

Protest Surveying. Testing the Feasibility and Reliability of an Innovative Methodological Approach to Political Protest

Political protest has become ubiquitous in advanced post-industrial democracies. More than three decades ago, Etzioni (1970) wrote about “demonstrating democracy” and since then the levels and forms of political protest have only continued to expand (Norris 2002). Because of the prevalence of this type of collective action, the relevance of the scientific study of protest participation has grown. If we want to understand the way in which Western democracies are evolving, it is important to comprehend the dynamics and drivers of protest participation. But protest participation has not yet divulged all its secrets. In this paper we claim that protest surveying, an innovative method to tackle protest participation, can help to explain some of this phenomenon’s unknowns. We test whether protest surveying is feasible and whether it can produce reliable data.

Protest participation does not occur in a social vacuum but in relation to other individuals within both meso as well as macro contexts. The biggest challenge facing present protest research is to bridge the micro-macro gap, a classic problem in the social sciences (Giddens 1987). Social and political protest is studied within two major disciplines. In *sociology*, social movement scholars primarily focus on the collective actors staging protest, typically drawing on qualitative case studies. They concentrate on social movement organizations, that is the meso level, and on the macro context in which they operate (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Tarrow 1992). To gather evidence sociologists mainly draw on protest event analyses, in-depth interviewing, and content analyses. In *political science* political protest is defined as a non-conventional form of political participation. Most participation studies are based on the micro level, with scholars drawing on general population surveys focusing on the individual participant (or non-participant) (Almond and Verba 1963; Barnes and Kaase 1979; Jennings and Van Deth 1990; Verba, Schlozman et al. 1995). Although they cover the same political protests, both disciplines have developed almost entirely independently with little mutual communication (see also Schussman and Soule 2005). The sociological social movement literature specializes in detailed case studies describing social movements as determined by their specific context (Tarrow 1992; Kriesi, Koopmans et al. 1995). That makes it difficult to generalize

from. In contrast, relying on general population surveys, political scientists of political participation tend to completely decontextualize non-conventional participation. Their studies do allow for some generalization but the crucial interplay between protest and its context is generally lacking. Yet, precisely the connection between the macro context that generates a “demand” for protest and the canalization of this protest willingness into real protest by meso or micro mobilization connecting demand and supply is the most contentious but underexposed issue in the protest literature (Klandermans 1997; Diani and McAdam 2003; Jasper 2004). In a sense, partly due to their methodological approach, both disciplines do not have a clear focus on protest itself: their focus lies either on the movement or on the individuals who may have participated in an undetermined protest sometime before.

In this study, we propose an alternative method to tackle protest participation that shifts the focus to protest and more specifically to the interplay between micro and macro factors. Protest surveys are oral interviews conducted on the spot or mail-in questionnaires handed out at the protest’s venue (or they are a combination of both); they directly question or sample protest participants at *specific* protest events. By conducting several protest surveys covering several specific protest events, one can systematically *compare* participants across protest events. This allows one to study the crucial interaction between, on the one hand, participants’ individual characteristics, motivations and networks with, on the other hand, the political and social context in which the event is staged. It is protest surveys’ comparative character that gives them analytical power which permits studying the micro-macro interaction in detail.

Consequently, questioning participants in specific protest events can tear down the walls between the different scientific traditions and can, by focusing on the link between “demand” and “supply”, make a significant contribution to our knowledge of protest, its drivers and mechanisms. Protest surveys combine the best of both worlds. From the participation studies drawing on population surveys, they adopt the quantitative survey method yielding generalizability and the undeniable advantage of preciseness, testability and the probabilistic logic typical for survey data. This allows protest scholars to join mainstream sociological and political research. Still, as we know from numerous social movement studies, context matters (Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi, Koopmans et al. 1995).

Focusing on specific protest and not on general protest participation, the use of protest surveys automatically emphasizes context to a large extent. We know fairly well who *in general* tends to protest but we often lack knowledge on the precise political and social circumstances that turn this general potential into actual protest participation. Scholars agree, by and large, that context is the key variable but to what extent and how exactly the context impacts the micro level remains largely unknown (Diani and McAdam 2003; Jasper 2004).

Protest research deals with three straightforward core questions: (a) *who* protests (socio-demographics), (b) *why* do people protest (attitudes and motivations), and (c) *how* are they brought to protest (mobilization)? Taking the context into account is key when tackling these three questions; they cannot be answered in a social vacuum, as there are dramatic differences between protest events in socio-demographics, attitudes, and mobilization patterns. By comparing protest events across issues (e.g. bread-and-butter vs. global justice protests) and across nations (e.g. anti-war protests in the US or in Germany), we are able to grasp the interplay between protest and its context (see for a similar argument: Klandermans and Smith 2002). Protest surveys, we contend, contextualize micro level protest participation data and produce valuable evidence that cannot be obtained otherwise.

Before we elaborate on the usefulness of protest survey methods, we will show that the protest survey method is both feasible as well as methodologically sound. We argue, first, that protest surveying is a feasible methodology that is quite easy to carry out. Response rates are satisfyingly high and the field work method is straightforward to implement. Second, we show that protest survey evidence, provided that certain procedures are followed, is reliable and valid. The answers obtained from protest participants can be representative for the entire protest population and sampling can approximate random sampling. Third, we provide evidence that protest surveys allow for unraveling several theoretical puzzles in existing theories on protest participation. In short: *the aim of this paper is to substantiate that protest surveys are (1) feasible, (2) reliable, (3) and useful.*

The paper draws on an extensive series of 22 protest surveys carried out by, or under direct supervision of, the authors in the 1998-2006 period. Most surveys were conducted in Belgium and cover a wide array of demonstration issues; seven surveys were conducted simultaneously in other Western countries and focused on an identical issue (war on Iraq). During the eight years of research,

varying methods of sampling respondents and controlling for non-response have been employed. This gives us the opportunity to test alternative procedures and to compare results.

Note that with the term “protest surveys” we refer to surveys carried out at *demonstrations*: a crowd of people moving on the streets from position A to B to give voice to their grievances. We are well-aware of the fact that there is more to protest than demonstrating. The “protest repertoire” in post-industrial democracies is wide-ranging and rich (Tilly 1986); people employ different methods to express their dissatisfaction. However, population surveys show that—except maybe for the lower threshold and more passive activity of signing a petition—participating in a demonstration is the most utilized protest technique (Norris 2002). Moreover, participation in lawful demonstrations is the repertoire that has been growing most spectacularly during the last decades and that has become one of the most normalized tactics (Norris, Walgrave et al. 2005). The procedures described below to sample “moving” protest rallies may, under certain circumstances, also be used to sample other types of contentious gatherings.

Protest surveys are feasible

Previous protest surveys: lacking methodological rigor

Protest surveys consist of face-to-face interviews with, or mail questionnaires distributed among, participants in contentious events. Sometimes, protest events may be covered with both mail-in *and* face-to-face interviews at the same time; this is what we did in most cases (see below). All questionnaires contain a fixed part with standard questions gauging socio-demographics, general political attitudes, and political behavior. They also include a specific and variable set of questions measuring opinions related to the specific protest issue and to the concrete mobilization process leading to participation.

Several studies mention the use of some kind of protest surveying technique but it is not part of the classic methods for studying protest (see for example Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002). The reasons are both theoretical and practical. The absence of literature describing and detailing validated

sampling procedures might have repelled scholars; the difficulty of drawing a reliable sample of demonstrators from an unstructured protesting crowd was probably the most important barrier. Our objective is to provide such a clear and reliable strategy in the next sections. In theoretical terms, situated on the edge between the sociology of social movements and the political science of political participation, protest surveys' intermediary position may have deterred sociologists and political scientists to rely on it.

Still, the older protest literature contains a few, scattered and non-systematic examples of protest surveying. Of course, many scholars have surveyed activists gathering at political events with a routine character—for example surveys among participants of the so-called “social fora” of the global justice movement (della Porta, Andretta et al. 2006) or the many surveys among party members attending party conferences (e.g. Rüdiger, Bennie et al. 1991). Interviewing and sampling people in the act of protesting, though, is rare. More important, there has hardly been any methodological reflection about design, sampling procedure, and validity.

The very first protest surveys were carried out as early as in 1965 among the participants of two anti-nuclear demonstrations in Britain and Germany (Boserup and Iversen 1966; Jenkins 1967). Parkin, in his seminal study on middle-class radicalism, relied on a kind of protest survey (Parkin 1968). Seidler and his colleagues undertook a more systematic effort during four different protest rallies in Washington DC in the early 1970s (Seidler, Meyer et al. 1976). More protest surveys were undertaken at the anti-nuclear demonstration on May 6th, 1979 in Washington DC (Ladd, Hood et al. 1983) and at a similar anti-nuclear gathering a month earlier, on April 7th, 1979, in San Francisco (Scaminaci III and Dunlap 1986). After more experiments (Waddington 1988) in several countries, gradually more students of protest started to rely on protest survey designs. Especially in France, the team including Favre and Fillieule carried out a systematic series of protest surveys in the 1980s in Paris (Fillieule 1997). Jasper and Poulsen (1995), in the US, report on their survey of three protest events—against nuclear energy and experiments on animals—in the late 1980s. The method however only seemed to be spreading at a considerable pace in the scientific protest community in the last decade. In the Netherlands (Klandermans and van Stekelenburg 2005; Van Stekelenburg 2006), in Belgium (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001; Bédoyan, Van Aelst et al. 2004; Walgrave and Verhulst

2006; Verhulst and Walgrave 2007), and in the US (Fisher et al. 2005; Fisher 2007) an increasing amount of demonstrations were surveyed at different occasions. In February 2003, an international team surveyed demonstrators against the imminent war on Iraq in eight countries (Walgrave and Rucht 2009). In the US, Goss (Goss 2000; Goss 2003) surveyed the Million Mom March on May 14th, 2000, and other US scholars have used protest surveys to assess organizational mobilization in five different global justice demonstrations in 2000-2002 (Fisher, Stanley et al. 2005). Since the start of the new century, numerous protest surveys—more than we manage to mention here—have been undertaken; results have often not yet been published as they were carried out too recently. Especially the sudden surge of the global justice movement and its eye-catching protest demonstrations all over the globe since the Battle of Seattle in 1999, have inspired protest scholars to conduct protest surveys at many contentious gatherings of the movement (Della Porta 2004; Blanchard and Fillieule 2006; della Porta, Andretta et al. 2006; Giugni, Bandler et al. 2006). In short, the method of sampling and surveying protesters is on the rise which makes it important to reflect on the methodological strengths and weaknesses of the approach.

What sampling procedures and methods did researchers adopt in previous studies? Table 1 contains a brief outline. In many studies, certainly in the older ones, *no* information is provided regarding sampling and survey procedures. Hardly any authors refer to the practical difficulties of sampling in moving masses and describe how they dealt with it. Parkin (1968: 6), for example, recorded addresses at the 1965 Easter March and contacted the listed people afterwards per regular mail. He completely fails to explain how addresses were collected and what sampling procedure was followed. Parkin simply states: *“The difficulties of attempting to draw an accurate sample from a continuously moving column of marchers will readily be imagined; some people leave the ranks while others join in as the column proceeds, so that its composition is never really constant.”* Also Waddington (1988: 29) does not provide us with a clear procedure of his sampling of participants in the 1983 protests against a visit of Mrs. Thatcher to Sheffield: *“Our survey of demonstrators, which was random in the literal rather than in the scientific sense, provide a rough profile of the demonstrators.”* Jasper and Poulsen (1995: 499) also did not inform the reader about how they dealt with sampling; we only know that they both used face-to-face interviewing and mail-back

questionnaires. They were satisfied with stating that “*Questionnaires were distributed in all parts of each crowd and, although this method does not obtain representative samples, we feel our sampling yielded no obvious biases.*” Della Porta and colleagues (2006) too remain vague about how they precisely conducted their sampling and survey among participants of the 2001 protest against the G8 summit in Genoa.

Some of the more recent studies, however, do offer a clear description of the sampling procedure. For the Million Mom March, Kristin Goss delivers ample information about sampling procedure and response rates. She interviewed 793 participants in this historic march drawing on a very short two-page face-to-face questionnaire administered on the spot with a response rate of 90 percent. A stationary event, the Million Mom March was sampled relying on a whole series of randomizing measures such as counting every third “picnic blanket”, interviewing all people in line for refreshments etc (Goss 2000; Goss 2003). Recently, Fisher et al. (Fisher, Stanley et al. 2005) succinctly describe their survey of 1,514 participants in five global justice protests. As used in earlier studies, they try to approximate random selection by “counting off” protesters standing in lines and select every 5th protester. Doubtlessly the most thorough and most promising effort to design a reliable sampling procedure was undertaken by the French team of Favre and Fillieule. They devised a systematic and well-considered approach for surveying moving crowds (Favre, Fillieule et al. 1997). The method that we will propose and test in the next section was strongly inspired by the work of these pioneering French scholars.

<Table 1 about here>

Table 1, documents that protest surveys have been applied to almost 35 different protest events; although there are probably more.. Issue and nation vary but American studies are predominant. Most surveys have been applied to events of the so-called “new social movements” (anti-racism, anti-war, global social justice etc). Yet also in a non-US context and for other issues—labor union events most notably—protest surveys have been used.

A first distinction refers to the difference between moving and stationary protest types. Stationary sampling, we believe, is essentially more complicated and more prone to selection biases than moving sampling. Dividing the crowd into “imaginary” sectors as Seidler et al (1976) did, is tricky and sector sizes cannot be equal in size. Counting rows or individual demonstrators in a disorderly standing mass is difficult. Centrally monitoring the sampling implementation is almost impossible as interviewer teams get dispersed over the crowd and supervisors loose control; giving interviewer more leeway to personally select respondents threatens the representiveness of the sample (see below). Often, the stationary phase is only a temporary and short period before or after the demonstration which makes it very difficult to plan and to give every demonstrator an equal chance of being selected for an interview. Standing crowds are incomplete. Often people are just waiting before the proper march starts, some people come late, they move within the crowd, or leave prematurely. Of course, in some nations, protestors typically march while in other nations they would gather to listen to some speakers. But when one has the choice the choice, we contend, it is best to sample when the crowd is moving as this changes the erratic bunch of people in a more or less orderly cortege with a clear start and a foreseeable end.

The second distinction is the type of interview: face-to-face versus mail-in (mail return envelop). Trading-off these two types of interviews is more difficult. That is why we combine both types in our own procedure (see below). The main advantage of face-to-face interviews is the response rate: when people are asked on location by a (friendly) interviewer, they hardly ever refuse to collaborate. Response rates mostly exceed 80 percent and sometimes studies even report “Stalinist” scores of nearly 100 percent response. We return to this later. A disadvantage of oral interviewing is the considerably lower numbers of successful interviews. And even when one manages to gather enough face-to-face interviews to carry out statistical analyses the amount of questions and resulting variables is unavoidably small: interviews on the spot can only take a few minutes. Mail-in surveys face the opposite (dis)advantages. They yield smaller response rates but larger amounts of successful interviews as distributing mail-in questionnaires can be done efficiently by a relatively small group of people. Response rates reach 40 percent, which is satisfying but still raises questions about representativity and nonresponse bias. We will address these in the next section. An important

advantage of mail-in interviews is that chances are higher that responses really reflect people's individual opinions and attitudes and are less affected by the "heat of the moment" as well as by social pressures from the social environment in which they participate (see also: Tourangeau, Rips et al. 2000). Moreover, people are often not very concentrated when they walk along in a noisy and vivid demonstration, they do not always understand the questions, and their answers might be imprecise and not well considered. When people fill in a questionnaire at home, these intervening elements are mostly absent. So, in general, we think the advantages of mail-in surveys outweigh the disadvantages. The main weakness of mail-in surveys is their lower response rate. We deal with this in the next section.

A third observation is that, with the exception of the studies by Van Aelst and Walgrave (2001), Klandermans and van Stekelenburg (2005), and Rootes and Saunders (2007), *none* of the reported studies incorporated systematic procedures to test for nonresponse bias. Even when authors sometimes do describe their field work sampling method and even when scholars sometimes do reflect, in just a few sentences, on the possible skewedness of their sample, no effort to tap nonresponse bias is undertaken. The data are simply taken for granted. This represents a significant challenge to the protest survey method. In the next sections, we attempt to remedy this flaw.

Finally, the small body of protest survey literature is scattered and non-cumulative. There is no systematic discussion of approaches and methods. Scholars do not seem to be aware of each other's work and they do not address each other's findings. The literature appears to be entirely disintegrated. We hardly found any cross references to other similar articles among the listed studies. Researchers seem to each time reinvent the wheel. If protest surveying wants to become an established method in protest research, a more integrated and reflective effort is needed. We attempt to fill this gap and to open the methodological debate.

Protest survey response rates across issues and nations

Between 1998 and 2006 the authors of this paper personally conducted, or directly supervised, protest surveys at 22 demonstrations. Basic descriptions of these surveys can be found in the Tables 2 and 3.

<Tables 2 and 3 about here>

Surveys were conducted in two separate waves. A first wave of 14 studies was conducted in Belgium between February 1998 and December 2006. It covers 4,445 completed mail-in questionnaires with an average response rate of around 40 percent. These surveys cover a wide range of eleven issues classified along the simple axis of “old social movements”—typical bread and butter demonstrations staged by the trade unions—“new social movement events”—anti-racism, anti-war etc—and what we would call “new emotional movements” demonstrations in support of the victims of random violence (Walgrave and Verhulst 2006). A second wave of surveys covers 11 anti-war demonstrations all held on the same day, February 15, 2003, in 8 different countries. This yielded 5,155 useful mail-in surveys with an average response rate of almost 47 percent. Both waves combined contain evidence of about 9,600 protest participants. To test for the representativity of the mail-in surveys, we also conducted face-to-face interviews in both waves, amounting to 2,608 oral conversations. We will elaborate on this more in the next section.

General population surveys most of the time yield only a small amount of protest activists (Favre, Fillieule et al. 1997; Jennings and Andersen 2003). The large amount of successful activist interviews produced by our protest surveys suggest that they may offer a valuable alternative and allow questioning substantial amounts of activists. The strength of our database is that the first wave compares across issues holding constant nation, the second wave compares across nations holding constant the issue. The least one can say is that this extensive data collection presents a tough test for the protest survey methodology.

Response rates vary across issues and nations but, except for some rare cases, response rates are fairly satisfying. Compared to the average 10-20 percent response of normal mail-in surveys targeting a specific population group, which can rise to 60 percent after three specifically designed reminders (Dillman 2000), an average of 40 percent response is a strong result for a survey without reminders. The protest surveys conducted for this study did *not* imply any reminders—questionnaires were distributed at the events and addresses of the selected respondents were not recorded. Clearly, protest demonstrators are an appreciative target group. The reason for high collaboration, we believe, is straightforward: people participating in protest events want to express themselves; they want to show their dissatisfaction and discontent. The protest questionnaire offers them another opportunity to express themselves, to specify why they attend, and to repeat their message concerning the protest's target (see also Blanchard and Fillieule 2006: 12).

In just two of the 22 cases response fell below the 30 percent threshold: the Brussels demonstration for the asylum seekers in February 2006 (17%) and the demonstration against the restructuring (layoffs) of the beer giant Inbev in March 2006 (14%). Considering the former, reasons for the low response rate must be sought in cultural and linguistic barriers. The demonstration was populated by many illegal immigrants, “sans papiers”, claiming that they should be legalized, get the official paperwork, and obtain the right to stay in Belgium. Many of them were not used to the concept of surveys and did not understand their purpose. They might have also been afraid to disclose personal information because of their illegal status. Moreover, many of them did not master one of the two languages in which the questionnaire was drafted (Dutch and French)—Fisher et al (2005: 108) also report on language problems while conducting their survey in Den Hague. At the Inbev demonstration, a typical blue collar workers' demonstration, people were not very receptive to the interviewers. The interviewers were mocked, they were considered aliens and after a while the streets were covered with our green questionnaires that had been discarded by the demonstrators. A research project conducted by a university, apparently, was perceived as being an elitist undertaking that had nothing to do with the workers' struggle against their bosses. Protest surveys are not fit to gather evidence on all kinds of protests.

What accounts for the diverging response rates in Table 2 and 3? When we compare the types of movements staging the event and the addressed issues we observe remarkable differences (Table 2). For demonstrations of the “old social movements” response rates are substantially lower than average: they hardly reach 33 percent with only the teachers’ demonstration in May 2000 surmounting the average response rate (47%). Especially demonstrations on labor conflicts in specific companies with a lot of manual workers produce low response rates (Inbev and VW Forest). Probably, these people do not want to “express” themselves as much as the others since their participation is more inspired by short-term instrumentality (against layoffs or for compensations) rather than by broader ideologies. They may also distrust or to some degree despise the fact that “ivory tower” university students come and observe their real-life struggle. Demonstrations of the “new emotional movements” protesting against random violence and supporting the victims on average receive the highest response rates with 45 percent. These people are extremely eager to be heard. In fact, these demonstrations are all about expression as they often do not have clear political goal, but are largely about displaying solidarity and compassion (Walgrave and Verhulst 2006). Intermediate response rates are found among the supporters of the “new social movements” with an average of 40 percent. As their appeal is often moral and directed at the population at large, we expect new social movement activists to want to express their opinion through protest surveys. The massive anti-war demonstrations of February 15th, 2003, a typical event of the new social movements, yielded higher than average response rates (47%) (Table 3). These demonstrations were staged at the apex of the run-up to the Iraqi war with enormous media attention for the imminent war. This was the moment par excellence when people wanted to be heard and articulate their non-compliance with war. So response rates are affected by three features of demonstrators: their need to express themselves publicly (linked with the issue), their language (nationality), and their education level.

Obviously, protest surveys are also subject to several classic survey problems. Especially, the questionnaire’s length can discourage people to complete it and send it back; tests with two differently sized questionnaires at the Silent March and the IPPS UK survey yielded significant results in response rates (Rüdiger 2006: 14). The type of questions affects response rates too. Some questions are too difficult or inappropriate for some people and might not only lead to item non-response but also to

total non-co-operation. Non-response on a long battery of questions gauging emotions, for example, proved to be significantly higher for the lower-skilled segments of our samples. Another classic survey issue is the differential role of interviewer variation (Freeman and Butler 1976). A test at the 2006 VW Forest demonstration shows that response rates were identical for male and female interviewers but also that women were much more successful in distributing questionnaires: 48 versus 36 per male interviewer. Finally, although a subjective matter, some interviewers seem to have certain “social” qualities that make their respondents return their questionnaires more easily. Observing the interviewers in action, the field work supervisors at the VW Forest demonstration identified two kinds of interviewers: those with distinct social skills and the others. “Social” interviewers’ response rates were 2 percent higher and they were also more efficient, producing on average 48 interviews per person while this was only 34 for the “non social” group.

The field work method, the questionnaire set-up, the features of the interviewers, and what we would call “contagious refusal” play a role too. At the VW Forest demonstration in December 2006 we experimented with allowing some interviewers to randomly select respondents; the other interviewers were monitored closely and directed strictly by field work supervisors who indicated precisely which individual they had to distribute a questionnaire to. It turned out that the monitored interviewers were much more efficient, interviewed more people and distributed more questionnaires: on average 49 versus 39 respondents in the non-systematic group. Another mechanism affecting response is whether respondents actually see other respondents refusing to accept a questionnaire or to be interviewed or not. It is hard to quantify, but we noticed that when a respondent refuses to collaborate chances are higher that the next selected respondent who observed this first refusal will decline collaboration too. Non-response, in a sense, is “contagious”. Interviewing a crowd starting at the back and working its way to the head of the marching column, one can avoid these (small) negative spirals of refusal (see below).

There are of course more trivial determinants of response that the student of protest has no control over. Weather conditions, for example, do seem to have an impact on response rates. Surveys conducted in pouring rain result in lower response rates. Questionnaires get wet and are less attractive to complete when people get home—if they are still in one piece. It was raining at two of the surveyed

demonstrations: the anti-war on Iraq demonstration in March 2004 and, especially, the Silent March in May 2006. The former, indeed, received a comparatively low response rate (37%) compared to other demonstrations staged by the new social movements. The latter reached an average response rate compared to the other new emotional movement event (46%). Yet, we expected an even higher response rate at the Silent March as this demonstration was staged in the city of Antwerp and the interviewers had home field advantage.

Protest surveys are reliable

So far we substantiated that the protest survey method drawing on mail-in (return envelop) questionnaires is possible and yields a fair amount of completed surveys. The main problem, however, remains: how can we be sure that the questionnaires sent back are representative for the population participating in the demonstration? Even with response rates of +40 percent the completed questionnaires may be biased and only represent a skewed segment of the entire group. As mentioned earlier, previous scholars using protest survey evidence most of the time did not bother about response bias. What we propose and test in this section is combining short face-to-face interviews with longer mail-in questionnaires. Oral interviews with an almost “perfect” response rate are used to test for the representativity of the returned mail-in surveys. *Combining* both methods we are able to unite the strengths of both approaches: the (almost) guarantee of a representative sample (oral) and a large amount of evidence (mail-in). Although some protest surveys in the past relied on both mail-in and oral interviews (see Table 1) both methods were used to cross-check for representativity in hardly any of the available studies. The procedure of combing face-to-face with mail-in surveys can carry the protest survey method a good deal further.

There are three potential reasons for the skewedness of samples drawn from demonstrations. First, not all participants may have had an equal chance to be selected leading to “non-contact” with some segments of the population. If the sampling strategy secures no equal spread over the entire population the obtained responses cannot be representative. Second, selected respondents may refuse to collaborate, to undergo a short face-to-face interview or to accept to take home a mail survey

(“refusal”). Third, mail-in survey response may be skewed due to the fact that the people who send back their completed questionnaires differ systematically from the people who did not collaborate (“response bias”). If these differences are linked to the variables the researcher is interested in, using the sample for scientific research is problematic (Groves, Dillman et al. 2002). In other words: self selection threatens the representativity of the sample.

Non contact: a sampling procedure giving all participants an equal chance of being selected

To start with sampling, we further elaborated the clever field work method designed by the French team of Pierre Favre and Olivier Fillieule (Favre, Fillieule et al. 1997: 21-25). Favre and colleagues tested three different strategies at three alternative demonstrations in 1984 in Paris and decided that working with moving and counting field work supervisors steering a group of interviewers was the best design. Demonstrations are usually not unstructured masses. In their, and our, method fieldwork supervisors count rows to ensure a fair dispersion of questionnaires over the whole marching column giving every demonstrator an equal chance to be singled out for an interview. The two fieldwork supervisors—each accompanied by a team of questionnaire distributors/interviewers—count the rows of participants in the moving cortege selecting every n-th row, to ensure that the same number of rows is skipped throughout the demonstration, and that the whole procession is covered. This guarantees that all groups, no matter if their members prefer to walk in the first part of a march or in the back, have an equal chance to be part of the sample. One of the two groups of fieldwork supervisors and distributors starts at the first row of demonstrators in the march and then gradually descends, counting and skipping rows till they arrive at the last row of the moving march. The other group of field work supervisors and distributors, the sporty ones (as they have to overtake the entire marching crowd), start at the end and gradually work their way up to the head of the march. Each time a row is selected by the field work supervisor, the distributor selects every n-th person in that row and hands out a questionnaire to this individual. Ideally, alternatively a person at the left side, at the right side, and in the middle of a row is selected, again taking into account that some participants will prefer to march at the margins or in the center of the crowd. Figure

1 displays the sampling procedure graphically. Note that this field work method is more advantageous and useful in some demonstrations than in others to get a good dispersion. If the procession is well-organized and people are marching in clearly identifiable blocks—along with co-members of their organization or organized in territorial circumscriptions (e.g. per province)—it is paramount that the whole procession is systematically covered from head till tail. This is the case for most old social movement events and to a lesser extent also for new social movement events. If the demonstration, in contrast, is unorganized and has no clear structure, it is less important to cover the entire procession. Demonstrations of the “new emotional movements” covered in Belgium (Table 2) were clear examples of such unstructured marches: there were no organizers taking care of some internal structure; people just sought their own way through the crowd, came and went wherever they felt. Strictly following the field work method in such a case, is less paramount (see also: Blanchard and Fillieule 2006: 13).

<Figure 1 about here>

The sketched sampling procedure is practical and feasible—we applied it in many demonstrations across issues and countries—but it has obvious limitations. Not all demonstrations are fit to be assessed by this method. Especially for the protest surveys conducted on the February 15, 2003, massive anti-war demonstrations the field work method did not always work neatly. First, if a demonstration is large and fairly static, and if the streets are congested with people, it is difficult for the field work supervisors and interviewers to get through the whole march and cover all kinds of groups. Indeed, the unexpectedly high numbers of demonstrators in some of the February 15 demonstrations made it simply impossible to stick to the field survey method in a strict way. Some interviewers were stranded on the stairs of subway tunnels or the crowd on the streets did not move at all and was completely immobilized due to the enormous attendance. With interviewers or the crowd being static, the sampling procedure could not be applied. This was, for example, the case in London, Madrid, and for the most part also in Berlin. Second, it is impossible to get a good sample of respondents in violent and/or irregular demonstrations (or in violent sectors of an otherwise peaceful

demonstration), even if we know that these forms of protest are usually small in number. In some exceptional cases, extremist groups of demonstrators within a peaceful event refuse to accept the questionnaires lowering the degree of representativity and biasing the result. On the Global Justice demonstration in 2001 in Brussels, for example, demonstrators of the so-called “Black Block”, the most militant and radical wing of the global justice movement, simply refused to accept our questionnaires. Fisher et al. (2005: 107) report about similar problems with small pockets of anarchist demonstrators in the global justice demonstrations they surveyed. Again, this is rare and, in general, demonstrators who have deliberately chosen to express their political opinion on the street are likely to collaborate and are even anxious to share their view with researchers. But this does not change the fact that the participants of some demonstrations can not be charted relying on protest surveys. This is the reason we never tried to survey a radical and violent demonstration—European farmers coming to Brussels with their “agricultural vehicles and utensils” (e.g. manure) to make the EU “feel” and “smell” their anger. Third, interviewers and field work supervisors need to be thoroughly trained. At the February 15, 2003, anti-war demonstrations not all interviewers and field work supervisors in all countries had previous experience with protest surveying. This caused some confusion and misunderstandings and made caused the method to sometimes be followed less strictly than planned. Training and investing in detailed briefings of interviewers helps to make them more efficient and successful. To keep experienced interviewers on board and motivated, we even started paying interviewers 10 EUROS more each time they participated in carrying out another protest survey. Also making interviewers identifiable by making them wear a sweater and a cap from the university seems to enhance collaboration. Fourth, protests have to have a certain size before a team of interviewers can tackle them.. When protest events are too small, say less than 5,000 people, interviewers become extremely visible which may have unwanted effects (Favre, Fillieule et al. 1997). Finally, demonstrations have to be announced beforehand to permit the research team to organize itself. This means that spontaneous outbursts of protest cannot be gauged adequately (ibid.).

So far, we did not present any proof that our systematic field work method produces a more representative sample of the demonstration’s population than just letting interviewers erratically wander through the crowd and distribute questionnaires here and there as “random” as possible. At the VW

Forest demonstration in December 2006 we divided our twenty interviewers in two equal groups. One group of interviewers was simply instructed to interview and distribute questionnaires as they saw fit while trying to get an optimal sample of the crowd. The other group of interviewers, in contrast, was closely supervised by the field work supervisors and followed the described field work method in full detail without any leeway to personally select interlocutors. Table 4 systematically compares samples of demonstrators drawn via both methods. Before looking at this table, we explain the procedure followed at the VW Forest demonstration: we combined face-to-face with mail-in interviews. All interviewers, for a short while, walked along with the selected respondents asking a few key questions and writing down the answers. Then, they separated (“tear off”) the already completed part of the questionnaire from the larger remainder of it and they handed the second (empty) part to the respondent asking to fill it in at home and send it back. The tear-off and the remaining questionnaire were labeled with an identical identification number, to be able to accurately measure non-response (see below).

<Table 4 about here>

The first column of Table 4 contains tests for significant differences between the systematic and non-systematic samples based *only* on the face-to-face surveys with a limited amount of variables; the second column with more variables is based on a comparison of both samples drawing on the respondents who sent back their questionnaire. The table confirms that there are clear and substantial interviewer selection effects; interviewers tend to select specific conversation partners and, thus, are not able to select a truly random sample. A positive sign means a higher representation in the group that was sampled by the non-systematic interviewers. “Free” interviewers at the VW Forest demonstration tended to select more female interlocutors, with a more than average high education, with a high interest in politics, not working at VW Forest, that did not agree with a number of highly polarized and “anti-capitalist” statements (they are less radical), that display less “hope” and “fighting spirit”, and that came less with family and colleagues. These differences make perfect sense. We anticipate interviewers to prefer approachable peers (see also: Favre, Fillieule et al. 1997: 22-23). As interviewers were highly skilled students in politics or social sciences, they probably (un)consciously

avoided to talk to angry blue collar workers that demonstrated in a group of colleagues displaying a good deal of “fighting spirit”. We conclude that adopting a systematic and strict sampling procedure makes a difference and leads to a substantially different, probably a much better, sample of respondents. Splitting the task of selecting respondents and interviewing them as we did seems to be a fruitful strategy (Seidler et al. 1976).

Refusal: assessing non-acceptance and non-collaboration

Response can also be biased by respondents directly refusing to collaborate when addressed by the interviewers. As shown in Table 1, direct refusal rates are most of the time *very* low. Acceptance rates always surpassed 80 percent and sometimes even flirted with the magic 100 percent collaboration rate. In face-to-face situations, addressed demonstrators hardly ever refuse to orally answer a few non-invasive questions (see also Rüdiger 2006; Fisher et al. 2005; Seidler et al. 1976; Goss 2003). When experimenting with distribution methods and interviewer features at the VW Forest demonstration in December 2006, we stumbled onto interesting differences in refusal rates. Remember that we used the “tear off” system with an initial short face-to-face interview followed by a second longer mail-in questionnaire that was given to the respondents asking them to complete it at home. General refusal rate for this dual interview was 12 percent. This refusal rate was higher than average, but bear in mind that this was a tricky demonstration to survey: a typical old social movement event targeting a specific company’s management. Interviewers who were allowed to select their interlocutor themselves *not* following the strict method, found considerably *more* willing conversation partners than interviewers following the strict method: collaboration rate among “free” interviewers was 92 percent, among “systematic” interviewers it was only 85 percent. This difference, again, indirectly proves that interviewers, when let free, tend to choose respondents that look “approachable” and avoid difficult respondents; and they are often right in their intuitive choice. Once more this underpins the importance of strictly guiding the interviewers and not giving them the opportunity to select their respondents themselves, even more so when they have to personally interview the selected respondents (and not just hand out a questionnaire).

Nonresponse: testing the representativity of the responses

To test for the representiveness of the mail survey, at eight of the 22 demonstrations covered, a sample of *other* demonstrators was interviewed face-to-face (Table 1). Both across issues and across nations we can, hence, compare face-to-face interviews with mail-in surveys. Knowing that response rates of face-to-face interviews approached 100 percent, we consider this as a useful first benchmark to test the representiveness of the sent-back mail-in interviews with an average response rate of only about 40 percent. Yet, the comparison is not entirely unproblematic as face-to-face sampling in these eight demonstrations was less “random” than the mail-in interview procedure. At eight of our demonstrations, the gathering crowd before the start of the demonstration was divided into sectors, and each interviewer randomly, often following a specific procedure, selected a fixed number of respondents in “his” sector (see also: Seidler, Meyer et al. 1976). The problem with such face-to-face sampling is, as we showed above, that refusal rates may be almost inexistent but that the selection procedure gives the interviewers too much freedom to select the respondents they “like” at first sight. For the mail-in surveys the nonresponse is problematic, for the face-to-faces surveys the sampling is imperfect. Table 5 and 6 contain a systematic comparison across issues and nations of both groups of respondents.

<Table 5 and 6 about here>

Table 5 compares face-to-face interviews with mail-in interviews for four demonstrations on various issues. We observed hardly any significant differences between both samples. Regarding socio-demographics, we find that in two of the four demonstrations female respondents are overrepresented among the mail-in respondents. At the “Education” demonstration, older demonstrators appeared to be somewhat more prepared to send back their completed questionnaire. In terms of political participation there were hardly any differences; only whether the respondent had participated in demonstrations before increased response at the “Social Security” demonstration but it

decreased response at the Education demonstration. Only one attitudinal variable is slightly significant: at the Anti-racist demonstration mail-in respondents were less satisfied with democracy in general. By and large, differences between both samples are small. Table 6 undertakes the same comparative exercise for four of the anti-war demonstrations in different countries. Differences are somewhat stronger, but remain limited. In three countries female respondents seemed more eager to return their questionnaire; in three countries older people collaborated more easily with the mail-in surveying; in all four countries higher skilled people completed the questionnaire more frequently than lower skilled people. That women tend to co-operate more with mail surveys (Porter and Whitcomb 2005) and that young people respond less (Kaplowitz, Hadlock et al. 2004) are findings that correspond neatly with the available literature. No behavioral and attitudinal variables display any difference between samples and, thus, we do not find any proof of the fact that more “radical” or more “engaged” respondents would be more willing to send back their questionnaires as typically found in employee surveys (Borg and Turen 2003).

How should we interpret these findings pointing towards small differences? Men and younger people are significantly overrepresented among the face-to-face interviews. It seems that our (also) young and predominantly male interviewers tended to select more female and younger conversation partners for their face-to-face interviews or, inversely, that female and older respondents more frequently send back their questionnaire. Thus, the observed gender and age differences between interview types might be due both to a response (mail) as to a selection (face-to-face) bias. Educational differences—highly skilled people are more willing to participate in an intellectual exercise such as as filling in a questionnaire (Couper and Groves 1996)—more clearly point towards a response bias: most likely our highly-skilled interviewers tended to select more peers but even among that specific selection the more skilled people more readily participated.

In order to conclusively test whether the small differences between the face-to-face and mail-in samples are due to skewed sampling (face-to-face) or skewed response (mail-in) we created an entirely different research design for the March for Joe and the VW Forest demonstration. This time, we only sampled people *during* the march relying on the method of counting the rows and the field work supervisors indicating the precise respondent to be addressed. As already stated, interviewers

conducted a short face-to-face interview, wrote down the answers, removed the completed part of the questionnaire and handed a second non-completed part of the questionnaire to the *same* respondent; both parts were marked with an identical identification number. The respondent was asked to take the second part of the questionnaire home, completed it, and send it back. This design allows us to test decisively whether responses on mail-in surveys were biased or not: sampling procedure was similar and (almost) perfect information on the population is available. Results are documented in Table 7.

<Table 7 about here>

The table substantiates that nonresponse bias is minimal and that differences between co-operating and non-co-operating respondents are very small. Only one variable seems to affect response and that is age. As suggested above, older people are more prone to collaborate with the researchers. We found this fairly strong response effect regarding age both among the March for Joe as among the VW Forest demonstrators. It is unclear whether older people simply have more time or just show more respect for the interviewers or whether young people consider answering a mail questionnaire old fashioned (Rüdig 2006).

Protest surveys are useful

After having established that the protest survey method, and more specifically the method we propose above, is both a feasible as well as a reliable way to produce data on participants of demonstrations, we will expand our contention that surveying protesters can help integrate both mainstream approaches of protest in this final section. Our basic claim is that by using protest surveys researchers can get more insight in *who* demonstrates, *why* they do so, and *how* they get to the streets since protest is quantitatively studied in a specific context that can be compared across demonstrations. We will underpin this claim by recapitulating some findings from earlier work based on our protest survey data. But first, drawing upon some of the classic literature, we illustrate the need

for the inclusion of specific contexts in political participation studies and for comparative analysis in social movement sociology.

Political participation research only truly emerged with Barnes and Kaase's (1979) *Political Action* survey conducted in the mid-70s. The inclusion of (un)conventional participation forms and their correlates in large-scale population surveys has been an evergreen ever since, from the 1980 World Values Study up until now. Although these studies have delivered numerous valuable insights, some crucial elements have been missing in their explanatory toolboxes. Not only are the amount of activists and even more specific protesters in these surveys often very low, they also lack the necessary evidence to pinpoint the precise reasons *why* and *how* people come to be active as they have no information on specific events in which the respondents participated. Some of these studies rely on disputable proxies to fill this void.

Take for example the massive *Citizen Participation Study* that constitutes the groundwork of Verba et al.'s award-winning *Silent and Voice* about American civic voluntarism containing 15,000 respondents as well as more than 2,500 in-depth interviews (Verba et al. 1995). Despite the path-breaking character of this study several key questions were left unanswered. The authors declare wanting to go beyond the socio-economic explanation models of participation, since these are "failing to specify the mechanisms that link SES (socio-economic status) to participation" (ibid: 280). They try to solve this by incorporating the concept of "engagement" in their model, defined as a "psychological predisposition". They measure engagement through such variables as interest in politics, political efficacy, civic values, group consciousness (race and gender), and party identification. But these concepts simply add to the understanding of who participates and they do not tell us more about why and how people participate. Verba et al. do include specific issue engagement in their model, but only refer to two issues (e.g. abortion). They speculate on the fact that "strong views on the issue produce higher levels of political activity" but they fail to use issues to explain real participation differences. At best, they describe an issue's "mobilization potential" (Klandermans and Oegema 1987) and not the role and importance of the issue in differential recruitment and the mobilization of different publics. Interestingly, Verba and colleagues acknowledge the peculiar and important role of issues and issue engagement when noting in their concluding chapter: "In contrast to

the more or less standing decision embodied by the Civic Voluntarism Model, issue engagements constitute a wild card with respect to their impact on participatory stratification. Their consequences for the representation of publics otherwise not well represented through participation are not fixed and stable. It depends upon whom the issue engages... As issues come and go, they mobilize to politics different issue publics.”(Verba et al. 1995: 522) In a similar vein, when dealing with the how-question, the authors of *Silence and Voice* establish clear and important linkages between socio-political participation and recruitment. But they define the latter concept quite minimally as “being asked” and they fail to incorporate this dynamic element in their final model. Thus, *Silence and Voice*, probably the main study in the field of political participation so far, establishes the importance of recruitment and mobilization but entirely ignores the mechanisms through which specific issue engagements (why) and diverging recruitment (how) can bring diverging people (who) to participate in events on different issues.

Other studies drawing on general population surveys have wrestled with similar problems related to the specificity of political participation and the importance of context to explain participation in protest. Schussman and Soule (2005), for example, combine the insights from political science and sociology in explaining protest participation concluding: “We argue that the kind of national, cross-movement survey data that has long been a standard tool of political science research will continue to be a valuable tool for sociologists who have tended to focus on case study data... This implies the need for research that combines attention to biographical, social and cognitive factors while being attentive to the ways in which these elements both generate and are influenced by the *contexts* in which protest takes place”(Schussman and Soule 2005: 1100).

As mentioned earlier, sociologists studying social movements have, in contrast to political scientists, mainly been focused on case studies. This led to the incapacity to compare (differential) protest participation across different contexts. The oversupply of separate and scattered case studies on different levels of analysis and with different dependent variables makes it impossible to systematically take into account the ways in which these different level contexts, that mutually influence each other, determine who, why, and how people show up. We maintain that fielding semi-

standardized protest surveys at a series of demonstrations can solve this problem to a large extent because it yields uniform and standardized data on the same level of analysis.

Within the concept of “protest context” at least two different context layers must be distinguished: structural context and issue context. When comparatively studying different protest events on the *same* issue but through time, or between different countries, the structural context in which the contentious event is situated must be taken into account. By structural context we mean, in short, the way in which the issue is dealt with by government and opposition, as well as in the media, the salience of the issue in public opinion, and the protest cycle stage in which the specific protest is situated (Verhulst and Walgrave 2007; 2009). When comparing the composition of protest events *across* issues, but within the same national or temporal context, we can assess how the issue context, that is the type of issues people take to the streets for, are responsible for mobilizing different kinds of people, with different motivations, and through different mobilizing channels. Concretely, the issue context refers to the type of issue (is it immediately threatening people in their material existence or is it rather a moral issue with long-term consequences only), to the type and strength of the social movements mobilizing on the issue, to the collective identity that is affected by the issue etc.. Several authors have previously stressed the need to include both types of contexts. Jennings and Andersen (2003: 177) argue that “a richer comprehension of political participation requires more studies of issue-specific activists and the specification of contextual factors that serve to motivate more intensive degrees of participation.” Meyer and Minkoff (2004: 1461) state that “analysts are not clear about the importance of general political opportunities relative to issue- or constituency-specific factors”, because, evidently, “what provokes mobilization for one movement or constituency may depress mobilization of another, and be completely irrelevant for a third”. Also Brady (1999: 796) is convinced of the importance of bringing issues into the explanatory models of participation: “Little attention is devoted to those factors, typically the political and social context of an individual, that create a demand for political participation. These factors include the issues that motivate participation... Most people get involved in politics because they care about some issue, but most models of participation give short shrift to issues.”

We showed so far that earlier studies haven't often fallen short in integrating protest data within their specific structural or issue context. This limits our knowledge of who protests and, especially, of why and how people become engaged. These questions can only be satisfactorily answered when taking the structural and issue context into account. The right answer to the question who protests, why, and how can only be: it depends on the context. Apart from the unfortunate separation of the two main disciplines studying protest, the reason for this lack of knowledge is largely methodological: mainstream methods decontextualize or overcontextualize protest and do not develop a comparative perspective. We suggest that protest surveys can solve that problem to some extent as they are essentially comparative and automatically primarily focus on context. Let us, then, show with more concrete empirical material that protest surveys can indeed help to integrate context into the study of individual protest participation recapitulating some findings from previous studies.

Using the data from the *International Peace Protest Survey* (IPPS) (Walgrave and Rucht 2009) gathered on February 15th, 2003, in eight countries (summarized in Table 3), Walgrave and Verhulst (2009) explain how different structural contexts produce variations in the composition of the different national protest events held on the same day and against the same war. They found that the more the political establishment rejects war and the more anti-war feelings prevail among the public, the more demonstrators resemble the total population in their country thereby establishing a link between macro context and micro participation. Besides that, the more open the mobilization process—that is: the more mass media take up the role of organizers—the more the people taking the streets resemble the entire population socio-demographically and attitudinally. So, how people participate (mobilization) and who attends interact differently depending on the structural context. The authors conclude that “in a nutshell, there seem to be two contextual “syndromes” in which protest can be staged; favorable conditions with supportive politics, public opinion, and media (with the potential benefit of open mobilization) and unfavorable conditions with hostile politics, public opinion and media (and thus closed mobilization). The first context produces a different type of event: protesters are the usual suspects that come from the fringes of the political spectrum, with distinctive social and political characteristics. The favorable context produces another type of protest: more internally diverse and more resembling the population at large.” (Walgrave and Verhulst 2009) In another paper, Verhulst

and Walgrave (2007) showed that the February 15 protest wave attracted significantly different amounts of first timers (ranging from about 10 percent in Italy to 50 percent and even more in the UK and the Netherlands) and that this variation in first timers was determined by the presence or absence of a preceding protest cycle in each of the eight countries: the less there had been protest in the years before February 15th, the more protest demands seemed to have been accumulating and waiting for this event. Other studies drawing on the same evidence revealed that protesters in the eight countries had different objectives and other motivations. In the US, for example, demonstrators were clearly aiming to stop the war whereas the Spanish and Italian demonstrations were more inspired by anti-government feelings (Klandermans 2009). So, although basically identical in timing, action type and set-up, the structural context with the US taking the lead in the war, made that the demonstrators in the different countries hold different motivations to take to the streets.

Protest surveying not only allows to systematically compare across nations but also across issues and to integrate issue context in the design. Norris, Walgrave and Van Aelst (2004), for example, drew on protest survey evidence on seven different protest issues in Belgium (summarized in Table 2) to reject protest anti-state theories and confirm the process of increasing normalization of protest. Beside these general findings, the authors refer to the importance of mobilizing issues as important contexts to understand individual protest participation. They write: “Considering all demonstrations as equivalent phenomena is a category mistake. The social characteristics, system support, motivational attitudes, and the political behavior of demonstrators varied by the type of event... The specific issues, organization, and mobilization processes involved, in short the context of a specific demonstration, makes a considerable difference. This supports the contextual account pointing towards specific issues, organizations, and mobilization processes to explain demonstration activity and contrasts between events.”(Norris et al 2004: 270) Also Verhulst (2007) established the usefulness of protest surveys for understanding the who, why, and how of protest participation and the key role played by mobilizing issues. He used protest survey evidence gathered at six demonstrations on different issues to show that different issues attract different people, with different motivations through different mobilization channels. Old social movement issues attract more lower-educated working men, not interested in politics and not very actively involved in (non-)institutional politics;

new social movement issue demonstrators are highly educated, interested in politics and politically active with ample protest experience. The finding that different issues attract different people is not surprising; we have known this for a long time and do not need protest surveys to demonstrate this. Still, Verhulst's analysis also shows that, whereas both types of demonstrations are largely organized and mobilized by specific organizations, the motivational dynamics that bring to the streets old and new issue demonstrators is quite different. Collective identity is more important for old issue demonstrators who have a much stronger belief in the instrumentality of their actions. New social movement demonstrators identify less with a peer group and their participation is more expressive; probably because their ample experience has made them realize that their struggle is long-term and that new issue demonstrations are attended by different groups that are less homogenous in their goals and tactics. Not only motivational dynamics differ across issues, mobilization patterns also diverge. Walgrave and Verhulst (2006) show that protest events reacting to extreme events of random violence against innocent victims follow an entirely different mobilization pattern than other demonstrations on other issues. Using protest survey data, they showed that, because of a lack of pre-existing organizations, mobilization is almost entirely driven by supportive mass media coverage leading to a very "open" mobilization type (see also: Walgrave and Manssens 2000). Consequently, protest events driven by media mobilization have the potential to recruit an almost representative cross-section of the population: people from all walks of life, with and without interest in politics, or previous activist experience.

Concluding, this section showed that protest surveying is useful to further our knowledge of protest participation. It raises a different perspective and links participation to context. Previous studies fell short in that perspective and were not able to highlight how the socio-demographic features of protesters, their motivation, and their recruitment interacted with each other and with the structural and issue context. Drawing on earlier work based on comparative protest surveys we documented that the structural and issue context matter a lot: who attends, why, and how differs largely across issues; also the structural context in which protest is staged affects participation.

Conclusion and discussion

The study started with a threefold aim: showing that protest surveying is a feasible, reliable, and useful way to gather evidence about individual protest participants. First, we established that protest surveys are a feasible and practical method to collect large amounts of empirical evidence on activists. Although not widely used in the literature, the reliance on protest surveys has been rising during the last decade. Yet, the literature is scattered, non-cumulative, and surprisingly disintegrated. A methodological debate is lacking. By systematizing the available studies, we found that many of them often employ not specified sampling and interview methods and that reflection and methodological rigor are scarce. Particularly worrying is the absence of testing for non-response bias: data are simply taken at face-value. We outlined a thoroughly tested method to collect protest survey data and provided ample guidelines to secure a representative sample of demonstrators. Drawing upon an original dataset containing 22 different protest surveys applied to demonstrations on varying issues and in eight different nations, we showed that protest surveys following this template yield acceptable response rates of around 40 percent in most cases. Aggregate response rates vary with the type of demonstration issue but also with the training and language of the demonstrators. Questionnaire design, sampling method, and interviewers' characteristics also seem to affect people's willingness to co-operate and send back their completed questionnaire. Our study hopes to start a so far conspicuously absent methodological debate, it produces a template of how to generate standardized protest data, it tests this method on a large amount of different demonstrations, and it stimulates the use of protest surveys to produce comparative knowledge of protest participation dynamics.

Second, the paper critically assessed whether protest surveys produce reliable evidence—that is: whether responses are representative of the demonstration's population as a whole. Combining face-to-face surveys with an almost perfect response rate with mail-in surveys with smaller response rates we found that differences between both samples were mostly marginal. There is more proof of interviewer selection effects (interviewers' selection of respondents is skewed) than there is proof of self-selection effects (collaborating respondents being systematically biased compared to non-collaborative ones). Also, we substantiated that the systematic and structured field work method

designed to get an equal spread over the whole demonstration delivers superior results than just letting the interviewers wander around freely and select their interlocutors according to their own will and taste. Except for some specific cases, the procedure seemed to perform quite well in various circumstances. This indicates that protest surveys can not only generate a lot of data but also good data. Following strict rules and procedures protest survey evidence can be considered valid and reliable. We provided such rules and explained how they affect the validity of the data.

Of course, protest surveys are not fit to assess all kinds of protest or to address any research question. Protest surveying is not a philosophers' stone or the "Eldorado" for the protest scholar community (Blanchard and Fillieule 2006). The main restriction is, obviously, that only data on individual protesters are gathered—the "demand" side of protest—and that evidence on the "supply" side—remain out of sight (Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002). If one is interested in social movements or in macro determinants of protest activity, protest surveys definitely are not the best method. Even when one is interested in individual protesters, the method has its obvious limitations. First of all, protest surveys typically produce snapshots and not films. A single protest event is picked out of an often longer protest cycle. Protest surveys, in a sense, ignore the longitudinal aspect of protesting. Recent social movement and political participation studies, though, tend to put protest careers and the patterns of recurring protest participation centre stage (Klandermans 1997; Downton and Wehr 1998). The largest challenge for protest surveying is to incorporate this aspect in its design. Questioning the same people several times allows studies to evolve from a cross-sectional to a panel design which is more capable of coping with diachronic phenomena. Another important limitation is protest surveys' sampling on the dependent variable. Protest surveys only inform us about actual participants, not about non-participants. But protest participation is a drop-out race with much more people willing to protest than actually showing up to do so (Oegema and Klandermans 1994). To assess this mobilization deficit we need to be able to compare shows with no-shows. Next, techniques should also be found to further increase the response rate of the mail-in surveys. Inspired by Dillman's (2000) Total Design Method one may search for ways to identify demonstrators in order to send them reminders in case of non-response. Finally, there are many practical limitations to the method that

make it unfit to assess some specific, but rare, protest events. We charted the difficult-to-survey protest events above.

Third and probably most importantly, we showed that protest surveys are able to connect both main traditions studying political protest—social movement and political participation studies—that have been working entirely separately for so long. Especially, the fact that protest surveys focus on protest participants in a specific context and not merely in general terms is a crucial step forward. Consequently protest surveys can be of help to lay bare the dynamics of protest participation and to answer the three key questions that guide the field: who protests, why, and how. Previous studies in particular lacked the necessary comparative perspective to link participation to context. They generated a lot of valuable propositions about participation, motivation and mobilization. But if we want to take the field further we need to modify our approach and focus on variation within the general pattern. Protest participation dynamics vary dramatically across issues and across nations. What applies to some demonstrations may be entirely different for others. Although in general the usual suspects attend, this is often not the case and sometimes people without any previous protest experience take to the streets. Arguably, these events are more important and have more consequences than yet another demonstration of the same die-hard protesters. Although in general we know that people are motivated by the cause at stake and aim to affect politics or economics by their participation, their motivation is often very different and some demonstrations are merely expressive events or events with a much broader oppositional agenda. Although in general organizations and formal networks are strong mobilizers, in some demonstrations they only play a modest role and mass media take over. Moreover, these three key aspects closely interact and these relationships can only be examined by comparing different demonstrations in their context and by searching for differences and not for similarities as previous studies have mostly done. Comparatively searching for variation and differences is precisely what protest surveys are good at as they allow to conduct an array of standardized surveys in different demonstrations and countries. Sticking solely to population surveys or to in-depth case studies without comparison is opting to confirm the same findings over and over again or to lay bare particular case-related phenomena that we cannot evaluate as we are not able to put them into perspective. Alternatively, protest surveys let us actively search for deviations from the

general pattern highlighting diverging dynamics and helping us to refine and bolster our knowledge of participation dynamics. Whatever limitations the protest survey methodology may have and whatever expansions and refinements the method may witness in the future, we hope to have shown in this paper that the core of the method is valid and can yield, when respecting certain procedures and rules, reliable evidence.

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Tables

Table 1: Overview of known studies drawing upon protest surveys

Author	Type demonstration	Year	Place	Type interview	N interviews	Response rate	Sampling type	Sampling procedure
Parkin 1968	Anti-nuclear	1965	London	Mail-in	445	81%	?	Non-specified
Jenkins 1967	Anti-nuclear	1965	London Hamburg	Face-to-face	143 137	+80%	Walking	Counting n th demonstrator
Seidler et al. 1976	Anti-war Anti-draft Pro-war Counter-inaugural	1970 1970 1970 1973	Washington Fayetteville Washington Washington	Face-to-face	90 24 84 109	93-95%	Stationary	Zone-sector sampling + counting n th demonstrator
Ladd et al. 1983	Anti-nuclear	1979	Washington	Mail-in	420	42%	Stationary	Non-specified
Scaminaci III and Dunlap 1986	Anti-nuclear	1979	San Francisco	Mail-in + self-administered questionnaires	276	28%	Stationary	Non-specified
Waddington 1988	Anti PM Thatcher	1983	Sheffield	Face-to-face	300	?	Walking	Non-specified
Jasper and Poulsen 1995	Anti-nuclear power Animal experiments Animal experiments	1984 1988 1988	Diablo Canyon New York Berkeley	Mail-in + face-to-face	273 270 30	?	Non-specified	Non-specified
Fillieule 1997	Anti-racism Pro-work Anti-unemployment	1984	Paris				Walking	Counting rows and demonstrators
Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001	“White” march Anti-racism Non-profit sector Social Security	1998	Brussels	Mail-in + face-to-face	123 457 374 355	40%	Walking	Counting rows and demonstrators
Goss 2003	Million Mom March	2000	Washington	Face-to-face	793	90%	Stationary	Several measures to maximize spread
Bédoyan et al. 2004	Global Justice	2001	Brussels	Mail-in	378	40%	Walking	Counting rows and demonstrators
Botetzagias and Boudourides 2004	Anti-war Iraq	2003	Thessaloniki	Face-to-face	180	?	Stationary	Distribution in campsites with demonstrators
van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2005	Trade unions “Turn the tide”	2004	Amsterdam	Mail-in + face-to-face	348 332	47% 42%	Stationary	Counting n th demonstrator

Fisher et al. 2005	“Human Dike” Anti-WEF Anti-IMF Anti-G8 Anti-IMF	2000- 2002	The Hague New York Washington Calgary Washington	Face-to-face	204 317 177 86 730	89-98%	Stationary	Counting n th demonstrator
Della Porta et al. 2006	Anti-G8	2001	Genoa	?	800	?	Non-specified	Non-specified
Fillieule and Blanchard 2006	Anti-G8 ESF-meeting	2003	Evian Paris	Self-administered questionnaires	2,282 2,198	?	?	Non-specified
Walgrave and Rucht 2007	Anti-war Iraq	2003	11 cities in 8 countries	Mail-in + face-to- face	6,753	47%	Walking	Counting rows and demonstrators
Heaney and Rojas 2007	Anti-war protest	2004- 2005	Events in seven US cities	Face-to-face	2,529	89%	Stationary	Counting 5 th demonstrator (from an “anchor”)
Fisher 2007	Anti-WEF Anti-IMF Anti-IMF Anti-war Anti-Bush	2002- 2004	New York Washington Washington Washington New York	Face-to-face	316 177 730 424 454	91%	Stationary	Counting n th demonstrator
Rootes and Saunders 2007	Anti-G8 (poverty) Climate Change	2005 2006	Edinburgh London	Mail-in + face-to- face	563 674	28% 36%	Walking	Counting rows and demonstrators

Table 2 Belgian Issue Protest Surveys (BIPS): descriptives and response rate

	Second White March	Anti-racism	Non-profit sector	Social security	Educational	Anti-Drugs	Global justice	Anti Iraq Occupation 04	Asylum seekers	Anti-Iraq occupation 2006	InBev	March for Joe	Silent March	VW Forest	Total
Movement type	New emotional	New	Old	Old	Old	Mixed	New	New	Mixed	New	Old	New emotional	New emotional	Old	-
Place	Brussels	Brussels	Brussels	Brussels	Brussels	Brussels	Brussels	Brussels	Brussels	Brussels	Leuven	Brussels	Antwerp	Brussels	-
Date	15 Feb. 1998	22 March 1998	26 March 1998	11 Sept. 1998	17 May 2000	30 Sept. 2001	14 Dec. 2001	20 March 2004	25 February 2006	19 March 2006	28 March 2006	23 April 2006	26 May 2006	2 December 2006	-
Aim	solidarity victims Marc Dutroux + against judiciary system	rights immigrants + stop extreme right	higher wages + more staff in non-profit organizations	higher social allowances	higher wages and more staff in schools	Against liberal drug policy	Against neo-liberal globalization	Against occupation of Iraq	Rights and respect illegal immigrants	Against occupation Iraq	Against restructuring InBev beer multinational	Against violence + in memoriam Joe Van Holsbeeck	Against racism + in memoriam victims racist killings	Against layoffs and restructuring Volkswagen factory Forest, Brussels	-
# particip. x1000	30	15	20	30	18	3	25	7	10	5	2	80	20	15	-
# Oral interviews	-	125	120	99	92	-	-	-	-	-	-	313	-	878	1,627
# mail-in interviews															
Distributed	270	700	700	730	635	622	1000	700	858	915	722	1018	1281	878	11,029
Completed	123	337	254	256	299	365	378	262	149	316	98	437	585	270	4,445
Response (%)	46	48	36	35	47	59	38	37	17	35	14	43	46	31	40.3

Table 3 International Peace Protest Survey (IPPS): descriptives and response rate

Country	US	UK	Spain	Italy	Netherlands	Switzerland	Belgium	Germany	Total
Movement type	New	New	New	New	New	New	New	New	-
Date	15 Feb. 2003	15 Feb. 2003	15 Feb. 2003	15 Feb. 2003	15 Feb. 2003	15 Feb. 2003	15 Feb. 2003	15 Feb. 2003	- -
Place	N.Y., Seattle, San Francisco	London, Glasgow	Madrid	Rome	Amsterdam	Bern	Brussels	Berlin	-
Aim	Stop war against Iraq	Stop war against Iraq	Stop war against Iraq	Stop war against Iraq	Stop war against Iraq	Stop war against Iraq	Stop war against Iraq	Stop war against Iraq	-
# participants x 1000	1,000	1,000	800	3,000	70	45	75	500	-
Oral interviews	-	504	-	-	100	181	196	-	981
Mail-in Interviews distributed	1,500	1,400	1,200	1,025	1,000	1,200	1,100	1,500	9,925
completed	698	544	445	1002	541	637	508	780	5,155
Response (%)	47	39	37	98	54	53	46	52	46.9

Table 4: Comparison of samples resulting from systematic versus non-systematic sampling at VW Forest demonstration in December 2006. Direction and significance (Mann Whitney U test).		
	Face-to-face only (non-response)	Face-to-face+mail-in only (response)
Sex (male-female)	+*	ns
Age (young-old) ^a	ns	ns
Education (low-high) ^b	--	+*
Interest in politics (low-high) ^c	+***	+***
Union member (no-yes)	ns	ns
Working at VW Forest (no-yes)	-***	-***
Job function (low-high) ^d	ns	ns
Know someone working at VW forest (no-yes)	ns	ns
“We must foremost send a clear message to the VW management in Forest” (not-very important) ^e	--	-*
“I took to the streets in the first place to denounce the fact that ordinary workers are exploited” (not-very important) ^e	--	-*
“If shareholders would not have been so greedy, many more people could have kept their jobs” (not-very important) ^e	--	-*
Emotions: hope (low-high) ^f	--	-**
fighting spirit (low-high) ^f	--	-**
Company: family (no-yes)	--	-*
colleagues (no-yes)	--	-*
others (no-yes)	--	+*
N systematic sampling	331	154
N non-systematic sampling	277	113

* p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; ns=non-significant; --=not asked.

Notes: ^a continuous age variable

^b ‘none/lower’, ‘lower secondary technical/vocational’, ‘lower secondary general’, ‘higher secondary technical/vocational’, ‘higher secondary general’ ‘non-university higher’, ‘university’.

^c on a scale ranging from 0 to 10.

^d ‘manual worker’, ‘employee’, ‘executive/management’

^e on a five point scale

^f on a seven point scale

Table 5: Response bias demonstrations across issues: comparison of face-to-face and mail-in surveys. Direction and significance (Mann Whitney U test).

	Anti-racism	Non-profit sector	Social Security	Education
Sex (male-female)	ns	+***	+*	ns
Age (young-old) ^a	ns	ns	ns	+*
Education (low-high) ^b	ns	ns	ns	ns
Participated in demo before (no-yes)	ns	ns	+*	-***
Interest in politics (low-high) ^c	ns	ns	ns	ns
Protest company (alone-co-members) ^d	ns	ns	ns	ns
Mobilization (open-closed) ^e	ns	ns	ns	ns
Participation decision (recent – long ago) ^f	ns	ns	ns	ns
Satisfaction democracy (low-high) ^g	-*	ns	ns	ns
Union member (no-yes)	ns	ns	ns	ns
N face to face	125	120	99	92
N mail-in	337	254	256	299

* p<.05; **p<.01; ***p≤.001; ; ns=non-significant.

Notes: ^a continuous age variable

^b ‘none/lower’, ‘lower secondary’ ‘higher secondary’ ‘non-university higher’, ‘university’.

^c on a scale ranging from 0 to 10.

^d The variable was constructed from personal micro-context company to more ‘closed’ and specific company. Respondents were able to tick multiple answers: we took into account the most specific company variable. Variables were: come to the demonstration ‘with partner’ ‘with family’, ‘with friends’, ‘with colleagues/fellow students’, ‘with fellow organization members’.

^e The variable was constructed from more ‘open’ information channels to more ‘closed’ and specific ones. Respondents were able to tick multiple answers: we took into account the most specific information channel variable they indicated. The variables were: informed on the demonstration by: ‘television/newspaper’, ‘family/friends’, ‘flyer, poster’, ‘school/work’, ‘organization’.

^f ‘today’, ‘last week’, ‘a few weeks ago’, ‘more than a month ago’

^g on a five point scale

Table 6: Response bias demonstrations across nations: comparison of face-to-face and mail-in surveys. Direction and significance (Mann Whitney U test).

	Belgium	Netherlands	Switzerland	UK
Sex (male-female)	+*	+*	ns	+***
Age (young-old) ^a	+***	+**	+*	ns
Education (low-high) ^b	+***	+*	+***	+*
Protest frequency (low-high) ^c	ns	ns	ns	ns
Interest in politics (low-high) ^d	ns	ns	ns	ns
Protest company ^e	ns	ns	ns	ns
Satisf. government's anti-war efforts ^f	ns	ns	ns	ns
N face-to-face	510	542	637	1124
N mail-in	196	100	101	504

* p<.05; **p<.01; ***p≤.001; ; ns=non-significant.

Notes: ^a continuous age variable

^b 'none/lower', 'lower secondary technical/vocational', 'lower secondary general', 'higher secondary technical/vocational', 'higher secondary general' 'non-university higher', 'university'.

^c 'first time', '2-5 times before', '5-10 times before', '10-20 times before' '20+ times before', '2-5 times before', '5-10 times before', '10-20 times before' '20+ times before'

^d on a scale ranging from 0 to 10

^e The variable was constructed from personal micro-context company to more 'closed' and specific company. Respondents were able to tick multiple answers: we took into account the most specific company variable. Variables were: come to the demonstration 'with partner' 'with family', 'with friends', 'with colleagues/fellow students', 'with fellow organization members'.

^f on a five point scale, ranging from very dissatisfied to very satisfied.

Table 7: Response bias for March for Joe and VW Forest demonstration surveys. Comparison of face-to-face only with face-to-face+mail-in surveys. Direction and significance (Mann Whitney U test).		
	March for Joe	VW Forest
Sex (male-female)	ns	ns
Age (young-old) ^a	+**	+***
Education (low-high) ^b	ns	--
Interest in politics (low-high) ^c	ns	ns
Ethnicity	ns	--
Emotions	ns	--
Participation aims March for Joe ^f	ns	--
Union member (no-yes)	--	ns
Working at VW Forest (no-yes)	--	ns
Job function (low-high) ^g	--	ns
Know someone working at VW Forest (no-yes)	--	ns
Issue question (disagree-agree) ^h	--	+*
N face to face only	193	608
N face to face+mail-in	106	270

* p<.05; **p<.01; ***p≤.001; ; ns=non-significant; --=not asked.

Notes: ^a continuous age variable

^b 'none/lower', 'lower secondary technical/vocational', 'lower secondary general', 'higher secondary technical/vocational', 'higher secondary general' 'non-university higher', 'university'.

^c on a scale ranging from 0 to 10.

^d Caucasian vs. other

^e We confronted the respondents with a long list of emotions and asked them which of these emotions applied to their feelings when they thought of the issue of the demonstration.; all on a seven point scale. *None* of these emotions differed significantly between the two samples. Among the tested emotions were "anger", "fear", "concern", "guilt" etc.

^f We confronted the March for Joe participants with five statements about the drama of the murder on Joe and the March for Joe. *None* of the statements gave a significant difference. The statements were the following: "The origin of the perpetrators is of no relevance: the same murder could just as well have been committed by someone of Belgian origin."; "This drama could have been prevented"; "I feel a very strong bond with the sorrow of the relatives of Joe Van Holsbeek"; "I owe it to myself to take part in this demonstration"; "I take part in this demonstration, because this way I am able to ventilate the emotions evoked by the murder on Joe Van Holsbeek". All statements were to be answered on a five-point scale, ranging from totally disagree to fully agree.

^g 'manual worker', 'employee', 'executive/management'

^h We confronted the VW Forest demonstrators with the following statement: "VW's management tries to play off the different branches against one another to force the workers to accept lower wages", to be answered on a five-point scale, ranging from totally disagree to fully agree.

Figures

Figure 1: Field survey method



