

# Do social movements improve corporate behavior?

...Maybe

*Mary-Hunter McDonnell, JD PhD*

*Associate Professor of Management*

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marymcd@wharton.upenn.edu



# Are we better off using private or public politics?

- Rising corporate-targeted activism is largely a result of disenchantment with public politics (Soule, 2009)
- But a *working* regulatory system may be preferable
- Key question: how does private politics affect the likelihood of formal regulation?
  - Corporate champions are necessary to achieve policy solutions
  - The ease of engaging in firm-targeted movements may decrease the likelihood of the persistent mobilization that would be necessary to achieve comprehensive reform



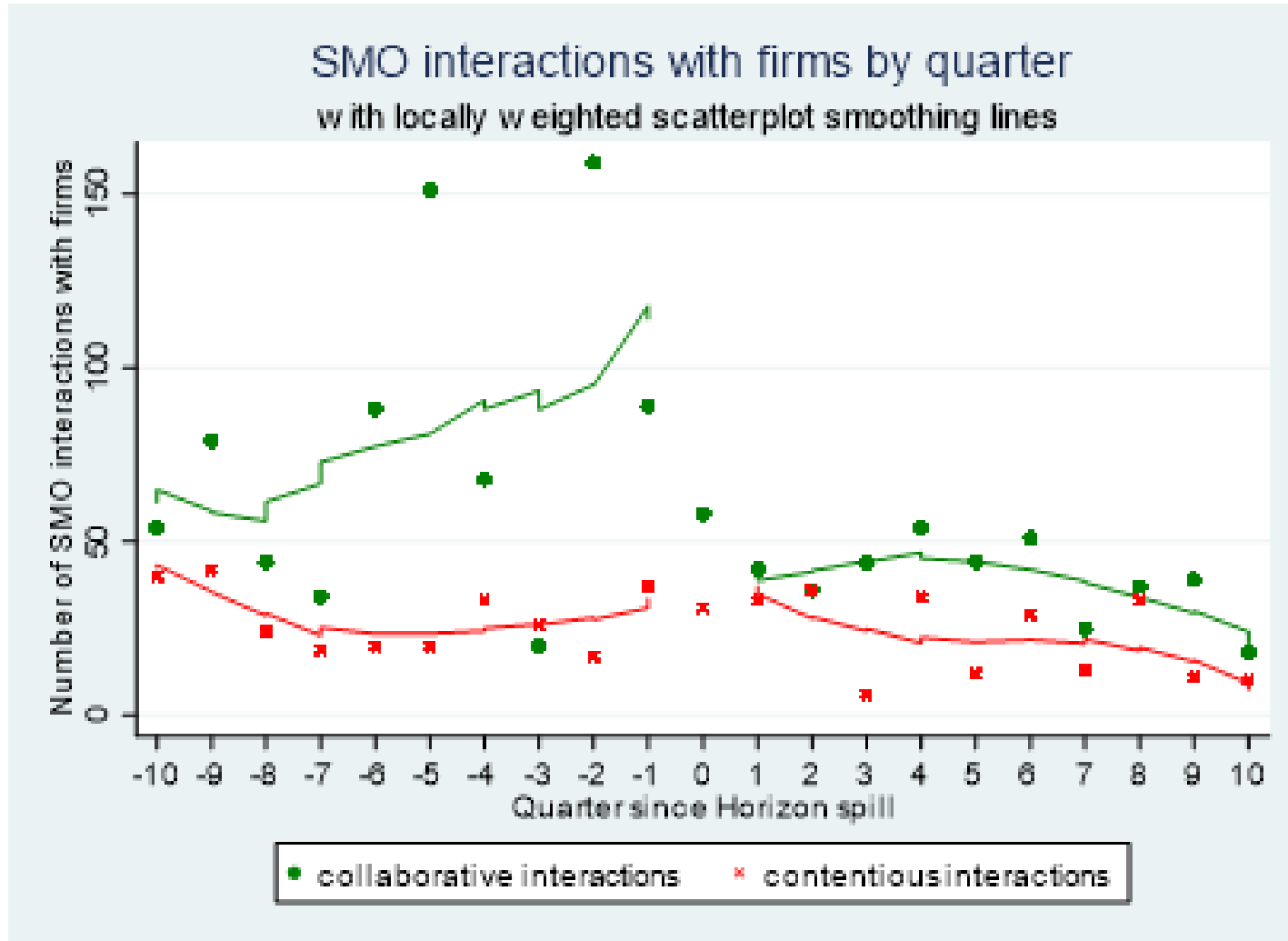
# Movements' Breadth of Impact depends on *how* they engage

- Research tends to focus on contentious activism
- Concessions won from contention are less likely to lead to voluntary reforms from non-targeted organizations
  - (Briscoe, Gupta & Anner, 2015: studying diffusion of anti-sweatshop supplier sanctioning practices)
- SMOs' increasingly use collaborative tactics
  - (McDonnell, Odziemkowska, Pontikes, 2021; Odziemkowska, WP).
- Collaborating may be better for fostering field-wide reform, but it risks SMOs' reputations.



Movements choose from a dynamic arsenal of tactics that includes **collaborative and contentious options**

# Illustration: Shifts in SMOs' Tactical Repertoires around the 2010 BP Oil Spill



Movements' willingness to collaborate requires a baseline amount of *trust* and a fair appetite for *risk*.

# What is *your* definition of CSR?

- Activism problematizes corporate values, but movements address politically contested issues (McDonnell & Cobb, 2020)
  - Contested issues provoke impassioned, oppositional responses along ideological fault lines.

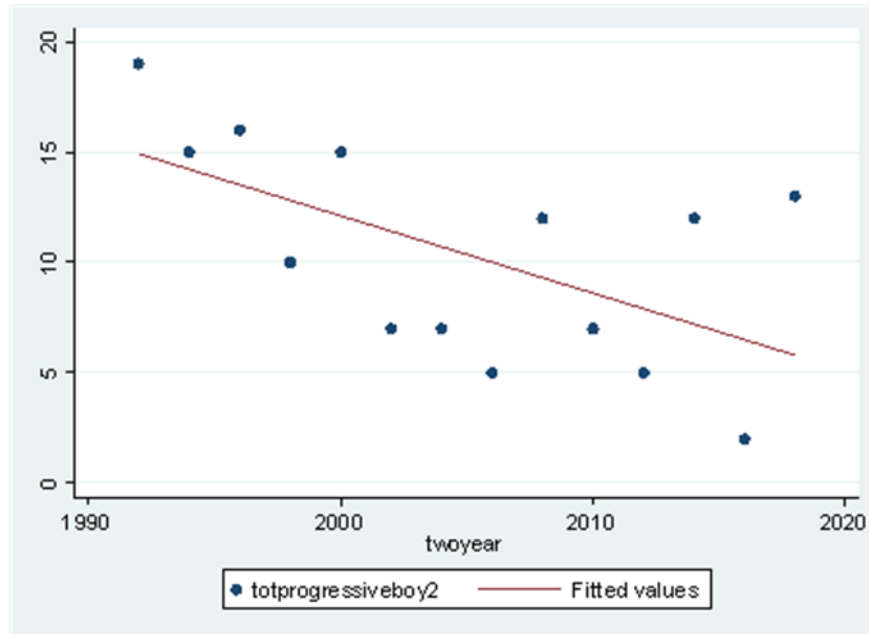
Illustration: Disney was boycotted in 1995 for extending health benefits to the partners of gay employees, while United Airlines was targeted in 1997 for not offering the same benefits.

- Liberals and conservatives are unlikely to agree about what counts as an *improvement* in CSR.

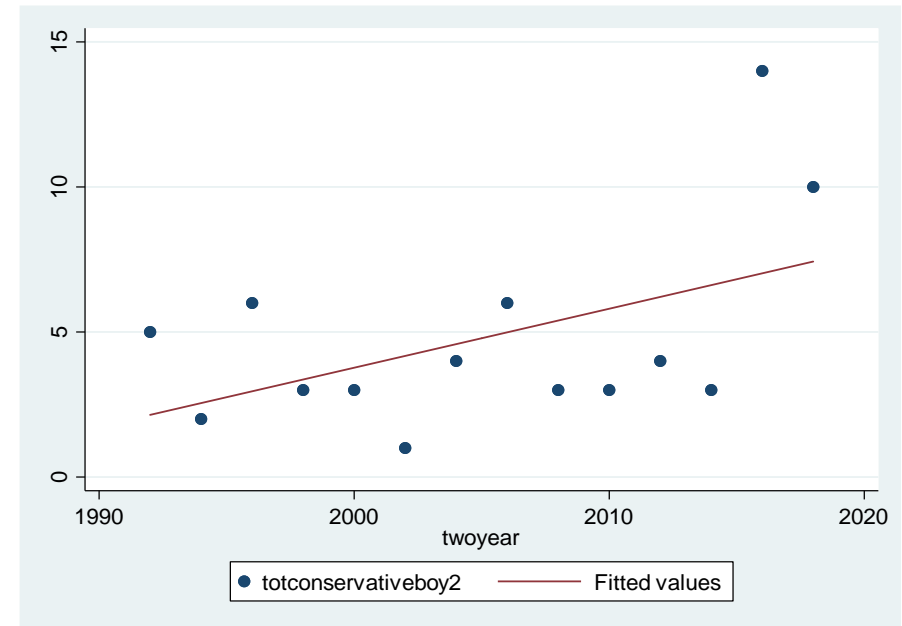


Whether or not you believe movements **improve** CSR depends on whether or not you believe that movements' claims are **correct**.

## Trends in Ideological Orientation of Anti-Corporate Activism (McDonnell & Darnell, 2021)



Total Progressive Boycotts by Election Cycle

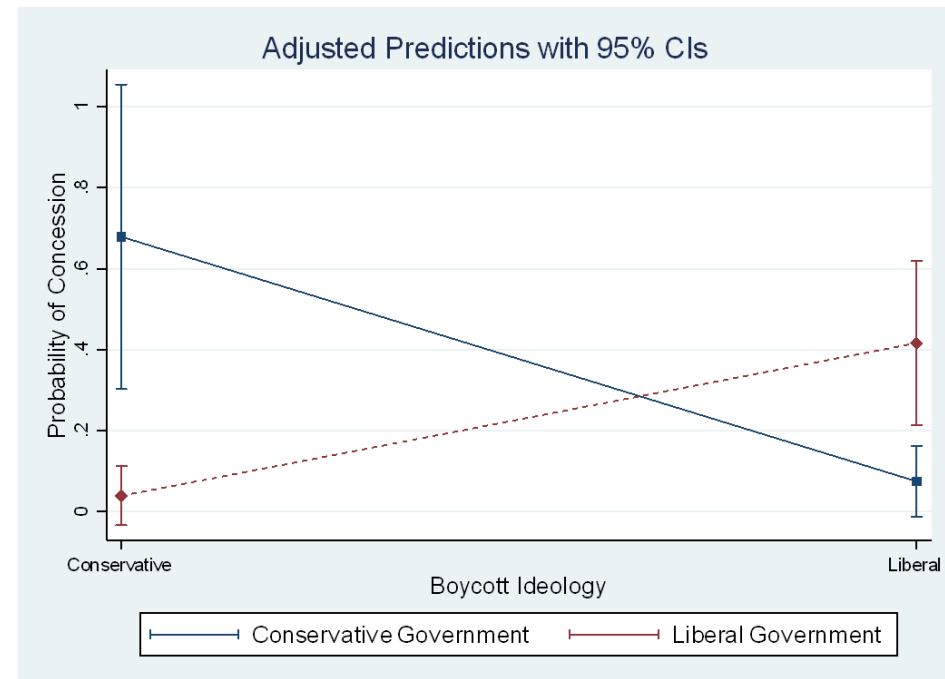
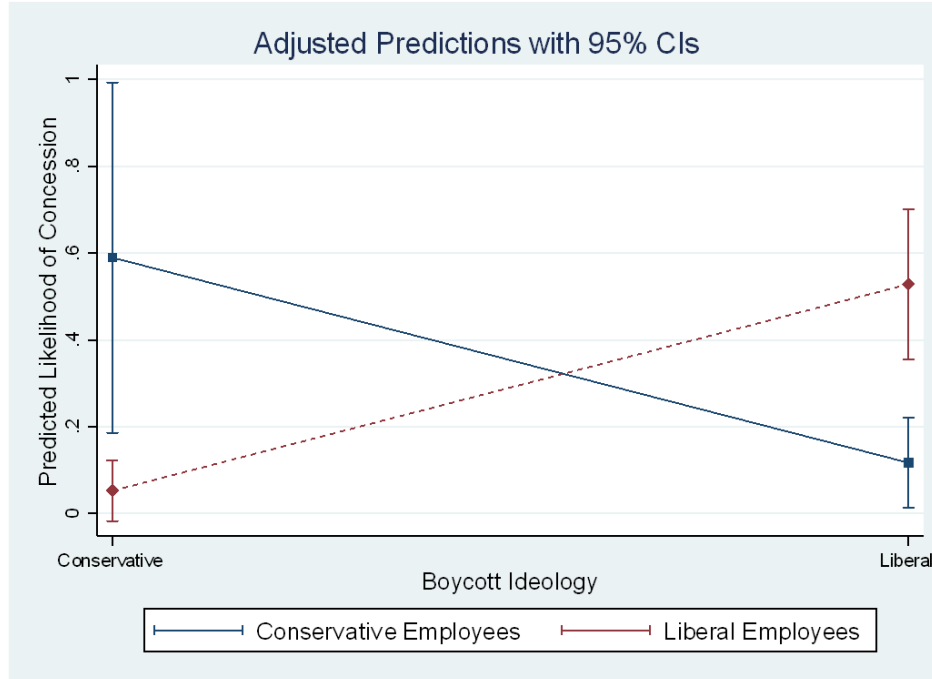


Total Conservative Boycotts by Election Cycle

Source: McDonnell & Darnell, WP

# How movements shape corporate practices depends on the ideology of key stakeholders

## Predicted likelihood of firm concession to boycotts, 1990-2008



Source: McDonnell & Darnell, WP); see also Briscoe, Chin & Hambrick, 2014

# Suggested Future Research Questions

- What movement strategies maximize field-level reform?
    - How should movements select their targets (for contentious or collaborative engagements) if this is their goal?
  - What companies make the safest and most effective partners for collaboration?
    - How can SMOs protect themselves when using their collaborative repertoire?
  - How are movement outcomes affected by increasing political polarization?
    - Are companies' performances of CSR likely to be ideologically consistent?
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