

# Student Social Movements' Prevalence and Effectiveness on the University of Botswana Campus



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## Introduction

John Nkinyangi defines student protests as anything that refers to “any incident of student revolt or unrest, which constitute a serious challenge or threat to the established order” (1991). Students have been getting involved in social movements since the beginning of independence on the African continent. The reasons for involvement vary but can be categorized into four groups, as defined by William John Hanna and shown in Figure 1 below. Different tactics are taken by the students to get their points across; some use a more peaceful approach, using sit-ins and nonviolent demonstrations, while others can turn into violent encounters that can end in injuries or death of some participants and spectators (“Soweto student uprising”). The Mafeje sit-that occurred in South Africa in 1968 included speeches from student leaders that were followed by a march and occupation of the administrations buildings at the University of Cape Town (Hanna 1971). Mali and Kenya have experienced extreme student protests that have ended in violent incidents (Smith, 1997; Amutabi, 2002). Students have been a part of social movements in many countries. Social movements are a part of the basis that makes up the people fighting for what they want. Student protests have the ability to not only change policies on university campuses, but also national and international policies when they unite together. Students at the University of Botswana are known to participate in matters concerning the state as well as the university, but there has not been a substantial amount of research on the effectiveness and prevalence of these movements to truly understand the protest culture among university students within the context of Botswana. By researching further into the protest culture of the University of Botswana, one will be able to explore different and possibly more beneficial approaches to bring attention to the issues.

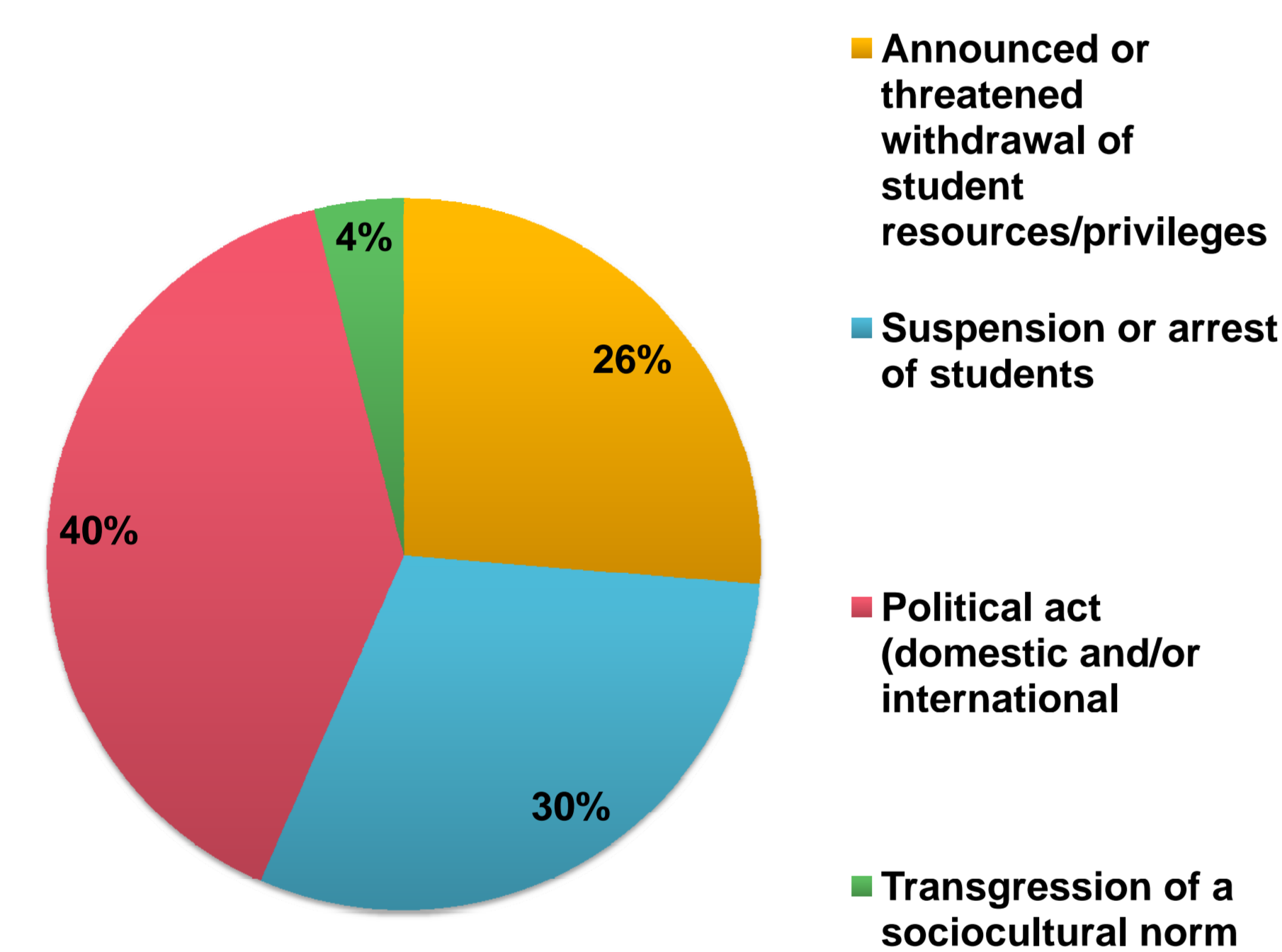


Figure 1 Distribution of Precipitating Incidents of Student Protests in Africa in 1968 (Adapted from Hanna, 1971)

## Objectives

- Look at student protests on the University of Botswana campus and determine the prevalence and effectiveness of these movements
- Shed light on how students go about getting their voices heard and to find out if the students themselves think of their efforts as successful or not, as well as faculties' opinion

## Methods

- Searches within academic literature, local and international newspapers, previous academic studies, and government documents on the subject of student protests in Botswana were used to gather logistical information as well as the students' and the public's opinions of student protests on the University of Botswana campus.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students and faculty on campus to gather basic information on general protests, different incidents when students did protest, and to get a better understanding of the on-campus opinion of effectiveness of the student social movements



Figure 3. Students protesting outside of Block 480 at the University of Botswana (Photo courtesy of Harris, 2012)

## Results: UB student protests

- There have been at least six movements since the opening of the school, and it does not seem like the protest culture is dying down. The issues have been varied, but there have been many grievances and movements that have circled around the issue of student allowances, academic shortfalls, and the discontentment of student activities; only a few national issues have caused the students to strike.
- Student involvement is said to not be as great as the media portrays but rather closer to 10% of the student population (personal communication, April 3, 2012). In Adewuyi Adeyinka's research on 2009 UB strike, the majority of students surveyed supported the strike (Figure 4 below).
- The use of violence is a usual occurrence with the protests on campus. In the majority of incidents researched, nearly all ended in violent acts being committed. This violence affects the number of student participants as seen in Adeyinka's study. See Figure 5 below for graphical representation. Violent acts are said to create a “bad reputation for students” and make it harder to negotiate with university management (personal communication, March 28, 2012).

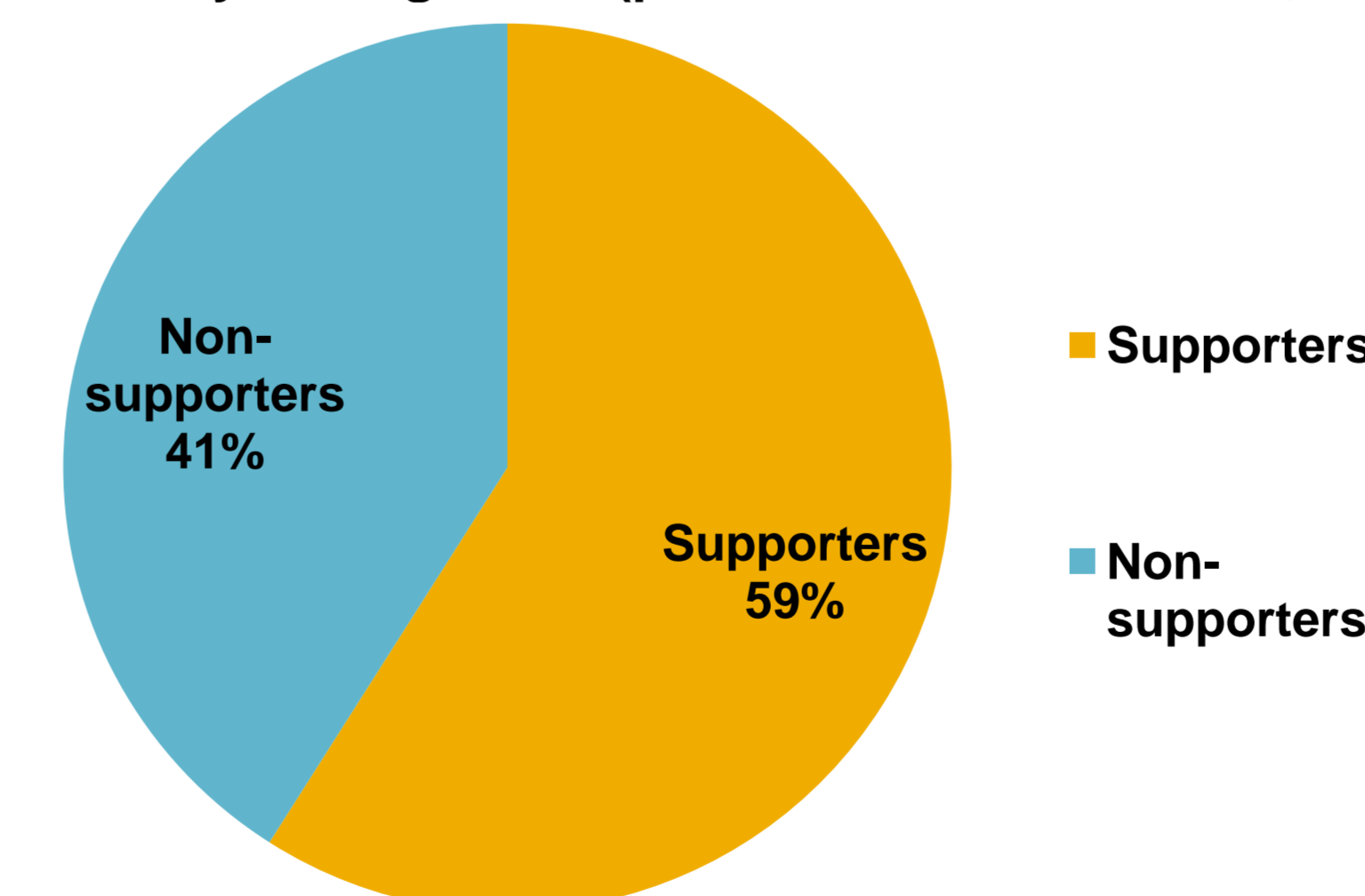


Figure 4. Percentage of students who supported disturbances and students who did not support disturbances during the 2009 UB student protest (adapted from Adeyinka, 2009)

## Conclusion

- University of Botswana student protest culture is very prevalent, but not as effective as students would hope.
- With their use of violence, students' efforts to change their situation have been thwarted and their reasoning delegitimized
- The university and students should:
  - attempt negotiate and start a dialogue first before beginning to strike or protest
  - set regulations and consequences pertaining to the use of violence and have the students enforce these rules
  - allow peaceful assemblies to discuss issues publicly
- In the future researchers should:
  - look into sampling a large population on campus with surveys asking basic questions about students protest while concurrently interviewing participants that might have a better knowledge of student protests.
  - look into people's opinions of student protests outside of the University of Botswana campus i.e. government officials or the police force.

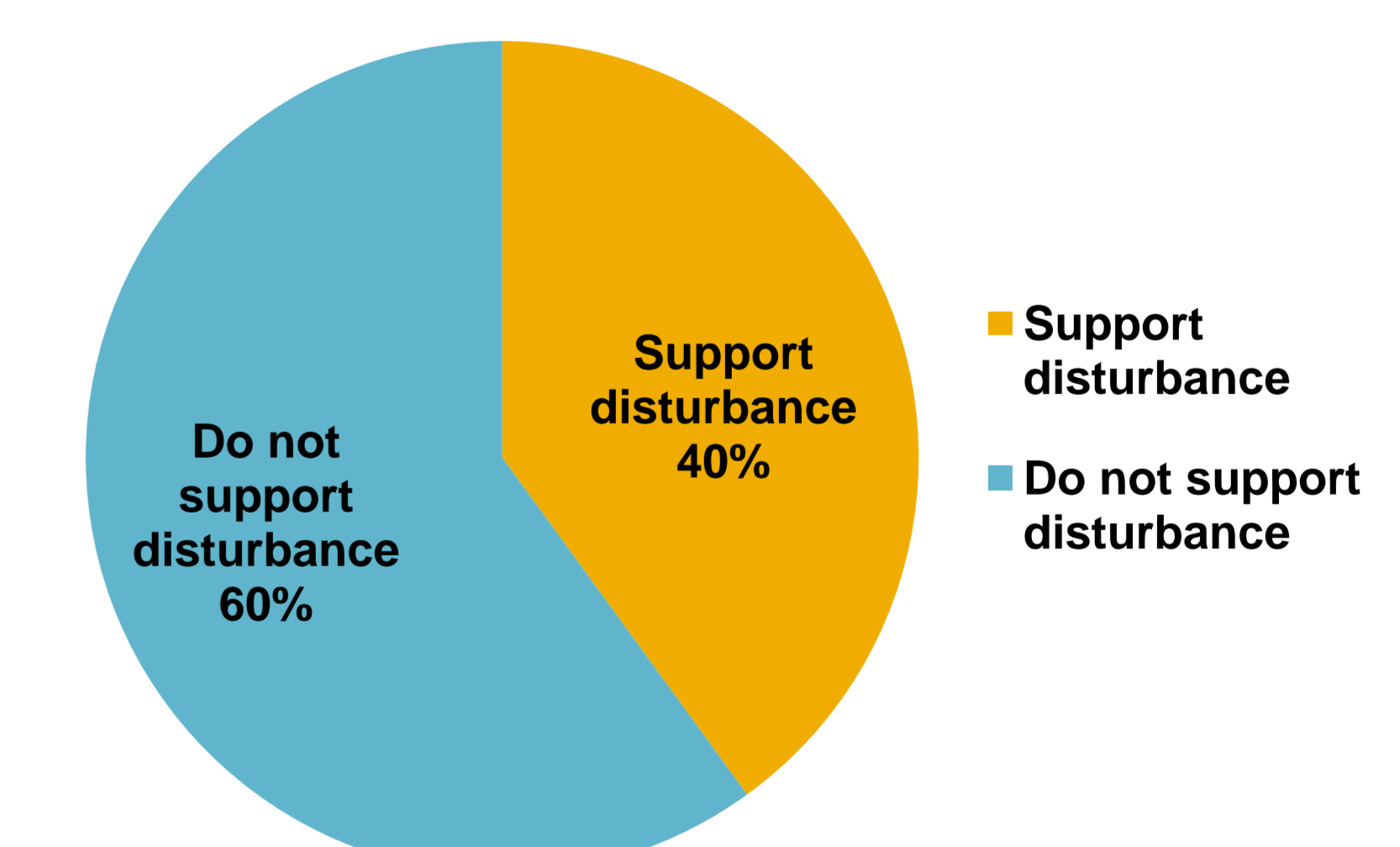


Figure 5. Percentage of Supporters and Non-supporters of 2009 UB student protest (adapted from Adeyinka, 2009)



Figure 2. UB students march outside of Block 480 during student protest in January 2012 (Photo courtesy of Beckman, 2012)

## Acknowledgments

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