



# Left-Wing Inertia Toward Animal Advocacy: A Research Blind Spot

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Recently, social scientists, practitioners and advocates have dedicated increasing attention towards engaging the political right in animal advocacy (e.g., Jenni et al., 2026). This growing focus on conservative outreach reflects a broad concern about polarisation. While this concern is legitimate, it may obscure equally important challenges in the movement’s ability to sustainably engage the political left. In this commentary we explore the extent to which animal advocacy is already successful among left-leaning audiences and whether left-wing attitudinal support for animal advocacy translates into meaningful behavioural change (e.g., diet change, advocacy efforts, donating to animal charities). Last, we explore under what circumstances targeted social change is more effectively achieved by mobilising a cohesive, committed minority and when it is more appropriate to seek bipartisan support. Drawing on evidence from the behavioural sciences we argue for greater empirical attention to the forms, limits, and sources of left-wing inertia within animal advocacy.

## Left-Wing Receptivity to Animal Advocacy

Left-leaning individuals place less emphasis on tradition, reject human supremacy in favour of “flatter” human–animal relations and are less attached to animal products (Dhont & Hodson, 2014). While these orientations are normatively aligned with animal advocacy, favorable attitudes alone are insufficient to produce sustained behavioural change (Loy et al., 2016). Even among those on the left who do make changes, there are



issues both in scale and retention. For example, while left-leaning individuals are 2.5–5.5 times more likely than conservatives to adopt veg\*n diets, they nonetheless constitute a small minority of the left overall (5–11%; Reinhart, 2018), and this limited uptake is further undermined by high recidivism among those who do make dietary changes (~84%; Arévalo & Anderson, 2023).

This pattern of ideological alignment, but general inaction is consistent with a substantial body of research documenting a persistent “attitude–behaviour gap,” whereby expressed moral concern frequently fails to translate into action (Webb & Sheeran, 2006). Applied to animal advocacy, strong alignment with animal welfare issues is therefore unlikely to translate into dietary change or activist engagement. Notably, the literature has devoted little time to explore this attitude-behaviour gap on the left, or broader left-wing inertia towards animal advocacy. While this is a clear knowledge gap, whether this is a strategic oversight ultimately depends on how critical behaviour change on the left is for animal advocates globally.

## Movement Building and the Left

There is little evidence that past social movements (e.g., the American Civil Rights movement) first tried to solicit broad bipartisan support. Instead, such movements were characterised by committed minorities that eventually reached a critical mass needed to drive change. The theory of critical mass and accompanying empirical evidence (Iacopini et al., 2022), suggest that social conventions can be overturned by a minority of committed individuals, if such a minority reaches a critical size. Such social tipping points produce small changes which trigger self-perpetuating feedback loops and eventually catalyse widespread change in social norms.

How such tipping points are reached under different governance structures remains poorly understood. Political context may determine whether animal advocacy is best advanced through a cohesive left-leaning minority or broader bipartisan mobilisation. In direct-democratic systems with frequent referendums (e.g., Switzerland), reform requires cross-partisan majorities. Here, politicising animal welfare as a left identity issue risks counter-mobilising conservatives, converting a broadly sympathetic issue into a partisan signal, thereby reducing the likelihood of securing a mandate. In contrast, in winner-take-all systems such as the UK’s first-past-the-post, parties face stronger incentives to differentiate and mobilise core supporters. Highly salient and polarising manifesto commitments can therefore attract greater attention and political capital (Baumgartner et al., 2018). Consequently, issues enjoying bipartisan consensus may be left to the discretion of specific underfunded government departments. Here, coordinated lobbying by a cohesive ideological bloc may outweigh broad appeal. The risks of a left-wing base causing polarisation under FPTP are also less clear; it *may* increase left-wing identification with animal advocacy, elevating its status on the policy agenda and increasing likelihood of

behaviour change, inducing a clear path for improving the material conditions for farmed animals.

The need for cohesive and organised social movements intensifies in democracies with proportional representation but no referenda (e.g., Germany) and non-democracies (e.g., Brunei). In the former, single issue parties can achieve notable policy gains—these parties are typically ideologically cohesive. For the latter, traditional means of micro-level social change (individual dietary change) must be pursued, as the path to influence governance is unclear. In both, ideological cohesion may be necessary to shape policy (PR) or to shift market incentives while avoiding censorship (non-democracies).

## A Call for Research

Despite the potential strategic value of consolidating a left-wing base, remarkably little research examines left-leaning individuals specifically. We therefore outline several directions for future research. First, research could investigate the psychological mechanisms through which left-leaning individuals specifically manage cognitive dissonance arising from continued animal product consumption, such as moral self-licensing or appeals to broader structural critiques. Second, research could focus on the retention of left-wing vegans, examining whether targeted forms of social support can increase participation in movement-building and mitigate burnout, social exclusion, and experiences of Vystopia (Veitch & Gregson, 2025). Finally, future work could examine how intersectional and expansive moral frameworks, which are especially salient on the left (Waytz et al., 2019), shape engagement with animal advocacy. While these frameworks *may* strengthen coalition-building and align with left justice commitments, they *may* also diffuse attention, reduce issue salience, or provide discursive resources for contesting animal advocacy. Empirical research is needed to determine when moral expansiveness facilitates versus constrains sustained engagement.

## Conclusion

Taken together, these considerations suggest that left-wing support for animal advocacy cannot be assumed to translate straightforwardly into durable behaviour change or effective movement-building and demands dedicated research. Given that advocacy movements operate under severe resource constraints, overlooking the distinctive psychological barriers that shape left-wing engagement risks inefficient allocation of time and funding. Addressing this blindspot is essential for refining outreach strategies and understanding how social change unfolds across political contexts, particularly whether committed minorities can achieve more than broad bipartisan consensus.

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