

# Distinguishing sympathisers, philanthropists, rusted on activists and radicals: Using person-centred analyses in collective action research

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## Abstract

Many of our theories and models within social psychology implicitly refer to 'types' or subgroups of people who engage in collective action (activists, protestors), or do not (sympathisers, bystanders). Other frameworks differentiate between actors based on their adoption of tactics (benevolents, activists, radicals). How, empirically, do we distinguish sympathisers from activists? Activists from radicals? This paper describes recent research that adopts person-centred statistical approaches (e.g., latent profile analysis, latent transition analysis, latent growth mixture models) to address three contemporary puzzles of collective action research. We present research showing that the methods are useful in identifying and explaining sub-groups of people who seek to bring about change in qualitatively different ways. The methods are also useful for understanding volatility in collective action as well as identifying and understanding variation in how people sustain, increase, or diminish their commitment over time. There is nothing so practical as a good method and person-centred statistical approaches are an important complement to variable-centred approaches in social psychological research on collective action.

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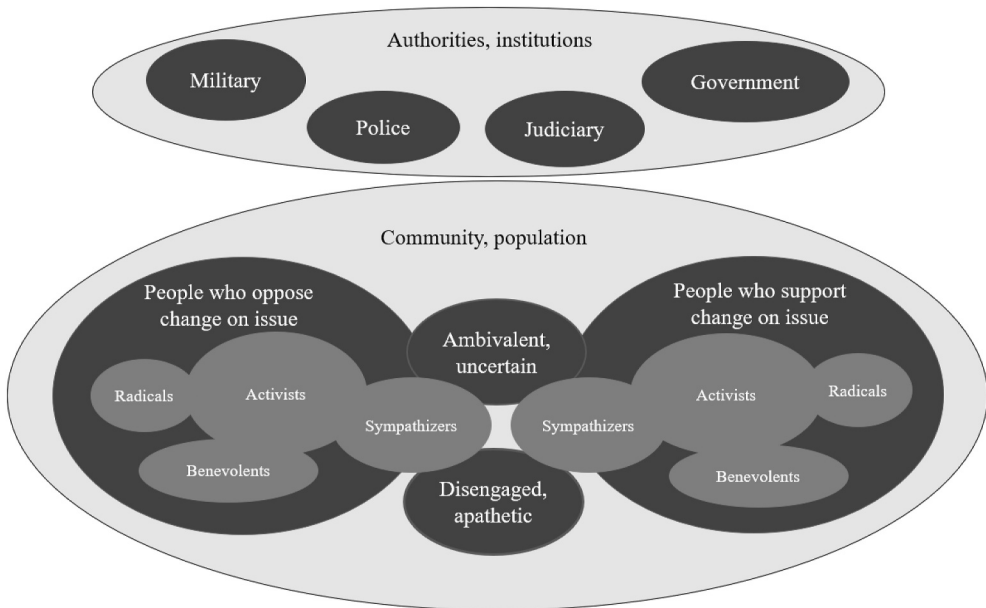
## KEYWORDS

activism, collective action, latent profile analysis, person-centred approaches, radicalism

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

People are protesting now more than any other point in history. A recent analysis of global protest movements between 2006 and 2020 found that protest events had more than tripled in less than 15 years (Ortiz et al., 2022). Every region has seen an increase with some of the largest protest movements ever recorded. In social psychology, protest, activism, and participation in social movements are known by the more general epithet 'collective action'. Collective actions are '...efforts by large numbers of people, who define themselves and are defined by others as a group, to solve collectively a problem they feel they have in common, and which is perceived to arise from their relations with other groups' (Tajfel, 1981, p. 244). During this same period, there has been a surge of research addressing the psychological drivers of collective action (see Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021 for a meta-analysis; Thomas & Osborne, 2022; Figure 1). Much of this research has focussed on addressing two primary questions.

First, why do some people act, whilst others do not? Here, we distinguish between activists (e.g., Blackwood & Louis, 2012; Van Zomeren, 2015) or protesters (e.g., Drury & Reicher, 2000; Sabucedo et al., 2018) from sympathisers (e.g., Klandermans, 1997; Thomas & Louis, 2014), bystanders (e.g., Saab et al., 2015), observers (Lizzio-Wilson et al., 2022) or those who are inert (McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2017a, 2017b). Second, there has been considerable interest in the tactical choices of some groups of people relative to others. Why do some people adopt more radical (illegal, even violent) tactics whereas others do not? Here, we talk of activists versus radicals (e.g. Drury et al., 2014; Moskaleiko & McCauley, 2009), and radicals versus terrorists (where the latter are prepared to use violence against civilians but the former are not; McCauley & Moskaleiko, 2017a, 2017b).



**FIGURE 1** Conceptual overview of the various (sub)groups who, together, comprise a whole community or population of interest in collective action research.

A key learning, implicit to the above, is that there is typically not just one group of people present in any given context or moment of contention. In fact, when we talk of protesters relative to sympathisers or bystanders, and distinguish activists from radicals, we are conceptualising these dynamics in terms of discrete sub-groups of people who differ in important ways from other sub-groups or 'types' of people. The psychological aspect of co-acting with others who share a common view of the world is also central to the definition of collective action: 'people who define themselves and are defined by others as a group' (Tajfel, 1981, p. 244, italics added). Such groups are frequently understood to have a latent, or not-directly-observable, quality because they are psychological groups (based on psychological self-definition; Tajfel, 1981) and not just physical groups (e.g., a group of actors at a rally or protest; Wright et al., 1990).

A second learning is that collective action is something that is enacted by people. It may seem an obvious point for a psychological scientist, but it bears repeating because *people* are far more complex than the sum or even interaction of one or two variables (see Bou Zeineddine & Leach, 2021; also Thomas, Duncan et al., 2022). In the context of these two observations, an overriding limitation is that, to date, most of our methods involve the adoption of variable-centred techniques where, for example, variation in commitment to action (outcome variable) is examined using General Linear Models (see Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021, for a meta-analysis). Yet, an isolated focus on the (mostly) linear relationships between one or two variables sits uncomfortably with the dominant theory and meta-theory in collective action research: that collective action is enacted by (sub)groups of people (Tajfel, 1981). Rather, collective action is multi-determined (Thomas et al., 2022), dynamic (i.e., both an outcome and a predictor of other factors; Drury & Reicher, 2000; van Zomeren et al., 2012), and frequently occurs via non-linear interactions between people and their context, arising when people reach a tipping point that 'enough is enough' (see Livingstone, 2017; Uluğ, et al., 2022). Although we use person-centred conceptualisation in our theorising (i.e., differentiating sympathisers, activists, radicals), our methods have largely adopted variable-centred approaches which are not well suited to identifying and distinguishing such sub-groups of actors, nor mapping how some people activate in ways that may be qualitatively distinct from other people.

This paper will discuss recent research that adopts person-centred statistical approaches as a complement to variable-centred approaches in social psychological research on collective action. Our key position is that conceptualisation should be reflected in methodology, and vice versa. As we explain below, person-centred methods put the person, holistically, at the centre of the analysis and are therefore well suited to test theories that are about the existence of (sub-)groups of people (e.g., activists), who are theorised to differ in important ways from other sub-groups of people (e.g., radicals). Accordingly, we present research describing how the adoption of person-centred techniques is helping to address three puzzles of contemporary collective action research: the challenge of identifying and explaining sub-groups of people who seek to bring about change in qualitatively different ways (i.e., distinguishing sympathisers from activists, and activists from radicals; puzzle 1); the challenge of understanding volatility and change in social movement dynamics (puzzle 2); the challenge of understanding variation in how people sustain, increase, or diminish their commitment over time (puzzle 3). Before outlining the research and recent literature in relation to these three propositions, it is necessary to briefly explain what person-centred methods are in relation to variable-centred methods, in the context of collective action.

## 2 | PRIMER: PERSON-CENTRED METHODS IN COLLECTIVE ACTION RESEARCH

Osborne and Sibley (2017) presented powerful arguments for the use of person-centred approaches like latent profile analysis (LPA) in social psychological research more generally. Table 1 provides an overview of the key differences between variable-centred and person-centred approaches relevant to collective action. Broadly, Table 1 suggests that whilst variable-centred approaches model the variance at the level of specific measures, person-centred approaches model variance that exists between groups of people who are (ostensibly) different to other groups of people. Whereas variable-centred approaches model dispersion in outcomes (variables), typically using variations of a general linear model (e.g., regression, ANOVA), person-centred approaches model dispersion

TABLE 1 Overview of variable-centred and person-centred approaches as applied to collective action.

	Variable-centred approaches	Person-centred approaches
Status in the discipline	Dominant approach within social sciences, including collective action research.	Emerging approach within social sciences, including collective action research.
Focus of analysis	Variable is at the centre of analysis. Explains relationships between variables of interest (e.g., social identification and intention to engage in collective action).	Person is at the centre of analysis. Identifies how combinations of variables (indicators) distinguish some groups of people who are different to other groups of people.
Assumption of (non) linearity	Often assumes linearity within a general linear model framework.	Assumes multiple levels of interaction and non-linear relationships.
Assumptions about sampling population	Assumes that all people are drawn from a single population. Parameters are for entire sample which is parsimonious but not specific to sub-groups.	Assumes that people can come from two or more sub-populations (sub-groups) with different sets of parameters. Each sub-group has different parameters which diminishes parsimony but allows for specificity.
Conceptualisation	Appropriate for investigating questions and hypotheses about how one variable affects another (e.g., what is the relationship between social identification and intention to engage in collective action?)	Appropriate where the goal is to categorise a sample into sub-populations or 'types' based on a chosen set of variables (e.g., how are sympathisers different to activists?)

within (groups of) people, using variations on a mixture modelling approach (e.g., latent class or LPA). A key disclaimer is that we do not suggest that either method is inherently better than the other. Rather, as has been argued elsewhere, it is necessary to select the method that aligns with the underlying theory (e.g., Howard & Hoffman, 2018).

In the same way that the epithet 'variable-centred methods' covers many statistical analyses (e.g., regression, ANOVA, path analysis), there are several different types of person-centred methods. Person-centred methods are also often referred to generically as mixture models because, rather than assuming a single, underlying distribution, they assume that the data are comprised of several different distributions (per Table 1). Table 2 summarises prominent person-centred methods and their uses. In what follows below we provide a brief overview of the process and practice of person-centred statistical approaches but we note that there are other more comprehensive and technical explanations available in the resources listed below, including links to code. Many of the papers below also have code available in their supplementary materials.

For each of these analyses, the process of analysis is similar and comprised of several steps. First, the number of profiles (classes) or trajectories must be determined based on a given set of indicator variables. The indicator variables (observed items or measures;  $j$ ) are those variables which, together, and in combination, are used to define and characterise the different profiles, classes or trajectories ( $k$ ). Just as how, in a confirmatory factor analysis, multiple items or indicators are used to define or reflect an underlying (but not directly observable) latent variable, in LPA or Latent class analysis (LCA), the items are used to uncover latent groups of people based on the patterns within and between people on those indicators (Ferguson et al., 2020). As we explain below, the selection of indicators is based on theorising about how different types or sub-groups are similar or different.

The primary stage of the analysis then iteratively tests for the presence of these sub-groups by comparing multiple models, with increasing numbers of classes, profiles or trajectories. Typically, up to six-seven profiles/classes ( $k$ ) are tested and each are compared to the  $k-1$  solution. The best fitting model is selected based on both empirical and theoretical considerations: fit statistics (lower BIC, AIC; a non-significant LMR, BLRT), entropy (>0.80; that is, the degree to which the model is partitioning the data into discrete, clearly defined sub-groups) and model interpretability are all important. This latter aspect bears repeating because person-centred methods are

TABLE 2 Primary types of person-centred statistical approaches.

Analysis	Uses	Resources
Latent class analysis (LCA), latent profile analysis (LPA)	Appropriate when the data are cross-sectional and are used to determine the latent sub-groupings within a given sample ('classes' or 'profiles'). Latent class analysis uses categorical indicator variables (e.g., did or did not attend a rally), latent profile analysis uses continuous indicator variables (e.g., action intention). Factors that are predicted by, or predictors of, membership of profiles/classes can be identified and modelled.	Ferguson et al. (2020) Collins and Lanza (2013) Nylund-Gibson and Choi (2018)
Latent transition analysis	Longitudinal extension of a latent profile analysis or latent class analysis. Profiles are derived at each time point providing information about the stability or change in the composition of the sub-groups, over time. Transitions between sub-groups can be modelled over time. Factors that predict change in membership can be identified and modelled.	Collins and Lanza (2013) Ryoo et al. (2018)
Latent class growth analysis (LCGA), growth mixture models (GMMs)	Appropriate where the data are longitudinal and are used to identify sub-groups of people with distinct patterns of change (trajectories) over time. LCGA and GMMs differ in terms of how they model individual variability within each of the trajectories.	Jung and Wickrama (2008) Nagin and Odgers (2010)

inherently inductive. Profile plots should be examined as a part of the analysis to ensure that the final solution is theoretically meaningful and interpretable—a practice that can appear at odds with concerns about researcher degrees of freedom. The results section should therefore provide a detailed description of the different solutions and an explanation for why the retained solution was selected. The profiles are typically not evenly distributed within a given population resulting in unequal  $n$  across the discrete profiles; these reflect the underlying realities of the relative prevalence of that sub-group within a given sample. Profiles should be described by their attributes in absolute terms (e.g., a given profile may show strong endorsement or agreement with a particular indicator) but also how they differ from each other in relative terms (e.g., where one profile is higher or lower than another).

Having identified the best fitting solution with  $k$  profiles, it is then possible to explore the predictors and outcomes of profile/trajectory membership using covariates. Predictors can be used to describe how conceptually antecedent variables predict membership of one profile, class or trajectory in ways that are different to others. Outcome variables can be used to examine whether one profile, class or trajectory is associated with a discrete outcome, relative to others. Both forms of analysis rely on assigning participants to their most likely profile (class or trajectory) based on their posterior probability. Ideally, the comparisons should be conducted using (so-called) three-step methods which incorporate the uncertainty associated with profile assignment (these are latent, not observed, variables), but also allow for the modelling of covariates without affecting the latent class formation (see Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014). In this way, the methods are useful in testing theories about how some groups of people differ from other groups of people, explaining those differences in terms of antecedent factors, as well as how some sub-groups of actors may be more strongly or weakly associated with distal outcomes. In the remainder of the paper we therefore turn our attention to a discussion of how this form of analysis can be useful in the context of research on collective action.

### 3 | PUZZLE 1: PERSON-CENTRED METHODS ALLOW US TO IDENTIFY AND DISTINGUISH THE UNDERLYING GROUPS IN COLLECTIVE (IN)ACTION

Figure 1 provides a conceptual representation of the sub-groups who, together, capture the complex interactions between a population (citizenry, community) and authorities (institutions). Within a given population, there are groups of people who either support change on a particular issue, and those who oppose it, as well as people who are disengaged or apathetic. Figure 1 also shows that, even within a broader group or community of people who are broadly supportive (or opposed to) change on a given issue, there are many different ways that people can respond to injustice (denoted as 'benevolents', 'activists' and 'radicals'). The various groups are depicted using circles to denote that such groupings frequently have a latent or not-directly-observable quality; the circles are different sizes to denote that the membership of such groups is not evenly distributed within a population. Here, person-centred approaches are particularly useful for identifying and explaining the different underlying sub-populations who are acting in qualitatively different ways even within the same broader cause or movement. Indeed, a small but growing literature is using these methods to understand the sub-groups that shape political engagement more broadly (e.g., Johann et al., 2020; Oser, 2017), and collective action specifically.

#### 3.1 | Differentiating the disengaged, ambivalent, sympathisers, activists and radicals

For instance, Thomas and McGarty (2018) distinguish between those who 'give' and those who 'act' to support global poverty reduction (reflected as 'benevolents' and 'activists' in Figure 1). Their LPA showed that benevolent supporters, who constituted the majority of the sample (90%), engaged in high levels of charitable generosity but relatively low levels of political activism. Activist supporters, on the other hand, engaged in 'giving' (charitable donation) *as well as* a suite of socio-political actions designed to tackle the structural causes of global inequality ('acting'); they were a smaller sub-group within the overall sample (10%). As outlined above, having identified and interpreted the profiles, it is then possible to use mixture modelling to examine what predicts membership of one profile, relative to another. Thomas and McGarty (2018) applied the insights of the motives anticipated by the social identity model of collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2008) to show that the two profiles could be differentiated (that is, predicted) by distinct patterns of social change beliefs, and emotions about injustice: benevolent supporters felt compassion for the disadvantaged group and believed that through mass collective generosity the symptoms of global disadvantage could be remediated; conversely, activists felt outraged about the status quo and believed that the best way to challenge global inequality is to challenge the systems that perpetuate it. The two groups thus shared the same social change *goals* (ending poverty) but arrived at different conclusions about the most effective *means* of achieving that change (see also Thomas & McGarty, 2017; Figure 1).

In a similar way, there are many ways that people can respond to the systemic abuses of non-human animals: People can make changes to one's own patterns of consumption (i.e., become a vegetarian or vegan; Judge et al., 2022), lobby for regulatory change to protect animals (e.g., engaging in activism) and/or engage in illicit investigation and direct rescue (forms of radical action; e.g., Johnston & Johnston, 2017). We anticipated above that a major point of debate in the literature on collective action has been around the adoption of more radical, even violent tactics—what differentiates a 'radical' compared to an 'activist'? Yet, it is also clear that, in this context especially, radicalism and veganism tend to go hand in hand—radical animal rights activists are typically vegan (see, e.g., Stuart et al., 2013), suggesting that it is necessary to consider how multiple forms of action (dietary restriction, illicit investigations) combine within some people who are different to other groups of people. A single focus on one form of behaviour is at odds with the idea that *people* engage in multiple forms of action.

Thomas et al. (2019) therefore used LPA to examine the meaningful sub-groups of people who engage in collective action in the context of animal welfare (or liberation). Their analysis revealed three profiles: an inactive ambivalent omnivores group; a lifestyle activist group who had a primarily vegetarian diet and engaged in activist

behaviours (signing petitions, posting, donating); and a small but empirically detectable radical group who had a primarily vegan diet, engaged in activist behaviours (signing petitions, posting, donating) *as well as* occasional radical behaviours (sit-ins, illicit investigations). That is, radical group members concurrently engaged in dietary restriction, conventional socio-political behaviours and more radical methods of illicit investigation.

We next explored the factors that differentiated the members of different groups. Predictably, identification as a supporter of animal rights was more important for both the activist and radical group, relative to the ambivalent group (see also Stuart et al., 2018; Ton et al., 2022). Moreover, the activist and radical sub-groups had quite different understandings of the intergroup context: whereas the activists emphasised the need to convince others (triangulation; Simon & Klandermans, 2001) and the effectiveness of co-action (group efficacy; van Zomeren et al., 2008), the radicals justified the use of extreme measures (Simon & Grabow, 2010) and believed that only more illicit, extreme methods could successfully liberate animals.

Thus, a key insight here is that the methods help to map out the relevant sub-groups who are either disengaged, ambivalent, or engaging using quite different forms of action (Figure 1). While there is evidence from variable-centred approaches that conventional and radical actions are explained by different factors (e.g. Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009; Selvanathan & Leidner, 2020; Tausch et al., 2011), person-centred approaches have revealed that people often take conventional and radical actions simultaneously (e.g., Alvarez et al., 2017; Mendel et al., 2022; Thomas et al., 2019). Thus, *people* (in all their complexity) may engage in more than one form of action at any given point in time.

### 3.2 | Self-interested virtue-signalling or 'genuine' action? Understanding the (mixed) motives for action

Thus far we have considered groups of people who are overtly acting in different ways (givers, activists, radicals) but people can also differ in terms of the quality of their underlying motivation or reasons for acting. The slacktivism debate, for instance, suggests that some people act for self-interested reasons (i.e., to demonstrate their morality, Kim et al., 2023; or to feel good about themselves, Skoric, 2012) rather than out of a genuine concern for the cause (see also Kutlaca & Radke, 2023; Radke et al., 2020; Selvanathan et al., 2020). According to proponents of the slacktivism perspective, online actions are particularly prone to self-interested motives (Kristofferson et al., 2014; Morozov, 2011). Indeed, Oser et al. (2013) used a LCA to demonstrate that online activists were a distinguishable sub-group from offline activists. However, both groups were empirically separate to a disengaged sub-group suggesting that online action is not reducible to low engagement. Moreover, it seems possible that self-interested versus 'genuine' reasons for acting can apply to both online and offline actions. That is, people may attend an offline event because it helps them to demonstrate morality or experience feelings of well-being or empowerment (e.g., Vestegren et al., 2017) in the same way that people can engage in online action out of a genuine and internalised commitment to the cause (e.g., Kende et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2015).

Accordingly, Yip et al. (2024) took a different tack to suggest that this debate could be more effectively adjudicated by considering the quality of the underlying motivation. That is, rather than focus on one form of action (offline action) as inherently more authentic than another (online action), Yip and colleagues adapted the motives outlined in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) to suggest that engagement in collective action can be autonomous (i.e., stemming from personal values and goals) and/or controlled (i.e., driven by external forces; see also Yip et al., 2023). Linking with the arguments above, such motives are also likely to differentiate some types of people relative to others. Therefore, Yip et al. (2024) examined sub-groups of refugee supporters that differed based on the combinations of motives driving their support.

Using LPA, Yip et al. identified four profiles that emerged relatively consistently in different contexts (i.e., support for Syrian refugees and refugees of the Ukrainian conflict), and in different countries. Two profiles reflected disengaged and ambivalent refugee supporters who either disagreed that they were motivated to act to



support refugees at all (disengaged) or were not sure about their own motives (ambivalent); these sub-groups reported low motivation to act. Purely autonomous supporters, on the other hand, indicated that they supported refugees only because of the alignment with personal values and identities (autonomous motives; Deci & Ryan, 1985) and disagreed that any external factors (controlled motives) were important in explaining their action. Intriguingly, however, there were two profiles who endorsed mixed motives (i.e., autonomous and controlled motives) for their support. Of special interest is the group of (what were termed) highly motivated supporters, who were characterised by agreement that *both* autonomous and controlled motives were important for their action. According to self-determination theory, autonomous and controlled motivation exist on opposite sides of a continuum and should not co-occur, as influences that foster controlled motivation (such as external rewards or punishment) undermine autonomous motives (see Gagné & Forest, 2008). However, these findings accord with evidence from other person-centred approaches which suggest that mixed motives do exist within people (e.g., in the context of volunteering; Geiser et al., 2014; workplace engagement; Levesque-Côté et al., 2021). Moreover, contrary to the tenets of self-determination theory, highly motivated supporters (those who reported both autonomous and controlled motives) were *most* committed to the cause and indeed were more highly committed than the purely autonomous supporters. Thus, using person-centred approaches like LPA reveals that there are discrete sub-groups among refugee supporters characterised by different mixtures of internal motives (within the self) and external motives (external to the self). Such findings refute suggestions that online actions are self-serving (slacktivism) while offline actions are 'genuine', or that any individual's action is either entirely selfish or altruistic.

Beyond debates about the underlying motivations for action per se, the methods can also help to understand instances in which people from very different backgrounds appear to unite together to achieve their social or political goals. For instance, Baysu and Phalet (2017) used LPA to show that the Gezi Park movement was itself comprised of sub-groups with different ideological agendas to, variously, defend liberty for everyone (liberals), promote national unity (secularists) or to oppose the protesters themselves (conservatives; see Figure 1). In another application, Liekefett et al. (2023) showed that the movement to oppose COVID-19 lockdowns (anti-lockdown) was comprised of sub-groups of people from the political centre, the far-left ('hippies'), as well as the far-right. Whilst all the profiles were united in their conspiracy beliefs and coronavirus downplaying, the left-wing profile were low in racism and antisemitism while the right-wing profile were high on racism and antisemitism. In combination, the methods help us to conceptualise, identify and understand the various sub-groups anticipated in Figure 1 and in many theoretical models of collective action and social change.

#### 4 | PUZZLE 2: THE METHODS HELP US UNDERSTAND VOLATILITY IN COLLECTIVE ACTION

One of the puzzles of contemporary collective action is that waves of action can emerge rapidly, often to address grievances that are longstanding. Person-centred methods can help us to understand heterogeneity and schism in a broader movement: why people who appeared (literally and figuratively) united in their disinterest at one moment, are engaging in passionate protest the next.

Collective action can be volatile (Louis et al., 2020). According to the Disidentification, Innovation, Moralisation and Energisation Model (DIME Model; Louis et al., 2020), when a movement experiences failure, effects are likely to be non-linear and heterogeneous. On the one hand, experiencing success should lead to sustained engagement using prior (primarily conventional) tactics. On the other hand, experiencing failure may lead to diverging reactions which stem from varying degrees of commitment and different views on how to progress the cause moving forward. Specifically, failure may lead collective actors to: Disidentify from and exit the movement (see Becker & Tausch, 2014); Innovate by using new, more radical tactics; or experience heightened Moralisation or moral



urgency about the cause (see Skitka et al., 2017) and a need to Energise or redouble their efforts using the same prior conventional tactics.

Lizzio-Wilson et al. (2021) used LPA to map the composition of social movements in relation to a real-world instance of political failure and establish failure's splintering effect on social movements. To do this, they sampled supporters and opponents of marriage equality *before* and *after* the 2017 Australian marriage-equality plebiscite, in which the federal government announced that it would hold a voluntary postal survey to gauge community attitudes toward same-sex marriage (leading to the legalisation of same-sex marriage in December 2017). Linking with Figure 1, self-identified supporters and opponents of marriage equality were sampled while the vote was in progress (Time 1) and immediately after the outcome of the vote was announced (Time 2). Opponents of marriage equality (who experienced failure) were also sampled again 6 weeks later (Time 3).

Prior to the outcome of the vote, the movement to support or oppose marriage equality looked very similar: there were two sub-groups reflecting either moderate or high levels of commitment. However, the composition of these groups changed dramatically after the outcome was announced at Time 2. Marriage-equality supporters (who had experienced success) became largely unified, with most supporters (97%) comprising a single subgroup reflecting continued investment in the movement. However, the picture was very different for opponents: here, the two sub-groups splintered to four, largely reflecting the divergent responses to failure outlined in the DIME model. On the one hand, there was a group of resigned acceptors who disengaged from the movement following failure. However, amongst those who remained committed, there were two groups who held different views about progressing the cause moving forward. Specifically, there was an innovator group who wished to adopt different tactics in the future; and a small but stable group who wanted to 'stay-the-course' using the same strategies as before. There was also a moderate group whose investment in the movement, desire to redouble efforts, and adopt new tactics generally sat in-between the other profiles. Over time, the resigned acceptors were least inclined to engage in future action on behalf of the cause following failure, whereas the innovators were the most committed to future action and to justify the use of radical tactics.

These results demonstrate that broader shifts in the institutional structures can dramatically change the nature and number of sub-groups within a movement at any given time (Figure 1). Division, fracturing, and schisms can be one consequence of failure (see also Sani & Reicher, 2000). However, this is not to say that sub-groups are never stable over time: Álvarez et al. (2023) used a latent transition analysis to show that, over the course of a year of protest in the context of the Chilean student movement, there was a high level of stability in the profiles and composition of the movement. At the same time, the effects identified by Lizzio-Wilson et al. (2021) highlight the importance of interpreting the groupings as a product of the specific context in which collective actors are embedded. Put differently, *latent groupings inductively reflect the realities of that cause at that point in time*: movements that are experiencing frequent, intense interactions with authorities (police, government, judiciary) and/or the opposed group (their adversaries) are likely to display more fracturing and movement between sub-groups, than those that are not. A related implication is that attempts to replicate the profiles in other causes or timepoints may not be straightforward because of very real influences of structural and political contexts in which movements exist (Uluğ et al., 2022).

## 5 | PUZZLE 3: THE METHODS HELP TO IDENTIFY AND EXPLAIN DISTINCT TRAJECTORIES OF ACTION OVER TIME

A final consideration is the role of time. Social change typically occurs slowly, over years, decades or even centuries. As highlighted above, some people will give up (disidentify) and walk away, perhaps as a result of burnout (manifested as a negative linear slope); others will maintain or increase their commitment (reflected in a null or positive linear slope); others still may engage fiercely at some points in time but diminish their commitment at others (a quadratic or cubic effect).

Although dynamic, changeable responses are much theorised in the collective action literature (e.g., Drury & Reicher, 2000; Thomas et al., 2009; van Zomeren et al., 2012), they are rarely empirically addressed. Indeed, given that person-centred approaches have only relatively recently emerged in the cross-sectional literature on collective action, we are not aware of many examples in the longitudinal literature. However, Thomas et al. (2022) adopted person-centred longitudinal methods (latent growth mixture models) to examine the sub-groups of people who reduced, sustained, or increased their commitment to ending global poverty over a 5-year timeframe. Their analysis identified two trajectories: an activist trajectory with a higher intercept (i.e., greater initial engagement) that was only weakly diminished over time (negative slope); and a benevolent trajectory with a lower level of initial action that was weakly increased over time. The activist trajectory was predicted by a combination of present-focussed and future-focussed emotions (outrage and hope, respectively) and greater social identification with the cause, whilst benevolent support appeared to be sustained by feelings of compassion. The absence of a trajectory characterised by a strong increase or decrease likely predicts the stability of the movement over the timeframe in question. Future research could very fruitfully examine trajectories of action over multiple measurement points, in the context of waves of stability and/or contention. Growth mixture models and latent transition models (see Álvarez et al., 2023) would provide rich information about how people move between groups over time, and in response to changes in the context.

## 6 | IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF COLLECTIVE ACTION RESEARCH: THEORY AND PRACTICE

Efforts to theorise social change rest on identifying the fault lines of group action but these are not always directly observable nor are the scientists who study them necessarily able to reliably discern the underlying patterns or sub-groups ("The Forecasting Collaborative", 2023). Yet, being able to detect and study these groups is important for the efforts of non-government and activist organisations. It may be that some sub-groups of actors are more likely to be effectively reached by some campaigns, relative to others, raising the prospect of more nuanced and targeted campaigns. At the same time, the methods may be of use to authorities who seek to identify some sub-groups of people who (for example) are more at risk of committing acts of extreme political violence, than others. Given the well-known 'specificity problem' (Dawson, 2019) in terrorism research, and the multi-factorial nature of collective action in general but political violence especially, these methods could provide a very useful complement to other approaches. This is especially likely to be the case because, with large enough population-level samples, several studies have shown (e.g., Thomas et al., 2019) that the methods can detect the numerically small but nevertheless meaningful people who are more committed to radical actions and who are otherwise difficult to access and study.

We have also highlighted here how the methods are useful in a science that is increasingly seeing a role for multiple identities (e.g., Louis et al., 2016), intersectionality (e.g., Baysu & Phalet, 2017), and complexity (e.g., Bou Zeineddine & Leach, 2021; Uluğ, et al., 2022). Recent theorising increasingly adopts a systems-level perspective on collective action, emphasising the micro, meso, and macro dimensions to how people act together to change societies and, on the other hand, how aspects of the social system shape people and their responses (see Thomas et al., 2022). As we hope we have begun to illustrate here, the methods are useful as we move beyond individual variables to examine how clusters of interrelated emotions, motives, and beliefs define some people relative to others; and how those clusters change over time in response to changes in the social context (or, perhaps, do not change; Álvarez et al., 2023). Indeed, in a field that is heavily influenced by the insights of the social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987), the subjectively important and contextually meaningful identities are paramount: these methods provide an alternative to explicit measurement (i.e., self-reported social identification) as a means of identifying and studying those groups.

Finally, person-centred methods could also have an important role to play in embracing more bottom-up approaches in quantitative social science. Rather than researchers a priori conceptualising and determining what the meaningful sub-groups are, these methods provide an inductive approach for the sub-groups to emerge empirically in ways that have broad applicability for the social and psychological sciences more broadly (see Osborne & Sibley, 2017). The adoption of such approaches needs to be carefully balanced against the requirement for pre-registered, confirmatory analysis within our science. As we highlighted above, person-centred approaches are inherently inductive and are (at least partially) data driven. Pre-registration can be used to identify a priori the decisions about the number of profiles, classes or trajectories that will be modelled, the adoption of three-step approaches or alternatives, as well as the nature of the sub-groups that would be expected based on theory. Transparency in the reporting of the solution (which one was retained and why) is critical.

## 7 | CONCLUDING COMMENTS

One of the pre-eminent figures of social psychology, Kurt Lewin (1945), famously stated that there was 'nothing so practical as a good theory'. We agree, but to that we would add: there is nothing so practical as a good method. Person-centred approaches provide a practically useful, theoretically relevant means of understanding, describing and explaining one of the most prevalent and consequential behaviours of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: collective action.

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The authors did not disclose any conflicts of interest.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

The research reported in this paper accords with all the relevant ethical statements.

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