

Methodology

This document describes in detail the approaches used to collect and analyze data for the fields in the Campaign Explorer. We describe the methodology used to construct each of the two databases currently in use: “Groups” and “Campaigns”.

Groups Database

The first stage of developing the database of Australian environmental advocacy groups involved identifying the population of groups active across all issues within the Australian environmental movement in 2017. To do this we identified potential groups by reviewing the Australian Register of Environmental Organisations (Australian Government 2018) and then using a snowball search system to follow linked groups and networks where listed. This process resulted in the development of a pool of 2,668 potential groups, which were then manually checked for the presence of an active website with a focus on national environmental issues. Applying these inclusion criteria resulted in 1,373 websites selected for more detailed review. These were then further filtered to only include those groups who undertook some form of environmental activism. We operationalized the word “activism” by applying the definition used by the Australian Federal Government through the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). This entity governs charitable organizations engaging in social and environmental change in Australia. The ACNC groups these activities as “advocacy,” defined as “activities which are aimed at securing or opposing any change to a law, policy or practice in the Commonwealth, a state or territory, or another country” (Australian Government 2012, 1). These activities are grouped by the ACNC into campaigning, lobbying, and general advocacy. Thus, the three words “campaign,” “advocate” (including variants), and “lobby” were chosen as the search terms for identifying organizations in the dataset engaged in environmental activism.

A manual search of each individual site using the three keywords was undertaken via the online site-provided search tool. Groups that did not return any positive search results, or did not provide an internal site search option, were then manually searched on the “About,” “What we do,” or equivalent webpage for a selected range of other terms related to advocacy and civil resistance. These included terms such as “influence,” “fight,” “movement,” or “take action,” as well as phrases which express any activities related to changing laws, policies, or practices. As a result of this process a further 876 groups were removed as they were judged not to undertake any form of environmental advocacy nor civil resistance (following Andrews, et al. 2016). The largest sub-group removed from the population were those working in “environmental remediation,” for example, through wildlife rescue or the restoration of bushland.

The final sample for analysis was 497 websites. We then undertook thematic coding. Codable attributes for content analysis were identified from the research literature on environmental activism and communication about issue focus, events, campaign goals, and campaign targets. This was done in order to construct a database specifically for groups

focused on climate change activism and to develop the campaigns database. To identify data for each of these attributes we created keywords (e.g., “campaign”). We then searched through the scraped website text to find incidents where these words were used. Inter-coder reliability was established through a staged approach, testing two coders’ results after 10, 30, and 50 documents were coded. Discrepancies of <0.60 in inter-coder reliability were reconciled at each stage through discussion, with 100% agreement reached between the two coders. A total of 50 websites were dual coded, resulting in a 10% sample percentage which is suitable for online content coding (Joyce 2018; Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken 2002). The remaining 90% of the data was then coded by one person. The final average inter-coder reliability was 0.809 (Krippendorff’s Alpha) and 0.81 (Cohen’s Kappa), which are considered acceptable (Hayes and Krippendorff 2007).

In order to use updated website text for the Campaign Explorer we re-scraped the websites in our Groups study population in early 2020. We did not undertake any manual coding on this text; however, we did use the text corpus for text analysis using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count program (Pennebaker, et al. 2015) and R software for topic modeling (Grün and Hornik 2011). Over time additional groups have been added as part of the Campaign Explorer citizen science project. For each group added the same coding process (either using website or Facebook text) is undertaken. A record of the ‘description’ of each group (from websites in the first instance, or Facebook if the group has no website page) is copied into the Explorer database, along with a tag identifying the date and location of the text copied.

Campaigns and Outcomes Databases

As described above, the website content from each group in the Group Database was read to identify campaign names, issue, goals, and targets. In total, 960 campaigns were identified. The outcomes of this data are reported in the paper ‘Gulliver, R., Fielding, K. S., & Louis, W. (2020). The characteristics, activities and goals of environmental organizations engaged in advocacy within the Australian environmental movement. *Environmental Communication, 14*(5), 614-627.’ Additional campaigns were added as part of the Campaign Explorer citizen science project. Each campaign added was identified through either website or Facebook text, and the same coding process to identify campaign names, issue, goals and targets was undertaken.

An online search was undertaken in early 2020 to identify whether the goals of the campaigns have been achieved. This search was done with Google search engine using different combinations of the campaign name, goal, or group responsible for its implementation. This assessment process involved searching for news stories, reports, or any data available online indicating whether the goal of the campaign had been achieved. Each campaign was then assessed as achieving either a “successful,” “partially successful,” “unsuccessful,” or “unknown” outcome. It is important to note that this process does not enable claims of causation between the activities of each group and the particular outcomes which were identified.

Successful campaigns are those that achieved their goal. For example, a campaign targeting a university to divest from fossil fuels was assessed as successful if the university made a formal, public commitment to do so. Likewise, a campaign was deemed unsuccessful if the goal had not been achieved. For example, a campaign to stop a coal mine would be considered unsuccessful if the coal mine proceeded or continued to progress in its approval or construction process. Partially successful campaigns were those with possibly multiple goals or targets, of which one or more were achieved. The outcomes of campaigns targeting changes in behavior, such as reducing the amount of meat an individual eats, were unable to be assessed because data on individual behavior (e.g., meat consumption) in the areas targeted by those campaigns is unavailable.