

## Original Research Reports

# What Do We Want? Examining the Motivating Role of Goals in Social Movement Mobilization

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### Abstract

The main purpose of any social movement organization is to achieve the goals of its followers. Little is known, however, about what type of goals disadvantaged group members strive to reach and which of those may motivate them to join a social movement organization. Using a door-to-door survey (N = 351), we investigated the mobilizing effects of goals among inhabitants of the North of the Netherlands that are adversely affected by gas-extraction induced earthquakes. We distinguished between collective (e.g., reduce gas extraction) versus individual goals (e.g., financial compensation), and outcome versus means goals (e.g., influence policy-makers). Moreover, we examined how perceptions of shared opinions with other affected citizens versus with people who are not negatively affected by gas extraction motivate the inhabitants to join a movement and attach importance to different goals. Our results indicate the existence of two pathways for potential mobilization: the first one through the perceptions of shared grievances, which can motivate people to join the movement and pursue collective solutions; and a second one through the perceptions of deprivation, which can motivate people to exert influence on power holders by joining a movement. Individual outcome goals were important but did not motivate disadvantaged citizens to join a social movement organization. We discuss the role of goals as a link between individual level and meso level factors for movement mobilization and collective action.

*Keywords:* goals, social movements, risk perception, disaster, social comparison

### Samenvatting

De belangrijkste reden dat sociale bewegingen bestaan is dat zij de doelen van hun volgers trachten te bereiken. Er is echter weinig bekend over het soort doelen dat achtergestelde groepsleden willen bereiken en welke doelen hen motiveert om lid te worden van een sociale beweging. Met een huis-aan-huis vragenlijstonderzoek (N = 351) onderzochten we het mobiliserende effect van doelen bij inwoners van Noord-Nederland die te maken hebben met de negatieve effecten van aardbevingen die veroorzaakt worden door gaswinning. We maakten een onderscheid tussen collectieve- (het verminderen van gaswinning) en individuele doelen (financiële compensatie), en tussen uitkomstdoelen en doelen die het middel aangeven om de uitkomstdoelen te bereiken (beleid beïnvloeden). Daarnaast hebben we gekeken naar hoe percepties van een gedeelde mening met andere getroffen burgers versus inwoners van andere delen van Nederland de inwoners motiveerde om lid te worden van een sociale beweging en verschillende doelen om lid te worden nastreefden. Onze resultaten lieten twee mogelijke wegen tot mobilisatie zien: de eerste door de perceptie van gedeelde grieven die mensen motiveerde om zich aan te sluiten bij een sociale beweging om collectieve oplossingen na te streven; een tweede door de perceptie van deprivatie die mensen kan motiveren om invloed uit te oefenen op beleidsmakers door lid te worden van een beweging. Individuele uitkomstdoelen waren belangrijk, maar motiveerden achtergestelde burgers niet om lid te worden van een sociale beweging. We bespreken de rol van doelen als een verband tussen factoren op individueel- en mesoniveau voor de mobilisatie voor sociale bewegingen en collectieve actie.

*Trefwoorden:* doelen, sociale bewegingen, risicoperceptie, rampen, sociale vergelijkingen

## Non-Technical Summary

### 1. Background

In the province of Groningen, in the North of the Netherlands, gas has been extracted from the largest natural gas field in Europe since 1963. As a result of the gas extraction, earthquakes have begun to affect the province of Groningen with increasing intensity; especially over the last decade. Inhabitants of the region suffer from damages to their houses, the inability to sell their houses, stress symptoms, and general declining of wellbeing due to fear of earthquakes. In the complex interplay between businesses, the government, and the affected citizens, very few people have joined social movement organizations to fight for improving the situation of the inhabitants of the region.

### 2. Why was this study done?

Social movement organizations allow citizens to collectively achieve certain goals when they are disadvantaged. Little research has however focused on the type of goals that people think a social movement organization should fight for. We argue that these goals are related to how citizens perceive their disadvantage compared to both affected others but also compared to unaffected citizens.

### 3. What did the researchers do and find?

We asked 351 inhabitants of the province of Groningen to fill out a questionnaire. The goal of our study was to investigate whether goals reflecting outcomes that would benefit all affected citizens, versus goals that were aimed more at benefiting individual citizens, would make people more likely to join a social movement organization. In the context of the gas-extraction induced earthquakes, reducing or stopping the extraction would provide a long-term solution that would benefit all citizens of the region. Conversely, better financial compensation would not provide a long-term solution and would mostly benefit the individual with damages. We also looked at means that specified how these different outcomes could be achieved: by gaining support from other Dutch citizens or by influencing policy-makers. We argue that these goals are related to why people are motivated to join a movement: because they feel more at risk than others. We found that the feeling that you are worse off than other affected citizens motivated people to join a social movement organization to fight for a reduction in gas extraction. We also found that when affected people did not feel acknowledged by unaffected Dutch citizens, they were more likely to join a movement to influence policy-makers to do something about the situation.

### 4. What do these findings mean?

In the province of Groningen, not a lot of people have joined a social movement organization to cope with the negative consequences of gas extraction in the region. Our study suggests that social movements need to look closely at whether the goals they want to achieve are the ones that affected citizens want. When they focus on goals that benefit all of those affected, and if they specify how to reach those goals, they are more likely to attract a larger following.

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One of the key aspects of social movement organizations is that they allow members of disadvantaged groups to exert influence through a collective endeavor, which cannot be achieved through individual action (Oberschall, 1973). In order to achieve social change, social movements try to attract followers by communicating sets of beliefs, values and goals which are supposed to resonate with the views of potential members (Benford, 1993; Benford & Snow, 2000). However, people often have multiple goals which can potentially motivate them to engage in collective action (Hornsey et al., 2006), and activists and their potential followers may have differing opinions about the same situation (Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). Thus, successful mobilization requires that movements and their potential members have shared goals and work together to achieve them (e.g., Klandermans, 2014; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Little is known, however, about which type of goals disadvantaged individuals want to achieve and which ones may motivate them to act collectively.

In this paper, we start from a very basic but important question: What do people want to achieve by joining a social movement organization? Research on goal attainment (Gollwitzer, 1999) and collective action (Hornsey et al., 2006; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests that members of disadvantaged groups can pursue various individual or collective goals that can have different functions (e.g., outcome goals or means goals). Importantly, these goals may arise from different concerns, such as perceptions of shared grievances or a sense of entitlement, and they may not necessarily match those of a social movement organization looking to mobilize this population. Previous research, however, focused either on the goals of social movement organizations (McCammon, 2012; Simmons, 2014; Snow et al., 1986) or on individual level motivations to participate in collective action (e.g., Klandermans, 1997; van Zomeren et al., 2008; Walgrave, van Laer, Verhulst, & Wouters, 2013). In this paper, we bridge the two perspectives and test the mobilizing effect of goals. We do this in the context of gas-extraction induced earthquakes in the northern Dutch province of Groningen (van der Voort & Vanclay, 2015), a slowly deteriorating situation (Postmes et al., 2018) in which the communities living in the vicinity of the gas field have been dealing with the negative consequences of gas extraction for several decades (Dost & Kraaijpoel, 2013). This situation provides a relevant context to test the mobilizing power of goals, because there are no clear and straightforward solutions, nor a powerful social movement organization that could unite the affected population.

## Gas Extraction and Earthquakes in the Province of Groningen, the Netherlands

In 1959, the largest natural gas field in Europe was discovered underneath the province of Groningen and the Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij (NAM), a shared enterprise between the Dutch state and two big oil companies subsequently started extracting the gas in 1963 (Stäuble & Milius, 1970). The first recorded earthquake occurred in this region in 1986, a region which had not experienced any natural earth tremors before. The intensity and frequency of these earthquakes varies considerably by location, as the Groningen gas field covers around 900 km<sup>2</sup> with 20 different gas extraction sites. Some municipalities, such as Loppersum, have been experiencing more frequent and stronger tremors than others (van der Voort & Vanclay, 2015). Despite growing unrest among the inhabitants of the region, it took over a decade before the first official reports tentatively linked the earthquakes to gas extraction (de Crook, Dost, & Haak, 1998), and the causal connection between the two has only recently been acknowledged (Dost & Kraaijpoel, 2013). While earlier reports predicted only minor tremors resulting from gas extraction (de Crook, Dost, & Haak, 1995), subsequent research suggested a gradual increase in the expected maximum magnitude of the earthquakes to 4.1 degrees on the Richter scale (de Crook, Dost, & Haak, 1998; Dost & Kraaijpoel, 2013; Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij, 2013; SodM, 2016). Recent reports suggest that the earthquakes do not only pose substantive financial strain on the local population because of property damages, but they are also associated with increased stress and health problems (Postmes et al., 2018; van der Voort &

Vanclay, 2015). Thus, the affected population may be motivated to join a social movement organization in order to seek short term relief and improve their individual situation, nevertheless they may also want to pursue a long-term collective solution that would secure better outcomes for the whole region.

The goals that people want to achieve through collective action are likely to be contingent on the type of grievance they want to address, but also on the social and political context (Jennings & Andersen, 2003; Simmons, 2014). Whereas suddenly imposed grievances (Walsh, 1981) might evoke swift mobilization driven by anger or outrage, mobilization as a result of enduring disadvantage depends on a more complex set of factors involving multiple actors, organizations, and motivations (e.g., Klandermans, 1997; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Subašić, Reynolds, & Turner, 2008). The context of our study contains elements of both; after years of smaller tremors, one relatively strong earthquake in 2012 has generated substantial fear and anger in the local community, and has finally led the government and the gas company to acknowledge the severity of the situation (Dost & Kraaijpoel, 2013). Due to continued gas extraction however, the situation has not improved and the community was pulled into a complicated power struggle between local and national government, businesses, and the general public.

Despite the strain posed by the earthquakes, collective action to address the precarious situation in the province has been scarce. The main social movement organization representing citizens in the affected area is the Groninger Bodembeweging (GBB), founded in 2009, which attracted the membership of about 1,500 people (Groninger Bodembeweging, 2015) out of the affected population of 400,000 people. The GBB mostly acts as an intermediary, representing affected citizens in negotiations with local and national government, and the oil and gas company NAM. The goals of this organization are diverse and mostly aimed at improving the wellbeing of citizens and securing financial compensation for those affected. A smaller organization, Schokkend Groningen, tried to gain some media attention for the region by engaging in more risky actions like occupying gas-extraction sites with a handful of people. However, both groups have been struggling to obtain larger support within the community. In fact, the relatively low levels of collective mobilization are surprising considering the extent of the consequences of the earthquakes, with over 12,000 citizens claiming financial compensation for damages annually from the NAM (NAMplatform, 2014). This could suggest that the goals of the social movement organizations and the population they aim to represent do not entirely match.

## Goals and Movement Mobilization

Goals are consciously intended end-states of an action (Locke, 1996; Ryan, 1970) that guide human behavior (Higgins, 1997). Research on goal setting theory has consistently shown that setting difficult goals leads to higher performance for both individuals (Locke & Latham, 1990) and groups (Kleingeld, van Mierlo, & Arends, 2011). Among participants in collective action, Hornsey et al. (2006) demonstrated that goals reflecting different inter- and intragroup concerns, such as influencing policy-makers and third parties, building an oppositional movement, and expressing individual values were important predictors of participation in future protests. Activists with experience in protest have however been found to differ from those who have never participated, with the latter facing greater barriers of engaging in protest for the first time (Verhulst & Walgrave, 2009). Importantly, Hornsey et al. (2006) did not investigate which goals are endorsed by, or may appeal to those members of disadvantaged groups who have not yet taken part in collective action. Our study aims to fill that gap.

According to social psychological theories of social change, when facing a situation of collective disadvantage, people can either engage in individual or collective coping strategies. Engaging in individual coping strategies may lead to the betterment of one's own status; however, this will not have an effect on intergroup power relations

(Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In contrast, collective coping strategies may improve the position of the group as a whole, while also (in)directly benefiting the individual (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). Social identity theory suggests that people are most likely to engage in individual efforts first, and only engage in collective strategies when they cannot improve their disadvantaged position by leaving the group individually (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Therefore, the goals that could motivate people to join a social movement organization may encompass both individual and collective concerns at the same time.

In the context of earthquakes in the province of Groningen, the affected community might strive for various short and long-term solutions. With the earthquakes causing damages to houses for example, ensuring better financial compensation for damages represents an important goal. Although many people have reported damages, this goal arises mostly out of individual concerns (i.e., damage to one's household), and it represents only a short-term and temporary improvement of one's individual status. Because the intensity and frequency of the earthquakes seems to be increasing over the years (van der Voort & Vanclay, 2015), individual financial compensation may not represent a long-term solution that changes the situation structurally and benefits all inhabitants of the affected region, including those who do not yet have property damages. One of the proposed long-term solutions that can benefit all inhabitants of the region would be to reduce or stop the gas extraction that is causing the earthquakes (SodM, 2016). In line with previous research, we expect that such a collective goal should be more predictive of intention to join a movement (Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012; van Zomeren et al., 2004; Walsh, 1981).

Furthermore, research on goal attainment (Gollwitzer, 1999; Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006; Polletta & Jasper, 2001) differentiates between final or outcome goals and means to achieve these outcome goals. In the context of collective action, the activists may seek the support of third parties or policy-makers (i.e., means) to help them achieve better status for their group (i.e., outcome goal). Simon and Klandermans (2001) conceptualized collective action not only as a power struggle between two parties with competing interest, but they also argued that gaining third-party support is crucial in this dynamic. Moreover, Hornsey et al. (2006) showed that goals such as influencing third parties and policy-makers play an important role in enduring engagement in collective action.

In the context of gas-extraction induced earthquakes, the inhabitants of Groningen need to gain wider support from Dutch citizens in general, but also the support of the government and policy-makers in order to ensure better financial compensation or reduce gas extraction. Although this can be done individually, for example by writing letters to politicians, exerting influence on the authority and/or third parties is more likely to be achieved through a collective endeavor (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Thus, our expectation is that endorsing these types of goals should also be predictive of individuals' motivation to join a social movement, because they are crucial for achieving the desired individual and collective outcomes.

## Shared Opinion and Severity Perceptions

The literature on environmental and technological hazards (e.g., social contamination, fracking, or nuclear plant accidents) suggests that the affected population responds to collective stress situations by engaging in an assessment of severity and the associated risks (van der Pligt & de Boer, 1991). This process involves the evaluation of available information communicated by the authorities, as well as the comparison between one's individual stance on the issue and the perceptions of relevant others (van der Pligt & de Boer, 1991). Van der Pligt and de Boer (1991) suggest that people engage in social comparisons to reassess their priorities and needs. More impor-

tantly, through social comparison, individuals can evaluate whether the other members of their group share their opinion or not.

Previous research on environmental risks has not specified to whom people compare themselves in assessing risk, nor which effects these social comparisons might have on different collective action goals. In line with the work on politicized collective identity (Simon & Klandermans, 2001), two different types of social comparisons are relevant for members of disadvantaged groups. First, one can compare oneself to those who share the disadvantage to assess whether others who are affected see the situation as equally dangerous and severe. Comparing oneself to other members of the disadvantaged group can foster a sense of shared grievances around which a strong and unified group can be formed to fight the disadvantage (e.g., Bliuc, McGarty, Reynolds, & Muntele, 2007; Simon & Klandermans, 2001; van Zomeren & Iyer, 2009). Second, members of the disadvantaged group can also compare themselves to those who are not affected (i.e., third parties). This social comparison is important because it can increase feelings of relative deprivation and entitlement (Runciman, 1966; Smith et al., 2012), especially if the third parties are seen as underestimating the severity of the situation.

However, if an individual perceives the situation as less serious and urgent in contrast to the relevant others, he or she may be less likely to engage in a collective action. System justification theory suggests that individuals sometimes justify the current status quo in order to reduce feelings of uncertainty (e.g., Jost & Hunyady, 2005), which may lead them to underestimate the severity of the situation. Importantly, research on natural hazards and disasters (e.g., floods, natural earthquakes) shows that underestimating risks has grave consequences because people fail to adequately prepare for a potential disaster (Paton, 2003; Paton, Smith, & Johnston, 2000). We expect that people engage in comparisons of risks with both those who share their situation and those who do not. In line with system justification theory and prior work on environmental hazards, both comparisons may reduce people's motivation to engage in actions if they perceive the situation as less severe than others. However, we explore whether these two comparisons could discourage people from joining a movement by changing the importance of different goals. Perceiving the situation as less serious than one's community may signal that collective solutions to the disadvantaged situation are not necessary. In other words, those who underestimate the severity in contrast to their fellow disadvantaged group members may attach less importance to collective outcome goals. On the other hand, those who underestimate the severity in contrast to unaffected third parties may feel less entitled to be compensated. Thus, they might attach less importance to securing better individual outcomes. Lastly, we expect both comparisons to motivate the endorsement of means to attain these goals.

In sum, in the current research we examine the mobilizing potential of different types of goals for those not previously mobilized by a social movement organization. We do so in the context of gas-extraction induced earthquakes in the province of Groningen, an environmental disaster which has only recently gained recognition by authorities (Dost & Kraaijpoel, 2013), and where the affected population did not engage in collective action on a large scale prior to our data collection. We differentiate between outcome goals that reflect desired end-states (i.e., individual financial compensation or the collective goal of reduced gas extraction) and means to achieve these goals (i.e., informing the wider public and influencing policy-makers). We expect collective goals and means towards goals to have greater motivating power for people to join a social movement organization. Finally, we examine whether and how perceptions of shared opinions with the local community or third parties motivate the endorsement of different goals and the intention to join a movement.

## Method

### Participants

351 inhabitants of the province of Groningen took part in a larger project on the effects of gas-induced earthquakes (for more details about the sampling procedure see [Kutlaca, van Zomeren, & Epstude, 2017](#)). The survey was carried out by six research assistants in nine towns of similar size situated in different parts of the province, in order to reach both people who were strongly and weakly affected by the earthquakes. The research assistants handed out approximately 50 surveys per town, with a maximum of one survey per household. The person who opened the door was asked to fill out the survey, except in the case of a minor younger than 16<sup>i</sup>. The data was collected during November 2013, almost one year after the reports explicitly linking gas extraction to the earthquakes were published ([Dost & Kraaijpoel, 2013](#)). We excluded four questionnaires from the analyses because they were filled out by two people, and one survey because it arrived long after the data collection was finished. The average age of the participants was 51.17 ( $SD = 15.11$ ) and 53.3% were women (5.5% of the sample did not fill out the demographic questions).<sup>ii</sup> 60% of the sample completed vocational education or had lower levels of education and lived in a household with an average income between 2000-3000 Euros per month. The vast majority of the participants owned the house they lived in (71.8%), and 41.5% of the sample included in the analyses reported having damages due to the earthquakes. Participants received a small gift as a token of appreciation for their participation.

### Measures

#### Movement Membership

First, we checked whether our participants were already members of any of the social movement organizations active at the moment of the data collection (for exact items, please see the [Supplementary Materials](#)). The participants could choose between the largest social movement organization—the *Groninger Bodem Beweging*—and the much smaller and newly established organization *Schokkend Groningen*, specify another movement, or indicate that they did not belong to any movement. Next, we asked the participants how likely it was that they would join a social movement organization (1- *Not at all likely* to 5 - *Very likely*), and to specify which organization they might join.

#### Movement Goals

The participants were asked to think about how important different goals should be for a social movement organization (1- *Not at all important* to 5 - *Very important*). We included two different outcome goals pertaining to the improvement of participants' individual situation (i.e., improving individual financial compensation) or collective situation (i.e., reducing and stopping gas extraction<sup>iii</sup>,  $r[292] = .70$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Additionally, we asked whether two means goals, i.e., informing third parties and influencing the policy-makers, were also relevant. The participants could also write down additional goals in an open-ended question.

#### Shared Opinion

In order to investigate how people assessed the severity of the situation, we asked them to compare their views to the views of two relevant groups: their affected community (i.e., ingroup) and the rest of the Dutch society (i.e., third party). More specifically, the participants were asked to indicate to what extent other members of their community shared their opinion about the earthquakes (1- *They see it as less severe than I do*, 3- *They see it as*

equally severe or 5- They see it as more severe than I do). We also asked participants to indicate how similar the opinion of those not affected by the earthquakes (i.e., the rest of the Netherlands) is to their views. Thus, higher scores on both items indicated that people underestimate or perceive the situation as less severe in contrast to the relevant group.

### Socio-Demographic Background

At the end of the survey, participants answered questions about their socio-demographics: age, gender, average monthly household income, highest obtained education level, whether they owned the house they lived in, and whether their home was damaged due to the earthquakes.

## Results

### Descriptive Analyses

Out of 336 people who responded to the question about membership in a movement, a large majority (93%) indicated they were not a member of any organization. Importantly, the members and non-members did not differ in their perceptions of importance of goals, with the exception that members attached greater importance to the goal of influencing policy-makers than non-members (see Table 1). Those who were already in an organization were more eager to become a member of another organization and they thought that the rest of the country was even less aware of the severity of the earthquake situation. Below we report the analyses on those who were not members of a social movement organization, however the key findings remained the same when we analyzed the full sample (see Supplementary Materials).

Table 1

Comparison Between Members and Non-Members of Social Movement Organizations

Variable	Membership in a social movement organization				<i>t(df)</i>	<i>p</i>
	Non-members ( <i>n</i> = 312)		Members ( <i>n</i> = 24)			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Shared opinion with community	3.33	0.56	3.13	0.61	1.76 (328)	.080
Shared opinion with the rest of the country	1.99	0.89	1.46	0.51	2.91 (330)	.004
Intention to join a movement	2.41	0.85	3.07	0.96	-2.93 (324)	.004
<b>Goals</b>						
Financial compensation	4.19	0.85	4.52	0.59	-1.85 (322)	.065
Reducing/stopping gas extraction	3.36	1.19	3.70	1.07	-1.30 (321)	.193
Inform third parties	4.04	1.04	3.96	1.30	0.35 (319)	.726
Influence policy-makers	4.26	0.86	4.74	0.54	-2.60 (317)	.010

Non-members were not very motivated to join any organization ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ), with the average score being well below the scale mean point of 3,  $t(310) = -12.37$ ,  $p < .001$ , and a large majority did not specify which movement they would consider joining. Among those who did, the *Groninger Bodem Beweging* as the largest social movement organization was the most popular (see Table 2). Among non-members, individual financial

compensation was deemed a more important goal than reducing the gas extraction, although these two goals were positively correlated  $r(299) = .32, p < .001$ . In line with the findings in Hornsey et al. (2006), goals reflecting intergroup concerns, e.g., informing others and influencing policy-makers, were also highly endorsed. Moreover, these two goals were positively related to both individual and collective outcome goals (see Table 3), suggesting that they represent the relevant means to achieve the desired outcomes. We also checked whether the participants mentioned additional goals that we did not cover. Only 21 (6.7%) of the non-members responded to the open-ended question, mainly elaborating on whether reducing gas extraction is feasible or not, and how a movement can influence policy-makers or third parties. One participant mentioned investing in alternative green energy as a relevant goal. Thus, overall we are confident that our choice of goals captured the most salient goals at the time of data collection.

Table 2

*Preferred Social Movement Organization in the Province of Groningen for Current Non-Members*

Social Movement Preference	Number	%
Did not specify	245	78.50%
<i>Groninger Bodem Beweging</i>	50	16.00%
<i>Schokkend Groningen</i>	9	2.90%
<i>Groninger Bodem Beweging and Schokkend Groningen</i>	5	1.60%
Another movement	3	1.00%

Table 3

*Correlations Between Goals, Shared Opinions, and Intention to Join a Social Movement Organization Among Non-Members*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Intention to join a movement						
2. Financial compensation	.26**					
3. Reducing/stopping gas extraction	.32**	.32**				
4. Inform third parties	.30**	.35**	.41**			
5. Influence policy-makers	.39**	.42**	.37**	.46**		
6. Shared opinion with community	-.23**	-.03	-.15*	-.13*	-.12*	
7. Shared opinion with third parties	-.25**	-.17**	-.08	-.1	-.27**	.21**

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

People slightly underestimated the severity of the situation in comparison to their local community; the average response was significantly different from the scale mean point of 3,  $t(306) = 10.50, p < .001$ . Closer inspection of the variable revealed that the participants almost exclusively indicated one of two options: They felt that the others have the same perspective (64.1%) or that the others see the situation as more severe (31.7%). Less than 5% of the sample chose other options. In contrast, our participants perceived the situation as more serious in contrast to the people who are not affected by the earthquakes. The average score differed significantly from the scale midpoint  $t(307) = -19.90, p < .001$ . In other words, they felt that the rest of the country seriously underestimated the severity of the situation in the affected region.

## Testing the Mobilizing Power of Goals

First, we examined whether perceptions of shared opinions with the community and third parties were related to the importance people attach to different goals (see Table 4). In line with our expectations, we found that perceptions of shared opinions with the community negatively predicted the importance attached to the collective goal of reducing gas extraction, meaning that underestimating the risk vis-à-vis other affected citizens was related to decreased endorsement of the collective goal. The perception of shared opinions with third parties negatively predicted the importance of the financial goal. In other words, underestimation of the severity compared to the unaffected citizens predicted less support for seeking financial compensation. Moreover, the two variables predicted the importance attached to informing third parties and policy-makers.

Table 4

*Regression Analysis: The Importance of Different Goals Among Non-Members as a Function of Shared Opinions*

Variable	Financial goal <sup>a</sup>			Reducing gas extraction <sup>b</sup>			Informing the country <sup>c</sup>			Influencing policy-makers <sup>d</sup>		
	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Shared opinion with community	-.00	-0.02	.984	-.13	-2.27	.024	.12	-1.97	.05	-.08	-1.30	.195
Shared opinion with third party	-.16	-2.67	.008	-.06	-0.96	.34	-.07	-1.21	.23	-.25	-4.37	< .001

<sup>a</sup> $F(2, 291) = 3.67; p = .027; R^2 = .025.$

<sup>b</sup> $F(2, 290) = 3.60; p = .029; R^2 = .024.$

<sup>c</sup> $F(2, 288) = 3.26, p = .04, R^2 = .022.$

<sup>d</sup> $F(2, 286) = 11.88; p < .001; R^2 = .08.$

Next, we ran a stepwise regression analysis to test whether different goals and perceptions of shared opinions with the affected community and third party motivate intentions to join a movement (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Regression Analysis: Goals and Shared Opinion as Predictors of Intention to Join a Movement.*

Variable	Step 1 <sup>a</sup>			Step 2 <sup>b</sup>		
	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Shared opinion with community	-.20	-3.56	< .001	-.15	-2.84	.005
Shared opinion with third party	-.22	-3.84	< .001	-.14	-2.53	.012
Financial compensation				.06	0.95	.345
Reducing/stopping gas extraction				.16	2.78	.006
Inform third parties				.07	1.16	.245
Influence policy-makers				.21	3.33	.001

<sup>a</sup> $F(2, 283) = 16.84; p < .001; R^2 = .11.$

<sup>b</sup> $F(6, 279) = 14.38; p < .001; R^2 = .24; R^2\text{change} = .13; F\text{change} (4, 279) = 11.85; p < .001.$

The additional analysis controlling for socio-demographic variables can be found in the [Supplementary Materials](#). First, perceptions of shared opinions with the community and the rest of society predicted lower intentions to join a movement. Second, supporting our assumptions about the importance of collective goals, reducing gas extraction and influencing policy-makers predicted the intention to join a movement. The financial goal, on the other hand, did not contribute to the model, nor did informing third parties. We ran a sensitivity power analysis in G\*power

(Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) to check the effect size our study was able to detect with the following parameters: 6 predictors, alpha level set at .05, power .80, and sample size of 286. The analysis yielded an effect size  $f^2 = .05$  ( $\approx$  to  $R^2 = .05$ ), non-centrality parameter  $\lambda = 13.93$ , and a critical  $F$ -value = 2.13.

Finally, we ran a path analysis in Mplus (version 7.4) to examine whether the shared opinions predicted the intention to join a movement both directly and indirectly via two goals (i.e., reducing gas extraction and influencing policy-makers). We allowed the two shared opinion variables as well as the two goals to co-vary with each other. The model fitted the data well (see Figure 1): The chi square test for model fit was not significant  $\chi^2(2) = 2.66$ ,  $p = .265$ , and fit indices indicated a good fit CFI = 0.99, RMSEA = .03, 90% CI [.00, .12], SRMR = .03. The indirect effect of shared opinion with the community through the collective goal of reducing/stopping gas extraction was only marginally significant  $B = -0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p = .065$  (see Table 6). The second indirect effect of shared opinion with the rest of the country through influencing policy-makers was significant  $B = -0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $p = .001$  (see Table 6). We also tested a reverse model, where the shared opinions acted as mediators and goals as predictors. This model also showed good fit  $\chi^2(2) = 2.04$ ,  $p = .36$ , CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .01, 90% CI [.00, .11], SRMR = .02. However, the initial model fits better with prior theoretical work on social change, which proposes that perceptions of shared grievances are a more distant predictor of engagement in collective action (Simon & Klandermans, 2001; van Zomeren et al., 2008).

Table 6

*Path Analysis: Shared Opinions (SO), Goals, and Intention to Join a Social Movement Organization*

Effects	Unstandardized coefficients (SE)	$p$
<b>Covariances</b>		
Shared opinion community - third party	0.11 (0.03)	< .001
Reduce/stop gas extraction - influence policy-makers	0.35 (0.06)	< .001
<b>Direct effects</b>		
SO Community → Reduce/stop gas extraction	-0.25 (0.12)	.030
SO Third party → Influence policy-makers	-0.24 (0.05)	< .001
SO Community → Intention to join a movement	-0.22 (0.08)	.006
SO Third party → Intention to join a movement	-0.14 (0.05)	.007
Reduce/stop gas extraction → Intention to join a movement	0.13 (0.04)	.001
Influence policy-makers → Intention to join a movement	0.26 (0.06)	< .001
<b>Indirect effects</b>		
SO Community → Intention to join a movement (via Reduce/stop gas extraction)	-0.03 (0.02)	.065
SO Third party → Intention to join a movement (via Influence policy-makers)	-0.06 (0.02)	.001

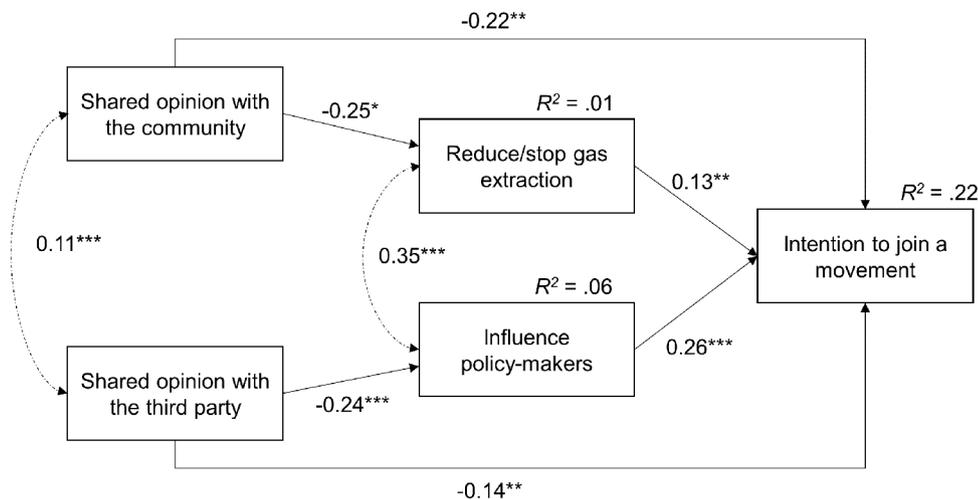


Figure 1. Results of path analysis. Single-headed arrows refer to significant paths. Double-headed arrows refer to correlations between the variables.

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

## Discussion

What do people want to achieve by joining a social movement organization? In this study we integrated insights from research on goal attainment (Gollwitzer, 1999), collective action, and movement mobilization (Hornsey et al., 2006; van Zomeren et al., 2004) to examine the motivating role of goals and perceptions of shared opinions in movement mobilization. We found that different outcome- and means to achieve goals stemmed from an individual's assessment of risk in comparison to two relevant groups: their affected community and an unaffected third party. More specifically, those who underestimated the severity of the situation in contrast to their fellow ingroup members attached less importance to achieving a collective solution to the situation (i.e., reducing/stopping gas extraction) and gaining greater societal support. This fits with previous research on risk assessment and protest against technological hazards (van der Pligt & de Boer, 1991). Moreover, those who underestimated the severity of the earthquakes in contrast to those who are not affected felt less entitled to seek better personal outcomes (i.e., improving individual financial compensation) or, interestingly, push for a movement to renegotiate the situation with policy-makers. Furthermore, in line with our hypothesis, people highly endorsed both individual and collective outcome goals, but only the latter was predictive of their intentions to join a social movement organization. Finally, we found that people's underestimation of risk affected their intention to join a movement both directly and indirectly by affecting the importance attached to the collective outcome goal and means goal of influencing policy-makers. Taken together, the findings suggest that there are two different routes that could motivate disadvantaged citizens to join a social movement organization. On the one hand, emphasizing the shared grievances with their close community might motivate people to strive for a collective solution, which would benefit all that are affected in the long run. On the other hand, increasing the sense of entitlement by focusing on the neglect and indifference of unaffected others might propel people to join in order to collectively exert influence on power holders.

## Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study extends previous research on movement mobilization in three important ways. First, we expand previous findings by examining the goals of those who have not yet been mobilized by a movement. Protest survey data shows that first-time protesters differ from experienced ones (Verhulst & Walgrave, 2009) or those who are occasional protesters (Saunders, Grasso, Olcese, Rainsford, & Rootes, 2012) in terms of the strength of emotions, but also their biographical availability. First-time protesters face bigger obstacles to participation because they need to overcome the barrier of having sufficient time and resources to participate (Verhulst & Walgrave, 2009). Our findings suggest that potential followers resemble inexperienced protesters to the extent that they are mostly concerned with their individual interests and improving their own situation. In other words, potential followers need to overcome the tendency to seek short-term improvements to their situation, but rather focus their strength on finding a long-term resolution. We doubt that successful mobilization can be achieved if movements would allude too much to these individual interests. Instead, focusing on articulating collective outcomes seems to be a more promising route to motivate those who are affected but not yet mobilized.

Furthermore, we showed how comparisons to relevant others play an important role in intentions to act collectively. Comparisons with other affected group members provides affected individuals with important information about the presence (or absence) of a shared view of the potentially disastrous situation (van der Pligt & de Boer, 1991) and may foster a sense of urgency to seek a collective solution (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). A strong and unified community is also an important source of emotional and instrumental support to those affected by injustice (van Zomeren et al., 2004). Downplaying the risks or disagreeing with the collective views may help an individual cope with uncertainty (Jost & Hunyady, 2005) or provide a feeling of relative gratification compared to others who are worse off (e.g., Leach, Snider, & Iyer, 2002; Vanneman & Pettigrew, 1972). However, these types of social comparisons may also increase distance to the community, which could have negative social consequences for people and render them particularly vulnerable in case of a next disaster. In contrast, we believe that the comparison with unaffected others facilitates the awareness that one is indeed worse off than those who are unaffected. The realization that one is being deprived of important outcomes may increase feelings of entitlement and the likelihood of participating in collective action (Smith et al., 2012; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Importantly, we contribute to this literature by showing that this perception can motivate people to enter the power struggle (Simon & Klandermans, 2001) by joining a social movement organization, but mainly through the instrumental means goals of exerting influence on policy-makers. Whereas we expected that the means goal of informing others could also be a response to the lack of acknowledgement from third parties, we did not find this relation. This could signal that in the context of gas-extraction induced earthquakes, the lack of acknowledgement from third parties does not stem from a lack of knowledge about the situation, and that concrete outcomes from power holders after years of neglect are deemed more important than trying to convince the general public. In other contexts with less public awareness of certain issues, shared opinions with third parties could, however, spur movement mobilization with the goal of informing others.

Third, our study provides a way to connect the micro level —individual goals, beliefs, and values— with the aims of social movement organizations, i.e., the meso level (Ketelaars, Walgrave, & Wouters, 2014; Snow et al., 1986). Previous research on movement mobilization assumed that movements can increase their mobilization potential by communicating messages that align with potential members' views (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow et al., 1986), but failed to specify which psychological mechanism underlies this process (Kutlaca, van Zomeren, & Epstude, 2016; McCammon, 2012; Simmons, 2014). Communicating, and of course working towards, collective long-term

solutions, emphasizing collectively shared grievances, and the sense of entitlement through comparisons with those who are affected versus those who are not affected can be fruitful ways to increase the movement's mobilization potential. Furthermore, our findings may further clarify the puzzling absence of collective action in the province of Groningen that should theoretically be a fruitful ground for a social movement to gain substantial following (van Zomeren et al., 2008). One possible reason for inactivity in Groningen is that the existing movements such as the *Groninger Bodem Beweging* focused too strongly on securing financial compensation, something that could be achieved individually by claiming damages from the gas company. Moreover, seeking financial compensation would not provide any relief to those whose damages are not only material, but also psychological. A recent study in the region showed that people reported continued safety and health concerns despite the improved individual financial compensation over the last three years, since the risk of a stronger earthquake with potentially more devastating consequences remains high due to continued gas extraction (Postmes et al., 2018). Thus, social movement organizations should focus on individual and especially short-term concerns only in conjunction with addressing collective needs, otherwise they run the risk of losing out on many more potential followers.

### Limitations and Directions for Future Research

An important limitation of this study is that the cross-sectional design cannot capture how the goals develop and possibly change as potential followers pass through different stages of mobilization (Klandermans, 1984). Previous research suggests that social identities can change through intergroup interactions (Drury & Reicher, 2000), and when the content of these identities becomes more politicized, the likelihood of engagement in political action increases (Turner-Zwinkels, van Zomeren, & Postmes, 2015). Similarly, the goals of experienced activists, first time protesters and potential followers can change as people become more politicized. For potential followers who are in the early stages of the mobilization process, the most important thing is to crystalize which collective (and possibly individual) goals should be achieved. Second, when people come to share the same ground and identify strongly with the goals, establishing important means may become more important for movements to keep the motivation high. Lastly, for long-term participation another goal may become the main priority, namely building, sustaining and expanding the movement. Future research should use a longitudinal design and include both activists and potential followers to clarify these processes.

Furthermore, the context of gas-extraction induced earthquakes is interesting for the study of movement mobilization, however its unique characteristics make it difficult to generalize in every respect to other contexts such as climate change activism or situations that are characterized by structural disadvantage (e.g., gender or race inequalities). Nonetheless, we believe that our differentiation between individual and collective goals on the one hand, and outcome- versus means goals on the other hand may help explain why social movements and their potential followers may not always share a common ground. For example, the movements and their followers may endorse the same outcomes but disagree about the means to achieve them (e.g., Klandermans & Oegema, 1987; Stuart, Thomas, & Donaghue, 2018). This sometimes occurs with less normative feminist movements (e.g., Becker & Barreto, 2014) where many women may not feel comfortable with tactics involving violence or explicit nudity to raise awareness about gender inequality. It would be interesting to investigate when the agreement on either the outcomes or the means is more important for participation in collective action.

To conclude, we believe that both sociological and social psychological work on social change can benefit from looking more closely at what people want to achieve by engaging in a collective struggle. We think that our classification of individual versus collective goals, and means- versus outcome goals may be a good starting point to

better operationalize and capture the (mis)match between activists and their (potential) followers. Additionally, gaining more insight into this process at the individual level is important in understanding the failure or the success of social movement mobilization.

## Notes

i) According to the ethics committee of the University of Groningen, a person younger than 16 years cannot take part without a parental consent.

ii) 5.5% of the sample did not fill out the demographic question. For more details about the sample and sampling procedure see Kutlaca, van Zomeren, and Epstude (2017).

iii) We differentiated between reducing and stopping the gas extraction altogether, since the latter option was portrayed by both the government and the gas company as a large financial loss for the country. Our participants indeed leaned towards reducing ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ), rather than stopping completely ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ), however the results remained the same irrespective of using single item reduction or the combined two goals.

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## Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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## Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

## Supplementary Materials

The full questions and scales we used to measure shared opinions, membership of a social movement, intentions to join a social movement, and the different goals can be found in the Supplementary Materials (Appendix A). The results from the analyses that we conducted including the members of a social movement and controlling for background variables are presented in the Supplementary Materials (Appendix B).

## Index of Supplementary Materials

van Bezouw, M. J., & Kutlaca, M. (2019). *Supplementary materials to "What do we want? Examining the motivating role of goals in social movement mobilization"*. PsychOpen. <https://doi.org/10.23668/psycharchives.2350>

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