging views. This suggests that with the momentum of a movement also the disappointment of some of its participants is born, finding themselves less in sync with what the movement leadership declares. How movement organizations deal with this difficult balancing act looks like a promising, but challenging, avenue for future research.

In general, we believe that our framework based on the concept of exposure passed the test. It produces plausible and empirically warranted predictions and indicates that frame alignment is about more than strategic framing or frame characteristics, and is connected to features of individuals, organizations and the broader context in which the protest takes place. It must be

noted though, that we only formulated and tested a partial theory. People adopting certain frames does not only depend on exposure, but on their willingness to *accept* the frames that are communicated as well (see for example Zaller, 1992 for a similar account of how public opinion is formed). Some people can be expected to be more willing to embrace the protest organizers' frames than others, depending on their motivation and issue involvement (Chong & Druckman, 2007), the strength of their predispositions (Brewer, 2003), or how credible they judge the source of the message to be (Pornpitakpan, 2004; for a similar argument related to frame alignment see Benford & Snow, 2000). Unfortunately, the evidence regarding the protest participants in our sample did not allow us to measure the acceptance dimension of frame alignment.

Moreover, while frame alignment is a process, our research only measured its outcome. A more complete picture would entail tracing the changing views of potential participants over time together with the strategic shifts in emphasis in the official mobilizing texts. Only such a dynamic analysis can shed light on the mutual adjustments between activists and organizations and disentangle the causal relationship. Such an approach could also aim to tap the views of non-participants before the event, in order to trace whether they have been exposed to mobilizing messages, to what extent they adopted these views, and whether their decision not to participate is related to their degree of alignment.

Furthermore, we are not sure that what we found here also applies to other types of protest and contention in other countries. Demonstrations may be the most popular type of protest nowadays, but studying other forms of political action, in other parts of the world, and in other moments in history may produce different results. For instance, it can be expected that more risky and costly participation requires higher degrees of frame alignment. People who

strike or who engage in confrontational action are on average probably more aligned than the demonstrators we studied here. In authoritarian countries as well, average frame alignment of protesters should be higher. Given these contingencies, however, we nevertheless believe that the *mechanism* and path we highlighted here and that leads to (non)alignment may very well be generic. Our framework featuring the mechanism of exposure to organizational messages on the one hand and alternative information on the other, is also likely to be relevant in other forms of protest participation and contention.

Finally, we have analysed frame alignment here as a dependent variable, trying to tease out its antecedents. Future framing studies could consider examining frame alignment as an *independent* variable as well. Are aligned activists, for instance, more active recruiters and more loyal participants? Do protesters come across as more unified when frame alignment is high, and does this influence protest success? We hope our study has pointed out a way, both theoretical and empirical, to start tackling varying degrees of frame alignment.

## **Endnotes**

1. Walgrave et al. (2016) report an average response rate of 36% across 51 demonstrations in the project. For an elaborate discussion of response bias and other methodological issues related to protest surveying we refer to this article.

2. Since we are not interested in comparing our data to a ‘population’, and as the descriptives of the paper are not our central contribution, we think it is not warranted to calculate response bias and, subsequently, to weigh the data. We are interested in the drivers of frame alignment *within* our sampled respondents and we control for differences between demonstrations and issues through multilevel modelling.

3. Coders were trained carefully and had to finish a trial for each demonstration they were assigned to. The trial coding was compared with a master coder's coding, and mistakes were followed up and clearly explained. Coders had to show sufficient congruence with the master coder before they could start coding.

4. We use the `meqrpoisson` command in STATA. We initially controlled for the country level by adding country dummies to the models. Adding these country dummies does not change the results. We left these variables out in the final analyses as the models already contain many variables at the demonstration level.

5. Possible answer categories were: 1 Radio or television; 2 Newspapers (print or online); 3 Alternative online media; 4 Advertisements, flyers, and/or posters; 5 Partner and/or family; 6 Friends and/or acquaintances; 7 People at your school or work; 8 (Fellow) members of an organization or association; 9 An organization (magazine, meeting, website, mailing list, ...); 10 Online social networks (e.g. Facebook, Twitter).

6. Church or religious organization, trade union or professional association, political party, women's organization, sport or cultural organization, environmental organization, lesbian or gay rights organization, community or neighbourhood association, charity or welfare organization, third world, global justice or peace organization, anti-racist or migrant organization, human or civil rights organization, or another organization.

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**Table 1.** The frame components of *Scream for Culture* (Amsterdam) and an example of coded respondent answers

Organizer frame components	Respondent answers (and coding)
Diagnoses (what is the problem?):	
1 Government cuts on culture are out of proportion	
2 The taxes on culture will rise (from 6 to 19%)	
3 The Music Centre will be abolished	
4 The cultural card will be abolished	
5 Arts and culture are seen as a 'left-wing hobbies'	
6 These austerities will do irreversible damage to the cultural infrastructure	
7 Arts and culture has a positive effects in our society	<p>Question 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture is an important element in society (congruent: 7)</li> </ul>
Blame attributions (who is to blame?):	
8 PVV (political party)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• and I want to protest against Geert Wilders (congruent: 8)</li> </ul>
9 CDA (political party)	
10 VVD (political party)	
11 The government	<p>Question 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The financial sector (incongruent)</li> </ul>
12 The parliament	
13 Halbe Zijlstra (Secretary of State)	
Prognoses (what should be done?):	
14 The policy plan should be more though through, with more vision	<p>Question 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Austerities should be more balanced, the cheese slicer instead of the sledge-hammer (congruent: 14)</li> </ul>
15 Cultural entrepreneurship should be stimulated more	

**Table 2.** Variable descriptives (N respondents=4,438;  
N demonstrations=29)

Variable	Mean (S.D.)	Min.	Max.
<b>Respondent Level Variables</b>			
Total alignment (DV)	2.13 (1.31)	0	7
Total nonalignment (DV)	2.01 (1.46)	0	10
Member staging organization (yes)	.50 (.50)	0	1
Mobilized via organization (yes)	.37 (.48)	0	1
Membership diversity (high)	2.37 (1.58)	0	5
Political interest (high)	3.28 (.70)	1	4
Gender (female)	.44 (.50)	0	1
Year born	1967 (15.33)	'24	'98
Education (high)	5.74 (1.45)	0	7
# Quasi-sentences	4.14 (1.54)	0	10
Issue-unrelated answer	.23 (.42)	0	1
<b>Demonstration Level Variables</b>			
Number of organizers	2.90 (1.66)	1	5
Formal organization (yes)	.76 (.44)	0	1
Political attention for issue (yes)	.34 (.48)	0	1
# Frame components in pamphlet	20.10 (7.75)	9	37
Issue			
Austerity	.55 (.51)		
Environment	.14 (.35)	0	1
Anti-discrimination	.14 (.35)		
Democracy	.17 (.38)		

**Table 3.** Two Multilevel random-intercept Poisson regressions (N respondents=4,438; N demonstrations=29)<sup>a</sup>

Dependent variable	Model 1 Total Alignment		Model 2 Total Nonalignment	
	Coef. (Std.E.)	IRR	Coef. (Std.E.)	IRR
Exposure to organizers' frames				
Member staging organization	-.001 (.027)	1.001	.001 (.027)	1.001
Mobilized via organization	.050 (.024)*	1.051	-.050 (.025)*	.951
Formal organization	.580 (.199)**	1.787	-.485 (.205)**	.592
Number of organizers	.029 (.021)	1.030	-.039 (.019)*	.960
Exposure to alternative frames				
Membership diversity	-.001 (.007)	.999	.011 (.007)	1.011
Political interest	.017 (.016)	1.019	.034 (.017)*	1.035
Political attention for issue	-.216 (.076)**	.810	.300 (.090)**	1.314
Controls respondent level				
Gender	.062 (.022)**	1.063	-.041 (.023)	.960
Year born	.001 (.001)	1.001	-.000 (.001)	.999
Education	.005 (.008)	1.005	-.008 (.008)	.992
# Quasi-sentences	.127 (.008)***	1.135	.234 (.007)***	1.264
Issue-unrelated answer	-.371 (.030)***	.690	.118 (.028)***	1.125
Controls demonstration level				
# Frame components in pamphlet	.007 (.005)	1.007	-.006 (.006)	.994
Issues (ref.=Austerity): Environm.	-.113 (.108)	.893	.009 (.131)	1.009
Anti-discrimination	.136 (.155)	1.146	-.120 (.187)	.887
Democracy	.601 (.228)**	1.823	-.403 (.271)	.668
Constant	-2.852 (1.567)	.058	1.183 (1.606)	3.264
Wald Chi <sup>2</sup> (df)	635.56 (16)		1229.86 (16)	
Prob > chi <sup>2</sup>	.000		.000	
Log Likelihood <sup>b</sup>	-6880.389 (-7206.227)		-6713.093 (-7268.980)	
Δ Log Likelihood	325.838		555.887	
BIC <sup>b</sup>	13911.94 (14429.25)		13577.35 (14554.76)	
Δ BIC	517.31		977.41	
AIC <sup>b</sup>	13796.78 (14416.45)		13462.19 (14541.96)	
Δ AIC	619.67		1079.77	
Rand. eff. variance 2nd level <sup>b</sup>	.029 (.050)		.043 (.086)	

a. Multilevel Poisson regression models with demonstration-specific random intercept:

$$\mu_{ij} = E(y_{ij}|x_{ij}, \zeta_{1j}) = \exp(\beta_1 + \beta_2 x_{2ij} + \dots + \beta_{10} x_{10ij} + \beta_{11} x_{11i} + \dots + \beta_{17} x_{17i} + \zeta_{1j}) \text{ where:}$$

$y_{ij}$  = total (non)alignment for respondent  $i$  in demonstration  $j$

$x_{2ij}$  to  $x_{10ij}$  = covariates at the respondent level

$x_{11i}$  to  $x_{17i}$  = covariates at the demonstration level

$\beta$  = regression coefficients for the covariates

$\zeta_{1j}$  = demonstration-specific random intercept

b. empty models in brackets

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

**Appendix.** Overview of the covered demonstrations

Demonstration	Date	Country <sup>a</sup>	Issue	# organizers	Formal org.	# fr. com
Climate Change	05-Dec-09	BE	Environment	5	yes	34
No to Austerity	29-Sep-10	BE	Austerity	4	yes	26
We have alternatives	02-Dec-11	BE	Austerity	3	yes	37
Not in Our Name	02-May-11	BE	Democracy	1	no	17
Fukushima never again	11-Mar-12	BE	Environment	5	yes	14
No Government, Great Country	23-Jan-11	BE	Democracy	1	no	9
March for Work	29-Jan-10	BE	Austerity	3	yes	23
Non-Profit Demonstration	29-Mar-11	BE	Austerity	1	yes	23
Retirement demonstration	21-Nov-09	NL	Austerity	3	yes	9
Culture demo Amsterdam	20-Nov-10	NL	Austerity	5	yes	15
Culture demo Utrecht	20-Nov-10	NL	Austerity	5	yes	15
Stop budget cuts (care & welfare)	19-Sep-11	NL	Austerity	5	yes	14
Occupy Netherlands	05-Nov-11	NL	Democracy	1	no	33
Together strong for public work	17-Feb-11	NL	Austerity	5	yes	21
Stop racism and exclusion	19-Mar-11	NL	Discrimination	1	yes	18
Student demo Amsterdam	21-May-10	NL	Austerity	5	yes	30
Student demo The Hague	21-Jan-11	NL	Austerity	3	yes	18
Military demo	26-May-11	NL	Austerity	5	yes	21
National Climate March 2009	05-Dec-09	UK	Environment	1	yes	27
Unite Against Fascism	06-Nov-10	UK	Discrimination	5	no	15
Fund Our Future: Stop Education Cuts	10-Nov-10	UK	Austerity	2	yes	18
National Climate March 2010	04-Dec-10	UK	Environment	1	yes	17
Second Student National Demo	09-Dec-10	UK	Austerity	4	yes	11
Occupy London	12-Nov-11	UK	Democracy	1	no	15
May Day Labour March	01-May-10	UK	Austerity	1	yes	15
Million Women Rise	05-Mar-11	UK	Discrimination	1	yes	35
Take Back Parliament	15-May-10	UK	Democracy	5	no	22
No to Hate Crime Vigil	23-Oct-10	UK	Discrimination	1	no	14
TUC's March for the Alternative	26-Mar-11	UK	Austerity	1	yes	17

<sup>a</sup> = Belgium; NL = the Netherlands; UK = United Kingdom