

Activism and awareness: Resistance, cognitive activation, and ‘seeing’ untouchability among 98,316 Dalits

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Abstract

There are a great number of outcomes for activism that are examined in the literature, but we know relatively little about how this behavior influences perceptions of the phenomena being challenged. It is possible that when one challenges some phenomenon, one begins to ‘see’ it more. Alternatively, activism might focus awareness on only certain manifestations of the problem of interest. The type of activism should matter here. We anticipate that only forms of resistance that increase exposure to oppression/oppressors and/or other challengers are likely to increase the number of discriminatory actions identified. Especially important here is nonviolent direct action because of the significant amount of training and interaction among activists that is facilitated by such activities as well as the extensive amount of exposure that nonviolence generally subjects participants to. Utilizing a unique database of 98,316 untouchables (or Dalits) from 1,589 rural villages in Gujarat, India, we find support for our argument. Specifically, Dalits who **earlier** engaged in nonviolent action which increased *either* exposure to oppression/oppressors *or* exposure to other activists but not both, identified a higher number of discriminatory events. In short, some activism does activate some awareness. This has implications for dissident commitment, radicalization, and post-conflict political processes.

Keywords

activism, awareness resistance, cognitive activation, Gujarat, India, untouchability

Judging from his written work, speeches, and interviews, Martin Macwan, an anti-caste discrimination activist based in Ahmedabad, India for approximately 35 years, sees untouchability everywhere. By untouchability we refer to the caste-specific discriminatory practice directed against Dalits that dates back approximately 3,000 years (Manu, 1500 BCE; Ambedkar, 1946; Singh, 1993). Upon reflection, it is easy to understand Macwan’s heightened awareness and sensitivity. For the bulk of his life, he has attended meetings and protests, signed petitions, compiled data, and been involved in lawsuits on the topic. Other members of the organization he is a member of – the *Navsarjan Trust* – are of a similar

opinion, especially the ‘seasoned’ activists. For those involved with this group it is difficult to go a day without some recollection of a prior instance of untouchability being discussed by one of the members, someone coming to the organization to issue a complaint about something being done to them or the emergence of some new crisis involving the topic.

The phenomenon addressed above is not specific to Macwan, Navsarjan or those that come in contact with

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them. Indeed, within the Indian context perhaps one of the most famous examples concerns Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi who, after interacting with anti-Indian discrimination activists in South Africa, realized that he needed to return to India to address British anti-Indian discriminatory behavior. Hearing Gandhi speak, one is immediately made aware of the myriad of abuses that Indians were subject to. Again, this makes sense. Over a very short but intensive period he engaged in working groups, rallies, speeches, and protests – all on the subject of Indian persecution and what could be done to improve the situation. Similar stories are told of those who engaged in struggles for women's suffrage throughout the globe, the 'Freedom Rides' in the USA during the 1960s, the anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa, and the recent Arab Spring. Once one is exposed to some form of discrimination through protest, it appears that awareness of discrimination grows afterward and one identifies it repeatedly – something we refer to as 'cognitive activation'.

Guided by the idea above, in this article, we are interested in whether activism activates awareness of injustice – not with those professionally involved with social movements but within the general population who may have participated in a protest, petition or meeting. In a sense, we are curious to see if participation in activism creates someone with the awareness of a Macwan, Gandhi, Mother Teresa or Lucy Stone. At present, we do not know much about this because most attention in the literature is focused elsewhere. For example, there is work about how social movement activism is directed towards changing national policy, enacting state laws or acquiring raises (McVeigh, Welch & Bjarnason, 2003; Soule & Olzak, 2004; Luders, 2006) and research about the impact of activism on subsequent participation in organizational events, the biographical availability of activists or specific life-course trajectories (for reviews see McAdam, 1999; Giugni, 2004). Some concepts move us in the right direction – 'framing' (Snow et al., 1986), 'cognitive liberation' (McAdam, 1982), and 'oppositional consciousness' (Mansbridge, 2001) – but each of these is limited in different ways because they are more concerned with involving people in activism than with addressing how activism influences anyone. There is some public opinion work that attempts to identify how activism influences mass attitudes (Opp & Roehl, 1990) but this work is generally concerned with whether or not individuals are more or less willing to join social movements after activism. Additionally, almost all the work identified above is focused on the USA or the West in general, ignoring the majority of the earth's population.

We maintain that neglect of cognitive activation is unfortunate because it could shed some much-needed light onto such topics as individuals joining social movements, participating in these organizations or radicalizing their role. For example, some research has found that exposure to repression and discrimination is extremely important for subsequent mobilization, but within this work there is a presumption that exposed individuals would be equally likely to recognize (or 'see') relevant coercive and/or discriminatory behavior, taking action that is deemed appropriate. However, if certain types of activism make some individuals more or less aware of the problem being confronted compared to others, then this variation might be helpful in understanding how individuals feel about the overall situation/condition that they live within, as well as for understanding who joins and persists in dissident behavior over time. The latter issue is the subject of other work. For now, we are interested in the impact of activism on awareness of discrimination.

Because of existing limitations with current literature, we introduce the concept of cognitive activation where experience of resistance against oppressive behavior (such as untouchability) prompts individuals to recognize related phenomena in greater amounts in the future. What becomes immediately noteworthy for us is the fact that we do not expect the impact of activism to be comparable across forms. We distinguish between types of contentious activities along two dimensions – exposure to others involved with contentious action and exposure to (those engaged in) discrimination. We expect those engaged in activities that have high exposure to activists and oppressors/oppression will identify greater numbers of discriminatory activities.

While we will pay attention to several forms of contention within the current study, nonviolence is viewed as especially important. Conceptually and tactically, this type of activism is significant because it attempts to change activists (as well as perpetrators) through the structured nature of the engagement. Because of this, nonviolence likely increases the degree of awareness regarding what those who engage in oppression/discrimination have done. Nonviolence is particularly significant in the Indian case we explore because there are very clear approaches to this tactic rooted in Gandhian principles of Satyagraha and Ambedkarian principles of Buddhism that have influenced precisely how post-independence Indians express discontent (Fitzgerald, 2007).

Within the current research, we present the results of a three-year research effort (2005–08) of untouchability and its resistance in 1,589 villages of Gujarat, which yielded responses from 98,316 individuals (Macwan

et al., 2010). Addressing diverse limitations with existing work, we focus on how activism influences those who challenge caste discrimination with a census of all those who could have potentially taken part. From our analyses, we find support for the general expectation that activism leads to greater awareness about discrimination. In particular, we find that participation in meetings, boycotts, sit-ins, and changing faith significantly increases the number of untouchability practices that individuals identify. Interestingly, we find that it is not exposure to other activists *and* oppressors that leads to greater awareness, but only one or the other.

Below, we outline what we currently know about activism as it relates to what encourages it, as well as what outcomes normally emerge when it takes place. Regarding the latter, we specifically highlight efforts to understand how individuals might be impacted by their experiences of dissent. The next section introduces our concept of cognitive activation and how different types of activism will influence it. Following this, we discuss what untouchability is (as practiced in India) and how this has been challenged over time. We then discuss the data and research design and an overview of our empirical findings. The conclusion identifies the implications of our work as well as what should be done in the future to follow up on the present examination.

Activism: Inputs and outcomes

Essentially, one can view much of the research in contentious politics and social movements in three ways. There are those who are interested in the activities that challengers engage in for their own sake – as tactics or repertoire construction (Tilly, 2006). There are those who are interested in what factors increase or decrease the likelihood that specific actions will be taken. This is the work concerned with political opportunity structure (McAdam, 1982; Kitschelt, 1986), mobilizing structure (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), and cultural frames (McCammon, 2012). Finally, there are those who are interested in the after-effects or outcomes of activism (King, Dahlin & Cornwall, 2005; Soule & Olzak, 2004). Our research is broadly concerned with the third area of study and thus we will focus attention on the work that is most relevant, but it is useful to consider some of the research generated in the second area as it has made some progress with understanding individual participants as well as organizational-level dynamics.

In reference to social movement outcomes, the situation has changed a great deal from, say, 20 years ago when such studies were relatively rare. Indeed, this has

become something of a high interest area. Unfortunately, attention has been somewhat imbalanced. As stated by McAdam (1999: 119) almost 13 years ago,

the bulk of work on movement outcomes has been focused on the political institutional impacts that have followed from movement activity. Much less attention has been paid to the wide range of unintended social or cultural consequences that could plausibly be linked to social movements. Within this latter category I would include those biographical or life-course consequences that have been empirically tied to movement activity.

It seems fair to argue that since 1999, McAdam's opinion has been sustained in that researchers have been predominantly interested in assessing the influence of movements on state policy¹ (McCammon et al., 2001; King, Dahlin & Cornwall, 2005; Soule & Olzak, 2004); roll-call votes (McAdam & Su, 2002; Olzak & Soule, 2009), and state spending (Andrews, 2001).² Adopting a more 'cultural' framework, some researchers focus on how movement outcomes could also include the survival and adoption of the ideals, discourse, and tactics of those involved in challenges (Giugni, McAdam & Tilly, 1999). While interesting, however, these latter efforts are in the minority, largely because they are difficult to measure.

A different strand of work is concerned with how activism influences the lives of activists (McAdam, 1999; Giugni, 2004). Normally, this considers aspects such as marriage, children, employment, moving, and career choices, revealing that engaging in activism has a serious and long-lasting influence on the lives of those who do it. For example, activists are much more likely to marry later (if at all), have fewer children and have them later in life (if at all), have less job stability, and select employment that generally involves helping or teaching. Other research about social movement outcomes on individuals is relevant as it concerns mass public opinion (Opp & Roehl, 1990). For example, some of this work has shown that those who engage in activism are much more likely to support this type of behavior in the future, as well as

¹ This is commonly broken down into four components: agenda setting, content of legislation, passage of legislation, and implementation. Some have even considered the possibility of reversal.

² Earlier work focused on Gamson's (1975) framework with its interests **with** new advantages and acceptance. As stated by Amenta et al. (2010), this was largely because these outcomes and the idea of success generally do not correspond well to the degree of potential influence over states and political processes.

question authority. Unfortunately such efforts have been rare and thus the number of different questions explored has been limited.

Looking for assistance in addressing our topic of interest, we found work concerned with getting individuals into social movements and activism to be important. An area we found to be directly relevant is research on framing, which explicitly attempts to deal with how social movement organizations assign meaning to events and conditions that facilitate subsequent mobilization (Snow et al., 1986). Here, it is believed that if a message ‘bridges’ – establishes links between frames or ‘amplifies’ previous ideas – then individual and social movement views converge in a way that renders the participation of the individual in the movement much more likely. From this, one might think it reasonable to argue that experiences with activism and social movements might increase awareness of the aspects that activism addresses and that social movements profess.

Perhaps most relevant to the present study are two other concepts related to getting people into activism. For instance, Nepstad (2004: 470–471) argues that ‘cognitive liberation’

denotes a three-stage shift in consciousness: first, individuals no longer perceive the system as legitimate or just; second, those who once saw the system as inevitable begin to demand change; and third, those who normally considered themselves powerless come to believe that they can alter their lot in life (Piven & Cloward, 1977, pp. 3–4). When individuals have moved through all three stages, they are ‘cognitively liberated’ and able to organize, act on political opportunities, and instigate change (McAdam, 1982, p. 51).

Similarly, there is the idea of ‘oppositional consciousness’ where individuals engaged in behavioral challenges move from seeing isolated discriminatory events to seeing whole systems of injustice (Mansbridge, 2001: 240).

The concepts identified above are crucial for they suggest that after exposure to a particular message and/or experience, the receiver (i.e. the one experiencing the prompt) could ‘see’ more of the relevant phenomenon of interest and even link it to a broader category of similar activity. While suggestive, however, the work mentioned above is generally focused on the period leading up to mobilization. It misses experience with activism, serving as something of an educational or teaching ‘moment’, after which the world is a slightly clearer and focused place. This is what leads us to adopt the conception identified below.

Cognitive activation

When we attempted to comprehend what it is about activism that might prompt change in awareness of sociopolitical problems, we were initially led to Hunt & Benford (2004: 445) who argued that

[i]n the course of engaging in and talking about various micromobilization activities, meanings are produced that facilitate the alignment of personal and collective identities, identity constructions, and convergences that condition future micromobilization efforts.

This general conception influences our belief that activism provides a forum for the presentation of ideas, the sharing of experiences, and the development of community. Individuals are brought to relevant events for a diverse array of reasons (friends, spouses, boredom, frustration, and hope) but they are then unified by what transpires. At related events, individuals share their experiences with discrimination and they are subject to counter-activism at the events in question. Equally as important, participants are also told about the experiences of others, as well as how to think about the relevant activities, which generally involves integrating them into some broader framework: a system of oppression or a legal category such as human rights. These framings tend to move individuals to more abstract and encompassing categorizations of discriminatory actions, resulting in a larger number of behaviors being understood as relevant. When focused on beatings during a protest, someone learns about rape. When in a meeting about restrictions on temple visitation, someone learns about limitations on getting water. In short, activism serves as a mechanism of information diffusion across individuals with one major objective being enhanced awareness of the problem at hand.

To be clear, we do not believe that we are talking about identity formation per se. One’s constant identification of oppression might be viewed as a component of identity, but this is not the argument that we make here. Rather, it is more like the issue of ‘alignment’ discussed by Turner & Killian (1972) – the degree to which different individuals come to adopt a similar view on a topic or, more specifically, how they come to see particular phenomena around them. The more one places oneself in situations where problems are discussed and confronted, the more these topics are raised in salience, and the more individuals will begin to recognize relevant phenomena in the world that they occupy.

This said, we acknowledge that not all activism is alike. Some forms are more or less likely to breed

Table I. Expectations from cognitive activation

		<i>Exposure to oppressors/oppression</i>	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Exposure to other activists</i>	<i>Low</i>	(1) Low awareness	(2) High awareness
	<i>High</i>	(3) High awareness	(4) Very high awareness

awareness because of what is involved in the activities themselves. Which dimensions of activism are worthy of attention? Moving through the literature one finds discussion of many: violence/nonviolence (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011), disruption/non-disruption (Piven & Cloward, 1977; Gamson, 1975; Franklin, 2009), internally focused within the group or externally focused (Tilly, 1978), levels of coordination (Tilly, 2003), and strategic variety (Ziegenhagen, 1986; Davenport, 1995; Soule & Davenport, 2009). When we consider these various characteristics, it is clear that not all of these are important for our research. We focus on two dimensions which appear to be crucial for cognitive activation.

First, different forms of activism involve varying levels of interaction with other activists. Individuals need to be able to understand, define, and interpret the context in ways that are sufficiently meaningful for them to take some concrete action. As noted by Edelman (1971: 32) such subjective understandings or cognitions 'are overwhelmingly not based upon observations or empirical evidence available to participants, but rather upon cueings among groups of people who jointly create the meanings they will read into current and anticipated events'. McAdam (1982: 50) underscores the point that 'groups of people' are critical for the change in consciousness 'to be both more likely and of far greater consequence'. That is, interactions provide the time to discuss the topic at hand, exchange stories/experiences, and begin to see that the phenomenon that they thought they had a handle on was actually more varied and larger than they imagined. Here, individual awareness emerges out of collective action. The more extensive the interaction in terms of time and frequency, the greater the amount of exposure that one would have to the topic of interest and the greater degree of nuance one would have regarding its identification.

Accordingly, forms of activism that involve extensive interaction with other activists increase the number of cases of the phenomenon that participants could identify subsequently. This is interesting in the case of nonviolence because activities such as sit-ins and marches tend to involve high degrees of coordination and communic-

ation before, during, and after the events, compared with something like an armed attack which involves a more limited/focused degree of preparation and communication before and especially during the event. It is hard to imagine activists talking about various patterns of discrimination when they are actively trying to advance on or protect a place from some opponent, but this is common in a march that allows for long periods of inter-activist communication. Even among nonviolent tactics, however, expectations vary. A petition or lawsuit involves much less interaction with activists than a meeting or a boycott.

Second, different forms of activism involve various levels of interaction with the agents of discrimination (in this study, so-called upper castes) and the relevant actions associated with them (in this study, untouchability). This is important because these interactions expose individuals to a range of actors and actions relevant to the problem of interest. It is expected that those forms of activism that expose activists to a greater number of actors and actions are those more likely to lead individuals to later identify more of the activities relevant to the problem of interest. By this logic, comparatively less exposure results in participants having comparatively less to tell and less to see.

We wish not only to identify the two dimensions identified above but also to suggest that they might not be independent of one another, although it is possible that they might be. Specifically, we anticipate that although awareness of discrimination is increased by high positions on each dimension individually, one's awareness could be greater when high positions are achieved on both simultaneously. From this, we derive Table I.

It is worthwhile to note that what is discussed above is very different from saying that an individual's awareness of discrimination is fixed before their engagement in activism – established by their education, class position or some other characteristic. In this view, it would not matter what someone did or who/what they were exposed to; they would tend to see the same amount of discrimination after an event as they did before. Such a view is especially noteworthy in the Indian case under examination, because

one's caste position is supposed to establish one's experiences, expectations, and levels of awareness in life (and forever through *karma*). Additionally, one could imagine the impact of activism going in a different way. Here, whatever discriminatory behavior individuals were confronted with at the time of activism could lead them to highlight this exclusively, in essence losing the forest for the tree that fell on them. In this context, individual opinion becomes more or less tied to the range of discriminatory experiences that they have when they engage in activism. These alternatives are important to mention, as there are alternative influences that emerge from considering existing literature. Cognitive activation is not constructed in a way in which exposure to activists and/or oppression/oppressors *by definition* leads to greater awareness.

Indian untouchability and anti-caste resistance

Untouchability is an extremely complex topic and sensitive issue within India (where it originated and is largely concentrated), dating back approximately 3,000 years. The sensitivity of the topic in part arises from its magnitude. It is infused into Indian culture and politics, and it influences all of India's one billion citizens, including approximately 170 million Dalits, roughly 4% of the world's population.

A detailed investigation of untouchability is beyond the current investigation, but our brief discussion here is meant to serve as an introduction. Discussed by numerous scholars (Manu, 1500 BCE; Singh, 1993; B eteille, 1965), untouchability is denoted by four general characteristics where, in effect, a socio-economic order is made politically sacred.

First, different groups are designated whose membership is initially fixed by class and/or birth.

Briefly, the *varna* system divided the ancient Hindu society into initially four, later five, distinct *varna* (castes), that are mutually exclusive, hereditary . . . and occupation specific: *Brahmins* (priests and teachers), *Kshatriya* (warriors and royalty), *Vaisya* (traders, merchants, moneylenders) and *Sudras* (those engaged in menial, lowly jobs), and those doing the most despicable menial jobs, the *Ati Sudra* or the former 'untouchables'. (Deshpande, 2000: 383–384)

Second, group reproduction is sustained through endogamy (i.e. marrying within a specific group). There has historically been a degree of hypergamy, as individuals attempt to marry at their level or higher, but generally the practice of endogamy is followed, thus sustaining separation.

Third, occupations, rights, and obligations are hierarchically allocated across castes from 'pure' (Brahmins) to 'impure' (untouchables). Indeed, the untouchables are believed to be so far from the Brahmins that they are commonly viewed as inhuman and outside the system of relations between 'civilized' beings. This said, although seemingly isolated, different castes are highly connected, so much so, in fact, that frequently the rights of one directly involve the obligations and deprivations of another.

Fourth, in order to assure adherence to the relations identified above, a detailed system of social control was created. This involved a wide variety of sanctions from 'boycotting' (excommunicating Dalits from a community) to murder. It is within this context that untouchability practices emerge. Over time what developed was a complex series of rules that covered almost all aspects of life (codified in Indian religious texts such as the Manusmriti [Manu, 1500 BCE]). These delineate where people can live, how people are greeted, what jobs they can have, where they can acquire water, where they can worship, and where people can be buried after death.

Those subject to the most restrictions and discrimination have not merely allowed such practices to be put forward with no objection. Almost from the inception of untouchability, different efforts of resistance have been undertaken by the lower castes against it (Omvedt, 2006; Bob, 2007). Although a detailed evaluation of these efforts is beyond the current study, one effort is especially useful as it relates to the population examined in the current study: the Dalit struggle undertaken by Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (Ambedkar, 1946). Ambedkar engaged in one of the larger efforts to challenge untouchability and his particular orientation represented a hybrid of political reform and nonviolent direct action. He believed political reform was necessary because systems of laws and accountability were required to investigate, monitor, evaluate, and prosecute those involved in violations of human rights, under which he included untouchability. He believed direct action was necessary because it was the only way that abuses could be brought to light, the Dalit community empowered, and signals sent to the majority of **Hindu** that such behavior would not be tolerated.

Over time, Ambedkar's thinking evolved, as he advocated that the only way Dalits would be free from discrimination would be for them to remove themselves entirely from Hinduism, which he believed was at the root of untouchability. In this vein he led a Dalit effort to join Buddhism, a belief system deemed more respectful of human rights. Buddhism was not only important as a political tactic but it was also influential in his thinking about resistance and struggle, because it became

intricately connected with principles of nonviolence. This reinforced but was distinct from Gandhian conceptions of nonviolence that were influential throughout Indian society at the time but which resonated less with untouchables. Such an orientation left nonviolent direct action as the dominant strategy within the Indian repertoire. The discussion of Ambedkar's model and approach to advocacy is especially important to the study undertaken here because it was adopted by the *Navsarjan Trust*, one of the leading organizations for Dalit rights in the part of India that we examine below – Gujarat.

In the last few years there has been an increasing amount of attention given to the topic of nonviolence. A common conceptual framework used within this research involves understanding that nonviolent resistance is based on the degree to which these tactics can cause disruption 'through social, psychological, economical and political means without the threat of use of force' (Stephan & Chenoweth, 2008). Gene Sharp (1973: 11) provides a list, though not exhaustive, of 198 nonviolent tactics that are divided into three broad categories – protest and persuasion, noncooperation, and intervention. While not easy to measure, the distinguishing factor between Sharp's tactics is the degree to which they cause disruption. For instance, while symbolic acts such as vigils, parades, and demonstrations, are directed against something (Sharp, 1973: 117), they do not exert pressure or sanctions. In contrast, tactics such as boycotts, strikes, and sit-ins are not only directed against a target, they are strategically planned in a way that will exercise pressure and/or sanctions upon opponents (Sharp, 1973; Franklin, 2009).

What is most important for the current work is what nonviolence *means* for those who engage in it. Here, the work of Martin & Varney (2003: 220) is especially relevant. As they argue,

[t]hose who participate in and support nonviolent actions are, in essence, communicating with themselves via their actions, revealing to each other their own power to act and to make a difference. The supportive response of other activists provides validation for their actions and beliefs (Colquhoun & Martin, 2001), creating the experience of empowerment. Routine communication among activists prior to and during actions is usually linked to this validation and empowerment.

While these elements are significant, we seek to extend the communicative influence to participant awareness of injustice.

Data and research design

While there is a large body of anthropological and historical work on untouchability in one or a few locales throughout India, there have been only eight scholarly investigations of it that attempt to systematically compile data and examine the topic across practices and locales. We generally follow the path established by Shah et al. (2006), who between 2001 and 2002, engaged in the most thorough and ambitious effort to assess untouchability yet undertaken.

The untouchability census employed within the current study was carried out by a team of scholars, lawyers, and activists in Gujarat, India from 2005 to 2008. This allows us to explore variation within one locale and estimate a more representative sample approaching 14% of villages within Gujarat, of which we conducted a census of the whole Dalit population.³ In total, over a period of two years and nine months, 5,462 census forms were completed across 1,589 villages with information from over 98,000 respondents.⁴

The general idea behind the census was to identify what forms of untouchability practices existed in villages across Gujarat. This effort resulted in the identification of 98 distinct practices.⁵ This list was compiled from an extensive evaluation of previous research as well as 35 years' worth of fieldwork undertaken by diverse individuals in the project. The responses to the questions about the presence or absence of untouchability practices were a series of binary responses which were coded 1 and 0, respectively. As conceived, the dependent variable within our study is the sum of untouchability/discriminatory practices identified as being experienced by Dalits in their villages. We employ ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to analyze our dependent variable as it is continuous and normally distributed. By allowing for the errors to be correlated within a village, we relax the assumption of independent observations in the village because we know that respondents are nested in villages.

In addition to being asked to provide data about untouchability practices, individuals were asked whether they had engaged in any form of activism on their own and whether they had participated in activities led by Navsarjan to eliminate untouchability over the previous

³ The villages selected do not fundamentally differ from those not selected on a variety of economic and demographic characteristics.

⁴ The full report is publicly available and can be downloaded from <http://rfkcenter.org/new-india-study-finds-untouchability-pervasive-across-public-and-private-life?lang=en>.

⁵ The list of 98 practices can be obtained on request from the authors.

five years (i.e. between 2000 and 2005). Specifically, the census covered 11 distinct forms of activism in which individuals could have participated: (1) *meeting*: when members of the Dalit community come together to discuss a topic; (2) *boycott*: when Dalits refuse to offer non-Dalits any service; (3) *petition*: putting forward written requests to the authorities asking them for action against dominant castes; (4) *sit-in*: sitting outside some authority's office to protest against their (in)action; (5) *march*: a procession of Dalits moving through a community; (6) *protest*: a demonstration; (7) *law suit*: registering a formal complaint with a court against non-Dalits; (8) *physical attack*: when Dalits physically injure or harm a non-Dalit; (9) *distancing from religion*: when Dalits avoid religious places or practices; (10) *changing faith*: converting to another religion such as Buddhism or Christianity; and lastly (11) *political activism*: engaging in a campaign to discourage electoral participation. Although the individual forms of activism provide us with the clearest examination of cognitive activation, we employ the Navsarjan-initiated activism to see if that somehow influenced the respondent's answers.

Finally, respondents were asked if they believed the different forms of activism were effective in reducing untouchability (i.e. if they were efficacious), which is more of an opinion. Three responses were provided: better, worse, same.

As for our main independent variables, first we look at the effect of being active in resisting untouchability. We operationalize this by looking at *participation in at least one form of activism*. We generally expect active persons to report more than those who are not active. Second, we *combine all the individual forms of activism* reported by the respondent over the five-year period prior to the census. We do this to gauge whether there is a difference between just being active and being very active. It is expected that if individuals participated in a higher number of activities, they would report more untouchability than those who participated in few activities. This result, however, may not hold when we add information about individual perceptions of efficacy. For example, we anticipate that if one believes that activism is generally efficacious (i.e. the forms of activism they engage in are 'successful' in reducing untouchability), then they should 'see' less discrimination. And, if they believe their activism is not efficacious, then they should 'see' more practices. We expect this to be the case regardless of the total number of activities individuals participate in.

Next, we *disaggregate the sum of all activism undertaken* to match the four categories we propose in Table I (varying exposure to activists as well as exposure to oppressors/

oppression). For example, most maintain that individuals are highly exposed to other activists and highly exposed to different forms of oppression/oppressive agents within activities such as marches and protests, as they are generally played out slowly over time and in the open (i.e. Table I, cell 4). Exposure to other activists and diverse forms of oppression are limited within activities such as armed attacks, petitions, and lawsuits, because they generally take place quickly and/or involve few individuals in isolated locales (i.e. Table I, cell 1). Exposure to other activists is relatively high and exposure to oppressors/oppression is relatively low in activities such as meetings, boycotts, and withdrawals of support, as they explicitly involve reducing contact with opponents (i.e. Table I, cell 3). Exposure to other activists is low and exposure to oppression/oppressors is high when activities such as sit-ins are undertaken which are designed to place activists in the midst of opponents within an open as well as normally unprotected/public space (i.e. Table I, cell 2).

We use this disaggregated measure in two forms. Analogous to what was done with the sum of activism measure, we first dichotomize each of the four groups and look at the effect of *participation in at least one activity in the group*. As already mentioned, we sum up all the activities engaged in for each of the four groups to see the distinction between just being active and the extent to which one is active in 'seeing' untouchability.

We admit that this does not completely get us to all aspects of cognitive activation by providing detailed information about how extensive contact was with other activists and oppressors/oppression, but we do believe that it gets us quite far in this regard. Indeed, all research on the forms of activism discussed within the study, as well as interviews conducted with diverse activists, focus groups, and ordinary citizens during the project, suggest that they are in line with the practices identified above. Although the grouping of different forms of activism provides us with the clearest examination of cognitive activation, we also employ reported Navsarjan activism in order to see if that somehow influences the respondent's answers. This likely captures the degree to which individuals receive information from a source external to their own village.

Finally, we attempt to be attentive to potential reciprocity and confounding explanations. For example, the literature on differential participation shows that prior awareness is a significant predictor of whether individuals are more or less likely to participate in activism (Beyerlein & Andrews, 2008). If these findings were to be neglected we could face a self-selection issue where individuals who are aware of untouchability are more likely to participate in disparate forms of activism and more likely to perceive

greater discrimination. To attempt to address this problem we use an approach that is sensitive to the issue as well as individual-level and village-level characteristics.

Regarding the first point, we not only employ a measure of activism that explicitly attempts to incorporate the temporal dimension (asking about activism prior to awareness) but also focus on what appears to be the less problematic direction of the relationship. For example, research from discrimination to activism is much more variable (with some finding a relationship but others not doing so). At the same time, research from activism to some impact on those who participate is less variable (with most finding some influence). Our extensive interviews, focus groups, and historical ethnographic work also supports this causal story.

Second, we use the subcaste of the individuals to gain insights into prior experiences with oppression/oppressors. As we mentioned above, the caste system is hierarchical with discrimination increasing as one moves downward. While all respondents in our census are Dalits, the category is not homogenous. Within this group,⁶ there are several subcastes across which the rules of discrimination are different. For example, *valmikis* are associated with cleaning toilets and sweeping streets, while *garo-brahmins* are associated with maintaining records of births/deaths and serving as priests to the *valmiki* and *rohit* who are below them (Singh, 1993).⁷ The nature of the work – ‘dirty’ in the former and ‘clean’ in the latter – makes *garo-brahmins* ‘purer’ than *valmikis* and thus less subject to discrimination.

Third, regarding the village-level indicators, we construct an average regional discrimination score. While the cross-sectional nature of our data does not permit

us to completely untangle the causal relationship between reported discrimination and activism, we were able to construct a proxy control variable⁸ by using the average reported untouchability score of surrounding villages, under the assumption that practices are similar to those nearby. In addition to the above, we use the number of locations visited by the enumerators in each village during the course of the census as something of an external check regarding what respondents report. Using the 2001 Indian Census (2001), we also include measures of the percentage of Dalit (to get some sense of how comfortable the community might be communicating information), the aggregate income (to proxy poverty), and the distance to the closest urban area for all villages (to measure geographic isolation). We expect that places where enumerators visited more locales, where there is a greater number of Dalits, where poverty is greater, and where the nearest village is distant will report more discriminatory practices.

Findings

As untouchability is a new variable of interest, it is difficult to think about what should be included in such a model. For this we considered what has been written about caste discrimination in particular but also what has been written about sociopolitical discrimination more broadly, including what we believed to be the most reasonable factors (Model 1). We anticipate that this will be refined over time.

When our basic model is considered, we find a few variables that are robust across the models estimated. For example, the extent to which castes are discriminated against is generally believed to be conditional on their position in the caste hierarchy. This is borne out by our results, as we observe that groups at the bottom of the hierarchy – *nats* and *valmikis* – consistently identify the highest number of practices. Additionally, we find that *garo-brahmins* and *tirgars* report the lowest number of practices, which is plausible as these two subcastes rank higher on the hierarchy. This provides a strong degree of face validity to the research.

Results consistently disclose that self-employed persons report about three more discriminatory practices than those who are unemployed, net of other factors. This finding is reasonable as self-employed Dalits are perhaps afforded a greater opportunity to interact with a wider array of individuals, places, and people, thus exposing them to more

⁶ In a 1993 national study carried out by a team of scholars headed by K. S. Singh, the study drafted a list of 6,748 *jatis* but were able to identify, locate, and study about 4,635 distinct *jatis* all over India (Singh, 1993).

⁷ It must be noted that there are several dimensions that determine the extent to which one experiences discrimination. In this article, we focus on two dimensions – work/profession and the kind of food one consumes (eats meat [pork and beef] or not). Work associated with cleaning is regarded as polluting and relegated to lower castes. The consumption of meat is regarded as impure and traditionally it is believed that lower castes consume more meat, specifically pork and beef, while higher castes subscribe to vegetarianism (Singh, 1993). An exhaustive exploration of all the dimensions along which *jatis* are differentiated is beyond the scope for this article. Based on the two dimensions, we arrange the *jatis* in an increasing order of oppressive experiences – Christian, *kshatriya*, *garo-brahmin*, *turi*, *nadia*, *vankar*, *senma*, *tirgar*, *nat*, *rohit*, and *valmiki*. While Christians and *kshatriyas* experience the least amount of untouchability, the *nats*, *rohits*, and *valmikis* experience the most discrimination.

⁸ Details on the construction of this variable can be found in the online appendix.

untouchability. Also, the self-employed are not attached to landlords or other upper-caste arrangements, thus diminishing any fear that respondents might have of reprisals. Of further interest is the finding that Dalits who are employed as laborers identify about one more discriminatory event than those who engage in other sources of work. This is intriguing because one would expect these individuals to report less discrimination due to fear of retaliation by their non-Dalit landlords.⁹ These results are broadly consistent with the subcaste hierarchical argument identified above.

Finally, we find that education significantly reduces the identification of untouchability practices, with a higher education and high school education leading to decreased reporting by about three practices, on average. This is in line with research that argues that education leads to emancipation from caste discrimination by giving Dalits skills in addition to 'a sense of individual dignity and confidence in the face of upper castes' (Jeffery et al., 2004). Higher levels of education bring with them a greater diversity in skills. With more skills, Dalits no longer depend on the upper castes for work, so they are less likely to be exposed to untouchability, and there would be less discrimination experienced/to report.

We now move to our primary interest: does activism *in general* activate awareness? From our research, the short answer is 'yes'. In Model 2 we observe that on an average, participation in at least one form of activism increases reporting discrimination by about 2.5 practices.

In Model 3 we find that participation in multiple forms of activism (which are aggregated to provide a cumulative score) significantly increases the number of untouchability practices reported, holding all else constant. Here, participation in an additional dissident activity increases identification of discriminatory practices by about 0.5 ($p < 0.01$). Activism thus leads to some awareness but not a great amount.

While this may seem straightforward, in Model 4 we find that the result above does not hold when we add information about how individuals evaluate their efforts, suggesting that it is important to consider how well people think they are doing. In this model we observe that individuals who believed that they were successful in activism reported fewer discriminatory practices (approximately two fewer [$p < 0.001$]) as compared with

those who were not sure. Also, those who believed that they made their situation worse or did not see any change reported more (approximately five, respectively [$p < 0.001$]).¹⁰ Such a finding is important for it essentially provides a new metric of social movement success: when they believe they have participated in successful activism, participants are less likely to see/report the phenomenon that they were challenging in the world they occupy.

Next we proceed to disaggregate the total sum of activism according to our proposed categories in Table I. In Model 5, we first dichotomize each of the four categories¹¹ and look at the effect of participation in at least one activity per category. We find that, on average, participation in activities characterized by high exposure to oppressors and low exposure to other activists (sit-ins) or participation in activities where exposure to oppressors is low but exposure to other activists is high (meetings and boycotts) increases reporting by 3.6 ($p < 0.01$) and 3 ($p < 0.001$) respectively, net of other factors. However, contrary to our expectations, we find that when the engagement was in activism where individuals are highly exposed to both the oppressors and other activists, the number of practices reported is reduced by one ($p < 0.05$).¹²

In Model 6, we sum up all the activities engaged in for each of the four categories. As already mentioned, we do this to see the distinction between being active versus the extent to which one is active in recognizing untouchability. This was done so that we could explore an alternative conception of our main independent variable. When the four categories are examined, we find that our argument is only partially supported. Results disclose that individuals who engage in either activities where exposure to other activists is low but exposure to oppressors/oppression is high (sit-ins) or activities where exposure to oppressors/oppression is low but exposure to other activists is high (withdrawal of support) report, on average, 3.6 ($p < 0.01$) and 2 ($p < 0.001$) untouchability practices

¹⁰ Each of the groups (better, worse, and same) is statistically indistinguishable from the reference category ($p > F = 0.0001$). When comparing the groups with each other we find that only respondents who feel efficacious are different from those who feel that nothing has changed ($p > F = 0.001$). The difference between those who respond that their activism has made untouchability better and others who report that their situation has become worse is not statistically significant ($p < F = 0.2633$). Also, there is no difference between those who respond that untouchability is worse and those who feel it is the same ($p < F = 0.1174$).

¹¹ The reference category is low exposure to both the oppressors and other activists.

¹² Each of the three groups is significantly different from the reference group ($p < F = 0.0000$).

⁹ We also run models with two other individual level characteristics – gender and age. While our main results remain robust across all the models, we do not include these models because we lose about 66% of our observations due to **casewise deletion**.

Table II. Unstandardized OLS regression coefficients predicting the impact of activism on untouchability.

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>	<i>Model 5</i>	<i>Model 6</i>
Any activism (1 if participated in at least 1 form)		2.548*** (0.634)				
All activism			0.434* (0.215)	-0.102 (0.247)		
Effect of participation (1 if participated, 0 otherwise)						
High exposure to oppressors and high exposure to activists					-1.400* (0.622)	
High exposure to oppressors and low exposure to activists					3.683** (1.293)	
Low exposure to oppressors and high exposure to activists					3.010*** (0.599)	
<i>Effect of total participation</i>						
High exposure to oppressors and high exposure to activists						-0.836 (0.469)
High exposure to oppressors and low exposure to activists						3.647** (1.346)
Low exposure to oppressors and high exposure to activists						2.109*** (0.487)
<i>Efficacy</i>						
Positive				2.354** (0.728)		
Negative				3.872* (1.567)		
Same				5.683*** (1.258)		
<i>Activism initiated via external source</i>						
Navsarjan activism		-0.11 (0.188)	-0.003 (0.210)	-0.033 (0.209)	-0.042 (0.190)	0.034 (0.202)
Individual level controls						
<i>Subcaste</i>						
Christian	-2.194 (1.988)	-2.606 (1.997)	-2.353 (2.002)	-2.606 (2.001)	-2.634 (1.986)	-2.489 (1.987)
Kshatriya	0.04 (2.483)	-0.717 (2.502)	-0.295 (2.538)	-0.616 (2.485)	-0.568 (2.578)	-0.57 (2.629)
Garo-brahmin	-1.745 (1.194)	-2.527* (1.209)	-2.151 (1.198)	-2.508* (1.213)	-2.462* (1.203)	-2.289 (1.200)
Turi	-3.923* (1.844)	-4.723** (1.815)	-4.212* (1.837)	-4.831** (1.812)	-4.785** (1.820)	-4.733** (1.798)
Nadia	0.343 (1.823)	-0.41 (1.776)	0.085 (1.804)	-0.451 (1.780)	-0.388 (1.792)	-0.197 (1.797)
Vankar	1.33 (0.750)	0.37 (0.755)	0.941 (0.766)	0.335 (0.750)	0.345 (0.753)	0.508 (0.751)
Senma	-2.155 (1.400)	-2.769 (1.454)	-2.385 (1.432)	-2.847 (1.460)	-2.706 (1.449)	-2.67 (1.460)
Tirgar	-6.154* (2.666)	-6.637* (2.756)	-6.486* (2.713)	-6.582* (2.747)	-6.824* (2.662)	-6.689* (2.654)
Nat	7.862*** (2.229)	6.759** (2.275)	7.162** (2.342)	6.690** (2.411)	6.861** (2.177)	6.308* (2.597)
Rohit	1.394* (0.659)	0.531 (0.687)	1.025 (0.680)	0.536 (0.686)	0.569 (0.685)	0.719 (0.676)
Valmiki	3.682*** (0.690)	2.917*** (0.710)	3.394*** (0.715)	2.892*** (0.705)	2.931*** (0.709)	3.053*** (0.706)

(continued)

Table II. (continued)

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>	<i>Model 5</i>	<i>Model 6</i>
<i>Occupation</i>						
Farming	1.033 (0.623)	0.579 (0.628)	0.822 (0.629)	0.566 (0.627)	0.636 (0.627)	0.722 (0.626)
Laborer	1.568*** (0.430)	1.097** (0.425)	1.343** (0.428)	1.108** (0.423)	1.123** (0.423)	1.211** (0.424)
Salaried job	0.755 (0.567)	0.291 (0.564)	0.525 (0.557)	0.322 (0.562)	0.319 (0.555)	0.428 (0.553)
Self-employed	2.984*** (0.666)	2.454*** (0.666)	2.740*** (0.661)	2.466*** (0.667)	2.488*** (0.659)	2.575*** (0.657)
<i>Education</i>						
Higher education	-2.829*** (0.576)	-3.020*** (0.570)	-2.880*** (0.574)	-2.981*** (0.567)	-2.957*** (0.574)	-2.938*** (0.574)
High school	-1.705*** (0.415)	-1.850*** (0.413)	-1.752*** (0.416)	-1.829*** (0.413)	-1.827*** (0.416)	-1.816*** (0.416)
Grade 1–8	-0.091 (0.371)	-0.262 (0.369)	-0.164 (0.371)	-0.238 (0.370)	-0.25 (0.370)	-0.245 (0.371)
<i>Village-level controls</i>						
Average regional discrimination score	-0.008 (0.036)	-0.008 (0.036)	-0.007 (0.036)	-0.008 (0.036)	-0.01 (0.036)	-0.009 (0.036)
Number of locations visited by enumerators	-0.091 (0.119)	-0.11 (0.119)	-0.099 (0.119)	-0.11 (0.119)	-0.108 (0.119)	-0.102 (0.119)
Percentage of Dalits	0.076 (0.076)	0.072 (0.075)	0.075 (0.076)	0.071 (0.076)	0.074 (0.075)	0.072 (0.076)
Natural log of income in thousands of rupees	-1.192** (0.436)	-1.191** (0.434)	-1.192** (0.435)	-1.189** (0.434)	-1.194** (0.434)	-1.189** (0.435)
Distance to closest urban area (km)	0.082 (0.053)	0.08 (0.053)	0.082 (0.053)	0.08 (0.053)	0.078 (0.053)	0.079 (0.053)
Constant	47.841*** (3.883)	48.100*** (3.873)	47.934*** (3.877)	48.061*** (3.873)	48.182*** (3.870)	48.059*** (3.871)
R ²	0.04	0.043	0.041	0.045	0.045	0.044
N	82008	82008	82008	82008	82008	82008

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Standard errors in parentheses. We lose about 16.5% of our original 98,316 respondents due to casewise deletion.

more than those who engage in activities with low exposure to both other activists and oppressors/oppression (i.e. lawsuits, petitions, and armed attacks). While we expected activities that were high in both exposure to other activists and oppressors/oppression to be important, we find that this is not the case.¹³ Activated awareness is selective, not cumulative.¹⁴

¹³ Each of the three groups is significantly different from the reference group ($p < F = 0.0000$).

¹⁴ We do not include all the activities than individuals engage in and their perceived efficacy of activism in Models 5 and 6 because of multicollinearity. Inclusion of both of these produces a variance inflation factor greater than 5.

Conclusion

Existing research has highlighted a wide variety of outcomes regarding what activism is able to achieve. Somewhat neglected, however, has been the impact of activism on those who engage in it. In particular, there are very few accounts of the effect on participants' awareness of the very problem that they are confronting – what we refer to as 'cognitive activation'. This is relevant for recruitment, sympathy, and financial donations among those in the mass population whose interaction with activism is infrequent, but also retention among those involved in social movements who engage in activism frequently. Also somewhat neglected are non-Western societies who might have different repertoires of contention that they rely upon, such as nonviolence and high-risk activism where individuals could suffer horrific costs for participating.

Drawing upon diverse literature, we argue that *activism can activate awareness* of injustice among those who engage in it, but we also note that not all forms of activism are equally likely to have this effect. Specifically, we maintain that exposure to other activists as well as to oppression/oppressors is important and that nonviolence is especially important because of the high degree of training, discipline, and awareness that is required to engage in it. Using a unique dataset of more than 98,000 Dalits (or untouchables) in 1,589 rural villages of Gujarat, India we explicitly address the topic of participant awareness in a non-Western context that is concerned with a situation of high-risk activism (caste discrimination). From our examination, we find that engagement in sit-ins, meetings, boycotts, and withdrawal of support increases the number of discriminatory events identified by individuals, as compared with those who do not engage. The results of this study generally support our idea of ‘cognitive activation’. Contrary to our expectations, however, we find that it is exposure to either other activists or oppressors/oppression that has an influence, but not both.

The results of the present investigation are potentially far-reaching. For example, this work opens up new research on activist outcomes by moving it to the individual level (part of micro-mobilization work) and prompts interest in the educative possibilities and socialization involved with challenging injustice. One can also see connections between the development of individual and collective awareness and potential activism. This work also continues to open up research into non-Western communities, something which is sorely needed.

At the same time, however, it is worthwhile to note the limitations of the current research. For example, we have provided no detailed evaluation of exactly how extensively individuals interacted with either other activists or oppressors/oppression. This is a crucial component of cognitive activation. Within this article, we have also viewed individuals as isolated beings (although we cluster observations on the village), but it may be important to consider individuals as being embedded within communities – especially in a society such as India where such aggregations are particularly important. We need to explore the connections between diverse social movement organizations and the villages/villagers of interest so that we can have a better understanding of exactly what took place, where, and potentially why. Such an investigation would allow us to better ascertain what was responsible for the activation. Finally, although we have addressed a topic relevant to 4% of the world’s

population and involving one of the largest nations, it would be worthwhile to consider cognitive activation in other contexts. For example, we believe that less awareness might be generated by less overt manifestations of discrimination and also by cultures which typically engage in activist practices that do not involve as much exposure to other activists and oppression/oppressors as nonviolence.

Replication data

The dataset and do-files for the empirical analysis in this article can be found at <http://www.prio.no/jpr/datasets>.


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