

2 Environmental Advocacy Strategies That Work

This chapter examines the full range of advocacy strategies found in the advocacy literature discussed in the previous chapter, offering an overview of environmental advocacy around the world. It will use data from an original dataset of environmental events from 2005 to 2009 to create a portrait of environmental activity during that period. The first section will present a brief description of the data gathered and the analysis performed. The second section will use these data to describe the issues that garnered the most activity, the locations where events occurred, and the advocacy strategies employed. The third section will delve into the key questions at the center of this book, examining which advocacy strategies were most effective and how their rates of utilization and effectiveness were affected by regime type or geographic region. The fourth section will dig a bit deeper to try to understand the ways in which regime type affects advocacy strategies, paying particularly close attention to how it may influence the incidence of violence. The chapter will conclude with some broader thoughts about how these strategies may be connected to one another to set the stage for the rest of the book.

Environmental Advocacy around the World

This chapter draws primarily on analyses of an original database of environmental advocacy events from around the world. To create the database, Factiva's major news and business publications¹ were searched for articles related to the environment that were published between January 1, 2005, and December 31, 2009. These five years were chosen because they are recent enough to be able to capture advocacy strategies used in

contemporary environmental politics, the focus of this study, and they are old enough that there would be a good chance that the outcome (success or failure) of the advocacy could be determined. The search generated 3,567 relevant articles with 177 duplicates, for a final pool of 3,390 articles. Articles were then randomly selected until the dataset contained 200 cases of environmental advocacy.

The dependent variable in the analysis was success. An advocacy effort was coded as successful if the goal of the action as articulated by the advocates was achieved. Thus, a public protest to close a factory was coded as a success if the factory was closed; a local clean-the-river event was coded as a success if the river was cleaned. The outcome was coded as a failure if the advocacy did not result in the desired outcome. Using the prior examples, if the factory was not closed, or if the clean-the-river event was canceled, it would be coded as a failure. Success was coded as mixed if the advocacy effort was partially successful, such as if the factory was closed for a while but then reopened after some cleanup had occurred, or if the clean-the-river event was originally scheduled to clean three riverbanks but only cleaned one. If the outcome could not yet be determined—for example, if discussions about factory closure were ongoing, or if the clean-the-river event was rescheduled but had not yet occurred—then the outcome was coded as undetermined.

Although it is intuitively obvious that some advocacy goals are harder to achieve and more important than others, I found it impossible to develop a reliable measure of advocacy impact. While the impact and importance of a national carbon tax is clearly larger than a pop-up exhibit of eco-art, most cases in the dataset were somewhere in between these two extremes. Is the successful prevention of the construction of a single new petrochemical facility more important than the successful creation of a regional watershed management plan? The closest I could come to measuring the scale of the impact was to measure the scope of the advocacy.² Scope was measured according to whether the advocacy was directed at the local, regional, national, or global level. It was coded as local if the goal was specific to a particular community—for example, closing a local power plant or conducting a local river cleanup effort. The advocacy was coded as regional if it included multiple communities, such as a watershed protection effort. It was coded as national if the goal was nationwide, such as a new national regulatory standard. It was coded as global if it crossed national boundaries, such as a multinational effort to preserve international fisheries.

For most advocacy events in the dataset, the goals of the advocates were clear and quite specific, as in the foregoing examples of closing a factory or cleaning a local river. However, for a small subset of events (7 percent), the stated goals of the advocates were broad—for example, “improve understanding about climate issues.” In those few cases, the event was coded as successful if the advocacy took place and people participated.

I recognize that this definition of success is very limited. In many cases, the ultimate goal of advocates is not so much to win a particular advocacy effort but rather to draw attention to an issue, shift the narrative frame to one that better favors advocates, or contribute to changing political culture. As Daniel Gillion persuasively argues in his *Political Power of Protest* (2013), the goal of protesters is to “set the political agenda and to focus governmental attention on a grievance that requires redress.”³ Thus, while this dataset codes for the “success” of a particular advocacy effort (e.g., halt construction on a new chemical-processing facility) based on whether the advocates achieved their stated objective in the specific advocacy event, the “real” goal of the advocates may have been more about setting political agendas and focusing government attention than about achieving a specific outcome in one particular event. Similar to protests, lawsuits also often have a clear, specific official goal (i.e., to win the lawsuit), but the “real” goal may be much broader and longer term.⁴ For advocates employing both of these strategies (as well as others), the result of a particular action is much less important than these broader shifts. Because the time horizon of this study made it too difficult to code consistently for these longer-term effects, they are not included. This limitation of the study is discussed in greater detail in the concluding section of the chapter.

Each case was coded for the strategies that were present in the advocacy effort. I included all the strategies discussed in chapter 1 that are generally identified as effective in the social movement, policymaking, and East Asian literatures: protests, lawsuits, media campaigns, letter writing, lobbying, cultivating connections with policymakers, work for business, public education, policy papers, art, and local projects. Additionally, a number of control variables were also included: level of democracy, issue type, scope of advocacy, whether it was an event related to a NIMBY (not in my backyard) issue, and whether violence occurred at the event. Finally, I coded which actors were involved in the event (grassroots nongovernmental organizations [NGOs], businesses, government, international organizations), as well

as which actors initiated the advocacy effort. For more details about how these variables were defined and coded, see appendix B.

This chapter focuses on identifying patterns in the types of environmental advocacy around the world and determining which strategies are the most effective. Additionally, I am interested in whether regime type or geographic region affects either the types of advocacy or its effectiveness. A number of statistical techniques were employed to carry out the investigation. In brief, descriptive statistics were used to determine the prevalence of different strategies and their relative success rates. Then, in order to gain greater analytic leverage on which strategies were more successful, I also employed ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions and recursive partitioning. More details about the statistical techniques used in the analyses can be found in appendix B. I will begin with the descriptive findings about strategy frequency and then present the statistical analyses aimed at determining efficacy.

Patterns of Environmental Advocacy around the World

Figure 2.1 shows that pollution remains the top environmental advocacy issue around the world, with more than 60 percent of all environmental advocacy events in the dataset, and more than half of all the cases in each region, having something to do with pollution. Figure 2.1 also shows that there is some regional variation—for example, while 76 percent of advocacy events in the Americas were related to climate change, only 36 percent of

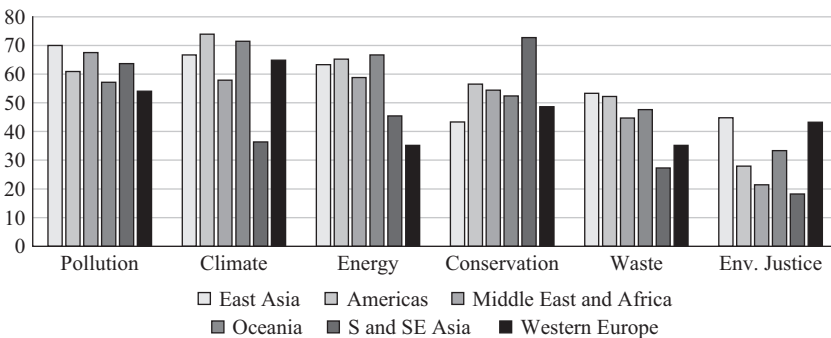


Figure 2.1

Advocacy issues around the world by issue and region, percent of events in each region addressing each advocacy issue.

those in East Asia were connected to that issue. However, overall, there was general consistency across the globe concerning issues, with pollution and climate issues garnering considerably more attention than environmental justice almost everywhere.

This relatively high level of consistency is not just found in terms of the issues that advocates engage; it is also true for the advocacy strategies that they employ, as illustrated in figure 2.2. Nearly everywhere, the most common advocacy strategies were working locally and cultivating a connection to policymakers, and the least common strategies were protests, art, and lawsuits.

The outliers in these data are the unusually high rates of protest and lawsuits in South and Southeast Asia. Although there may be something about that region that generates particularly high rates of protest and lawsuits (or at least particularly high rates of media coverage about protests and lawsuits), it is quite likely that the results are more a result of the relatively small number of overall cases in the dataset from that region. As discussed earlier and described in more detail in appendix B, the environmental events in this dataset were randomly selected. This means that they did not have an even distribution across the different regions. Figure 2.3 shows the number of environmental events in each region and their ratio within the

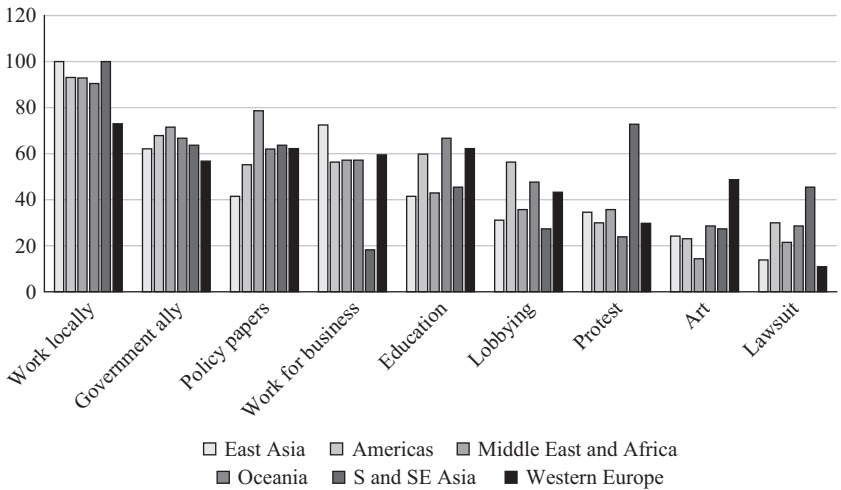


Figure 2.2 Strategy present rate by region, percent of events in each region that utilize each advocacy strategy.

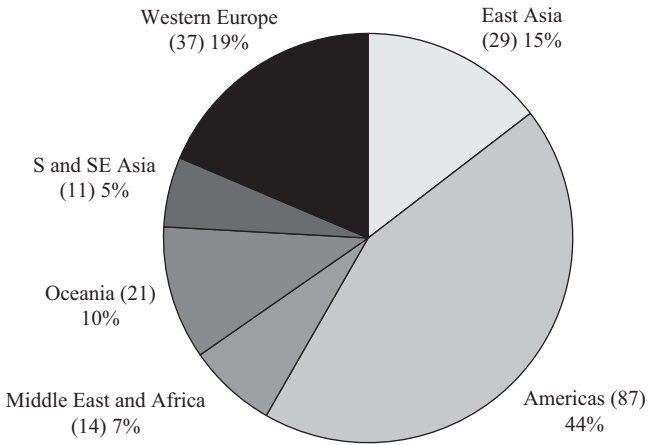


Figure 2.3
Distribution of cases by region.

two-hundred-case dataset. Thus, even though the Americas had more than three times as many protests as South and Southeast Asia during the time period (twenty-six compared with eight), because there were so many more cases coming from the Americas as compared with South and Southeast Asia (eighty-seven vs. eleven), the number of protests was a much smaller percentage of the whole. With a small total number of cases coming from the region, the differences of only a couple of cases can greatly affect the percentages (e.g., if the random sample had captured just three fewer cases of protest, the percentage of South and Southeast Asian cases involving protests would have dropped from 73 percent to 45 percent).

Patterns of Advocacy Success

Thus far, we have seen that the types of issues about which people become engaged and the advocacy strategies that they employ are remarkably similar everywhere in the world. What about efficacy? Are some strategies more effective in some places than in others? To investigate what factors affect the efficacy of different advocacy strategies, I'll utilize slightly more sophisticated statistical methodology.

First, a few more descriptive statistics. Not surprisingly, advocates will have an easier time being successful with some strategies than with others.

Achieving success for an environmental artist—who merely wants to engage the attention of the public and expose them to a different way of thinking and viewing the world—will be considerably easier than for an activist who has taken a giant multinational corporation to court for violating local environmental protection laws.

Figure 2.4 indicates the percentage of cases using each advocacy strategy that succeeded, failed, or had mixed outcomes. It is worth noting that every single strategy succeeded more often than it failed—even lawsuits, which had the highest failure rate of all the strategies, succeeded more often than they failed. Relatedly, for all of the more confrontational forms of advocacy—lobbying, policy papers, lawsuits, and public protests—the most common outcome was mixed, in which the advocates gained some, but not all, of what they wanted.

Figure 2.5 illustrates that success rates also varied by issue area. Once again, it becomes clear that most environmental advocacy, irrespective of issue area, is at least partially successful. Somewhat surprisingly, advocacy concerning waste issues, which can often be highly contentious NIMBY-type politics,⁵ was remarkably successful, gaining outright successes 63 percent of the time. Not surprisingly, environmental justice issues, which frequently involve communities that are politically marginalized and are often threatening to ruling political elites,⁶ were the least successful, although even these advocates experienced far more successful and mixed results than outright failures.

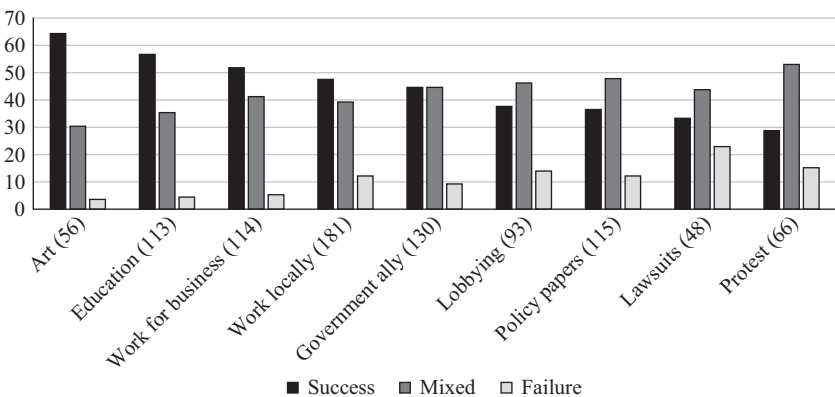
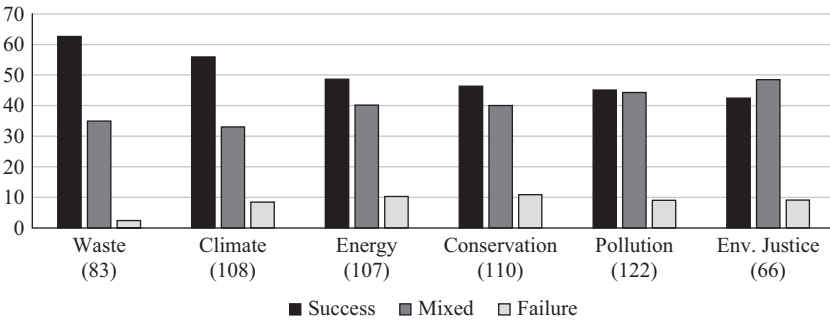


Figure 2.4
Advocacy outcomes (percentage) by strategy type (total cases in parentheses).

**Figure 2.5**

Success rates by issue area (total cases in parentheses).

These descriptive statistics help us understand some valuable information about advocacy. First, in contrast to the expectations of much of the literature, advocacy strategies do not appear to vary much by region. Second, in support of the expectations of the literature, more collaborative strategies tend to be more successful (at least when measured by the crude metric of “Did advocates get what they asked for?”) than confrontational strategies. Finally, the literature is unclear about what the expectations are for overall success rates, but the numbers from this study strongly suggest that advocacy is frequently successful in achieving at least some gains. Advocates often win outright victories, gaining exactly what they ask for (more than 60 percent in terms of waste issues, and more than 40 percent for all of the other issues), and rates of complete failure are quite low—below 10 percent across all issue areas.

However, these descriptive statistics do not have any control variables such as scope of advocacy (local, regional, national, international), the presence of violence, start year, or organizational networks, and they do not allow for any interaction effects. Therefore, the next section will employ slightly more sophisticated statistical analyses to get at the question of efficacy. Table 2.1 presents the results of the OLS regression of the strategies and control variables.

These results show that two strategies, art and education, have statistically significant positive relationships with successful outcomes. Additionally, two issue areas are strongly related to the likelihood that an advocacy effort will be successful: climate change and waste. One strategy, protest, is negatively related to success, and the presence of violence is also negatively

Table 2.1

OLS regression of advocacy strategies and success.

	Estimate	Std. error	<i>t</i> -value	Pr (> <i>t</i>)
(Intercept)	-7.205	8.918	-0.808	0.420
Government ally	0.020	0.103	0.194	0.847
Work locally	-0.145	0.180	-0.804	0.423
Local network	0.163	0.129	1.264	0.208
International network	-0.095	0.107	-0.891	0.374
Probusiness	-0.071	0.106	-0.672	0.502
Art	0.288	0.108	2.667	0.008
Education	0.313	0.096	3.257	0.001
Policy paper	-0.178	0.111	-1.604	0.111
Protest	-0.267	0.133	-2.011	0.046
Lawsuit	-0.037	0.133	-0.278	0.781
Lobby	-0.115	0.102	-1.130	0.260
Letters	0.027	0.123	0.219	0.827
Media	-0.098	0.102	-0.963	0.337
Violence	-0.428	0.192	-2.226	0.027
Regime type	0.080	0.073	1.085	0.279
Scope	0.066	0.046	1.450	0.149
Start year	0.003	0.004	0.760	0.449
Conservation	0.043	0.100	0.425	0.671
Pollution	-0.028	0.094	-0.293	0.770
Energy	0.056	0.100	0.564	0.574
Development	-0.094	0.099	-0.953	0.342
Climate change	0.182	0.100	1.817	0.071
Waste	0.326	0.097	3.374	0.001
Environmental justice	0.016	0.103	0.159	0.874
Other	0.217	0.644	0.337	0.737

Note: $R^2 = 0.372$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.274$; $N = 192$. These results do not include the four cases with undetermined outcomes or the four cases where the regime type could not be coded either because the cases began before Freedom House coded the country or because the advocacy effort was transnational and involved countries with different Freedom House scores.

associated with advocacy success. Surprisingly, regime type did not have a statistically significant relationship with success. The same model was run replacing the aggregated “freedom” variable with separate measures for civic rights and political rights with no appreciable difference in the results.

The OLS regression tests all the variables as if they are operating independently, but since many advocacy efforts include the use of multiple strategies, I also used the random forest classification algorithm (CTree)⁷ in order to gain greater insight into the conditions under which different strategies might be more effective, as well as their relationship to one another. The algorithm performs recursive partitioning of the dataset into successively more homogeneous groups, sequencing the variables hierarchically to predict successful and failed outcomes. Ideal groups would be entirely homogeneous. Figure 2.6 illustrates the CTree output for all of the predictor variables utilized in the foregoing OLS regression, using the 196 cases with known outcomes. Failed cases are indicated by a -1 value, mixed cases with a 0 value, and successful cases with a +1 value.

The recursive partitioning tree is much more informative than the OLS output. It indicates that the most important factor for determining advocacy outcome is scope: failure is much more likely when activists are advocating at a local level (scope ≤ 3). About half of activists working at the local level use policy papers as one of their advocacy strategies. If they combine policy papers with grassroots education, they are likely to gain at least partial success. However, if they use a policy paper and fail to engage in grassroots education, they are likely to fail in the end. Indeed, this is the only node—local advocacy, use of policy paper, no grassroots education—where failure is more likely than success. For every other node, success (full or partial) is more likely.

For advocacy conducted at the regional, national, or global level (scope > 3), the deciding factor is whether the advocacy is engaging with a waste-related issue. Nonwaste issues generated mixed results, while waste issues tended not to fail. How successful advocates were depended on their use of protest and grassroots education. Cases with protests did not fail but tended to generate more mixed resolutions than total victories. Cases without protests and without grassroots education efforts did better than those with protests, but advocates who combined a nonprotest strategy with grassroots education cases were far more successful than either of the other groups. Once again, regime type was not a significant predictor variable.

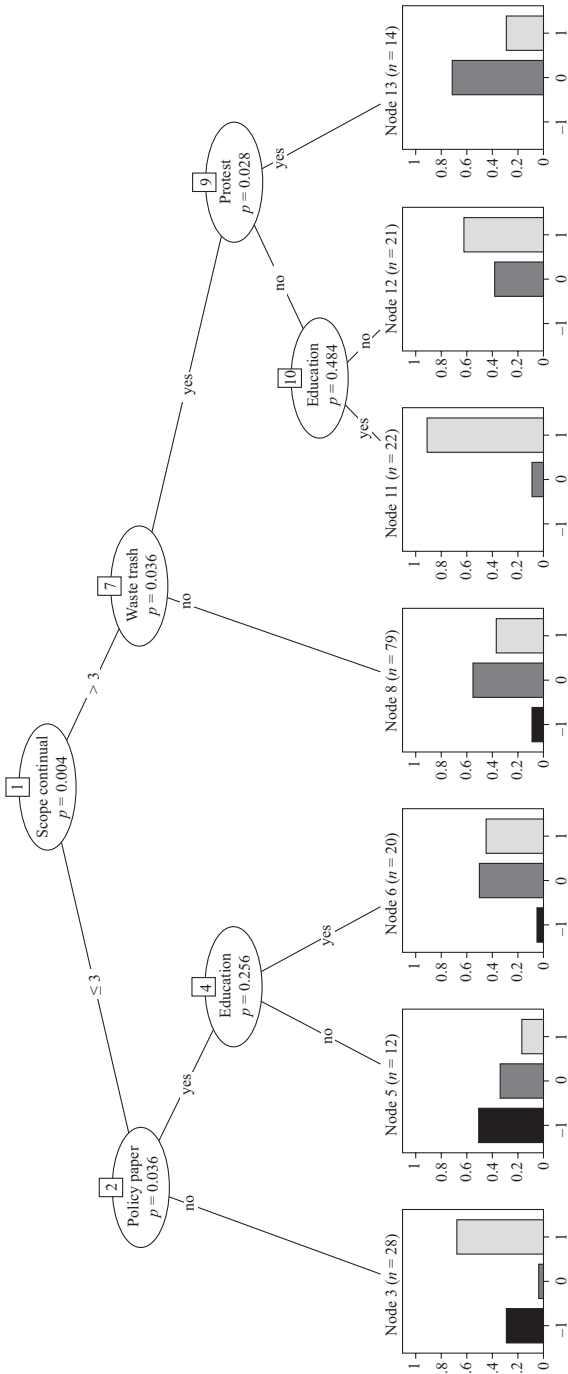


Figure 2.6 Recursive partitioning of advocacy strategy and context variables (-1 = failure, 0 = mixed, 1 = success).

Regime Type and Successful Advocacy

The descriptive statistics indicate that advocacy strategies do not vary much by region, and the OLS regressions and recursive partitioning lend further evidence to suggest that regime type is not a statistically significant factor determining advocacy success. Indeed, it appears that strategy selection and success are influenced primarily by local factors. These results support the findings of Russell Dalton and colleagues in their 2003 study of environmental organizations in which they wrote, “Within each nation, the environmental movement is so diverse that national-level opportunity structures have little influence on the participation patterns of environmental groups.”⁸

And yet the idea that regime type does not matter for advocacy success goes against all instincts, scholarly and otherwise. Digging into the data a bit more, we can see that regime type does appear to affect the likelihood of success, even if it does not register as statistically significant when other factors are taken into account. Figure 2.7 illustrates the outcomes for the 192 cases in which both regime type and outcome could be determined.

The relationship between regime type and advocacy outcomes appears to be nonlinear. While the chances of complete success rise with the level of freedom in the country, the chances of failure are about the same in free and not free countries, with partly free countries having the greatest proportion of failed advocacy cases. When these data are broken down more, the complex relationship between regime type and advocacy outcome is

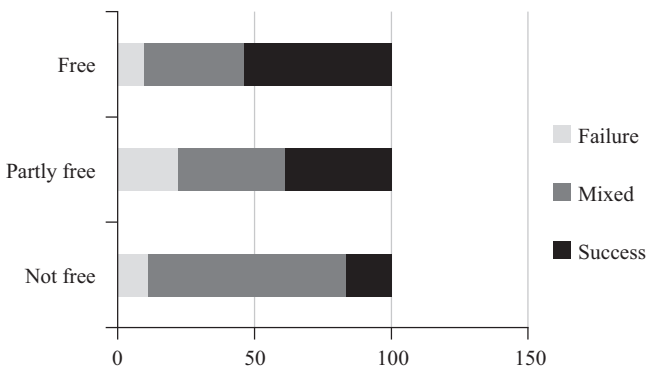


Figure 2.7

Regime type and advocacy outcome (percentage). Of the 192 cases, 156 were in free countries, 18 were in partly free countries, and 18 were in countries that are not free.

further illuminated. Figure 2.8 illustrates the percentage of advocacy outcomes according to Freedom House’s political rights (e.g., right to vote, right to join a political party, the existence of competitive elections) and civil liberty (e.g., freedom of expression and belief, right to free association, rule of law) ratings (1 is most free, 7 is least free).

Civil liberty appears to have the expected linear relationship with success—the percentage of successful cases tends to rise as civil liberties rise. However, political rights do not appear to be related to success in any linear way—successful, mixed, and failed cases are almost randomly distributed. Thus, it appears that for environmental advocates, having free elections and active political parties matters much less than securing the rights of a free press and equal protection under the law.

Failure is more common in countries that fall in the midrange of both civil liberties and political rights than in countries on either the democracy or autocracy end of the spectrum. Mixed outcomes do not appear to follow any kind of pattern across regime types. These results suggest that political regime context affects advocacy outcomes in complex, nonlinear ways.

Digging further, the findings here suggest that while regime type may not affect success, it does appear to affect failure—in particular, the consequence of failure. This study was designed to examine the factors that help determine success and distinguish among success, mixed success, and

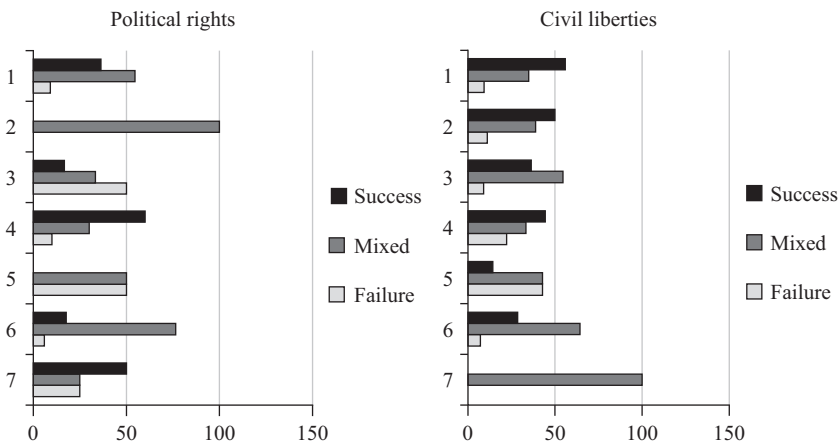


Figure 2.8
Advocacy outcome by political rights and civil liberty rating (percentage of cases).

failure. It was not designed to study failure, so there were not enough cases of complete failure to make nuanced distinctions among them.

However, if we look at the small subset of cases (thirteen of two hundred) in which there was violence associated with the environmental advocacy, there is a strong indication that while regime type might not affect advocacy success rates, it may have an important influence on the consequences of advocacy failure. In terms of overall numbers, environmental advocacy in undemocratic and partly democratic countries was disproportionately likely to involve violence: 22 percent of the environmental advocacy efforts in unfree countries and 11 percent of the cases in partly free countries turned violent, in contrast to only 4 percent of advocacy efforts in free countries.

Because of the relatively small number of failed cases in this dataset, it is impossible to draw definitive conclusions about the influence of regime type on the consequences of advocacy failure, but they do offer tentative support for other research that has studied violence and environmental advocacy. One study by Helen Poulos and Mary Alice Haddad (2016) suggests that grassroots environmental protests in democratic countries are much less likely to turn violent than those in nondemocratic countries.⁹ Global Witness, a global NGO that tracks violence against environmental activists, found that 2015 was the most violent year on record, with nearly two hundred people being killed for trying to protect their communities against various forms of resource extraction. The Global Witness map of deaths highlights strong geographic and political patterns to the violence, with more violence occurring in undemocratic countries.¹⁰ Thus, while regime type and geographic region may not help us understand patterns of advocacy success, they may be highly influential in explaining the patterns and consequences of advocacy failure, and violence in particular.

Finally, while this research has demonstrated that some advocacy strategies are more common and more effective than others, it should not be interpreted to mean that strategies that have low success rates should be abandoned. While the analyses here measured the scope of the advocacy effort, they could not measure the impact of the outcome. It may very well be that the types of advocacy that are less successful in terms of frequency, which was the measure here, are more important in terms of overall impact.

For example, the statistical evidence presented here suggests that legal advocacy and public protests are neither common nor particularly effective

in gaining outright victories anywhere. However, it may be that one outright victory can more than make up for the cases of defeat. Furthermore, as Austin Sarat and Stuart Scheingold (2006) have demonstrated in the US, Patricia Steinhoff and colleagues (2014) have shown in Japan for legal advocacy, and Daniel Gillion (2013) has demonstrated for protests, even when they fail or only partially succeed, these forms of advocacy can often serve important organizing and public-awareness-raising functions that can contribute to a broader advocacy goal even when they have failed to achieve the immediate goal. Therefore, this research should not be interpreted to mean that strategies with low success–failure ratios are ineffective. Rather, their frequency and effectiveness should be placed in an appropriate context.

Conclusion

The research presented here has three important findings: (1) Most environmental advocacy is successful. (2) Neither advocacy strategy choice nor strategy success rates vary significantly by region. And (3) regime type has a complex relationship with advocacy. These findings challenge several common assumptions in social movement and public policy literatures.

First, to my surprise, most environmental advocacy efforts are successful. While the environmental advocacy efforts in this dataset were quite wide ranging—including activities as far removed from each other geographically and politically as a project to promote green hotels in Vermont, to violent antipollution protests in Henan, China, to environmental education efforts in Gambia and many in between—I did not expect success rates to be so high. My own daily reading of the news is full of doom and gloom about the devastation that climate change is causing and will wreak on the planet. These results clearly show that I have been missing a broader picture that includes a lot of positive action at the grassroots level in which individuals, communities, businesses, and local and sometimes even national governments are actively engaged in numerous proenvironmental activities all around the world.

Second, these results challenge the assumption that advocacy strategies and their success rates are particularly linked to political culture. Certainly, the exact form that any given advocacy effort takes will be culturally rooted in the location where it is taking place. For example, while it might be common to have martial arts demonstrations as part of public protests in

Taiwan,¹¹ you would be very unlikely to see martial arts performed at a climate rally in Germany. However, although they may be engaging in slightly different implementations of the strategy, advocates in both places are using public protest as an advocacy strategy. Thus, the idea that somehow “Western” cultures are more likely to employ confrontational strategies such as filing lawsuits, organizing protests, and lobbying politicians,¹² while “Eastern” countries tend to employ more “embedded” collaborative strategies such as cultivating government allies, writing policy papers, and engaging in grassroots education,¹³ is false. Advocates across the globe all employ a wide variety of advocacy strategies, and they do so at roughly similar rates.

Furthermore, successful strategies are similarly successful everywhere. Asking a former Ministry of Environment official to be on the board of your environmental NGO is as effective in Bonn and Buenos Aires as it is in Beijing. Cultivating government allies gives you policy access that is useful in any political context in which you live. Similarly, grassroots education that teaches children to appreciate and value the planet on which they live is as important in Bangalore as it is in Cincinnati. Advocates filing legal lawsuits against polluters and those taking to the streets to oppose the building of a new polluting facility in their neighborhood are going to face opposition and difficulties no matter where they are.

Finally, these results complicate the assumed relationship between regime type and political advocacy. While some scholars¹⁴ have also found that regime type does not affect advocacy patterns, much of the literature on environmental politics assumes that regime type will affect the types and efficacy of advocacy efforts.¹⁵ The findings here suggest that it is not the case that advocacy is more common or more generally successful in democratic states. Perhaps even more surprising, it does not appear that advocacy strategies vary by regime type—advocates in democratic countries are not, in fact, more likely to use lawsuits or protests to promote their environmental causes.

Additional analysis of the data has revealed that democracy has complex, nonlinear relationships with advocacy. When we separate out political and civil liberties, it appears that civil liberties are much more important in ensuring the ability of advocates to promote their causes utilizing safe, legal, nonviolent means. Advocates whose civil liberties were protected, who enjoyed freedom of the press, freedom of movement, and equal legal protection, had greater chances of success than those whose civil rights were not protected.

While the small number of outright failures in the dataset does not allow for a rigorous analysis, the distribution of violence among those cases leads to findings that are deeply troubling, although not particularly surprising: advocates in nondemocratic contexts who engage in failed advocacy are much, much more likely to face violence than their counterparts in democracies. This suggests that the factors that influence failure, and especially the consequence of failure, may not be the same factors that affect success. Success and failure may not lie on a continuum.

Rather, “mixed outcome” may be the equivalent of “0,” and the dynamics that move an advocacy effort in the positive direction from 0 (mixed) to +1 (complete success) may be quite different from the factors that move an advocacy effort from 0 (mixed) to -1 (complete failure). Just as it is the case that the factors that lead to “failed states” in international relations are not merely the inverse of those that lead to “sustainable development,” scholars of social movements and public policy should perhaps be thinking about success and failure as two rather different phenomena instead of as merely parts of the same continuum.

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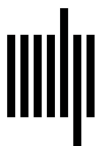
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