

Hilary Term, 2025

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND COLLECTIVE PROTEST

Dr Michael Biggs

Wednesday 2–4pm, Meeting room on 1st floor

(Version 2)

This paper examines explanations for the origins and outcomes of social movements and collective protest. Readings range widely in subject matter—from food riots in eighteenth-century England to protest following the fall of Mubarak in Egypt—but with an emphasis on the United States since 1950. The emphasis is on preparing students to develop their own empirical research, for the MSc dissertation or DPhil thesis.

Requirements for students auditing the paper as well as those enrolled:

- For two of the eight weeks, you will write an essay (about 2000 words) answering one of the questions. You are welcome to propose another question, just discuss it with me first. As well as the assigned readings, you must also incorporate two other articles or another book from a social movement that interests you. Sharing your essays will help with revisions for the examination. Email me the essay (preferably a Word document so I can add comments) to be before 5pm on Tuesday. Late essays will not receive comments.

The paper is assessed by an unseen three-hour examination in Trinity Term.

READING LIST († to be circulated)

I. American New Left in the 1960s

Analyzing social phenomena should begin from familiarity with specific examples. As a case study, we will consider the New Left on American campuses in the 1960s. Retrospective accounts by three student activists trace the evolution of the movement over time, while contemporary film conveys the degree of conflict on campus.

- What motivated these students to join the movement?
- Why did some activists (like Rudd) become more radical while others (like Searle) became more conservative?
- How were students able to change their universities?

Students for a Democratic Society, Port Huron Statement, 1962;

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Port_Huron_Statement

Jo Freeman, *At Berkeley in the Sixties: The Education of an Activist, 1961–1965*, Indiana University Press, 2004

Mark Rudd, *Underground: My Life with SDS and the Weathermen*, Harper Collins, 2009, parts 1–2

Two Days in October, American Experience, PBS, 2005;

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vla-0oeU1c8>

(skip the segments on Vietnam, just watch those on protest at Wisconsin)

Protest: Columbia 1968; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DiGVcBirLqs>

John R. Searle, *The Campus War: A Sympathetic Look at the University in Agony*, New York: World Publishing, 1971; <https://www.ditext.com/searle/campus/campus.html>

2. Conceptualizing movements and protest

With a tangible example in mind, we turn to the question of how to conceptualize social movements and protest. Movements need to be grasped as an abstract social phenomena, as well as one with a particular historical genealogy (as we will see next week). Theory has been informed by the method of cataloguing protest events or ‘contentious gatherings’.

- Riots, demonstrations, strikes, occupations, boycotts—do these forms of action share similarities? How do they differ from voting?
- What is a social movement?
- Assess the advantages and the disadvantages of taking the protest event as the fundamental unit of observation in the field of social movements.

William A. Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest*, Homewood, Ill.: The Dorsey Press, 1975, pp. 14–17 and appendix A†

Claus Offe, ‘New Social Movements: Challenging the Boundaries of Institutional Politics’, *Social Research*, vol. 52, 1985, pp. 817–68 (read pp. 826–88)

Mario Diani, ‘The Concept of Social Movement’, *Sociological Review*, vol. 40, 1992, pp. 1–25

Clarence Marsh Case, *Non-Violent Coercion: A Study in Methods of Social Pressure*, Allen and Unwin, 1923, ch. 21

Ralph H. Turner, ‘The Public Perception of Protest’, *American Sociological Review*, vol. 34, 1969, pp. 815–31

Dana R. Fisher, Kenneth T. Andrews, Neal Caren, Erica Chenoweth, Michael T. Heaney, Tommy Leung, L. Nathan Perkins, and Jeremy Pressman, ‘The Science of Contemporary Street Protest: New Efforts in the United States’, *Science Advances*, vol. 5, 2019, eaaw5461

Swen Hutter, ‘Protest Event Analysis and Its Offspring’, Donatella della Porta (ed.), *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 335–67

Pamela Oliver, Alex Hanna, and Chaeyoon Lim, ‘Constructing Relational and Verifiable Protest Event Data: Four Challenges and Some Solutions’, *Mobilization*, vol. 28, 2023, pp. 1–22

Brayden G. King and Laura K. Nelson, ‘Beyond Protests: Using Computational Text Analysis to Explore a Greater Variety of Social Movement Activities’, *Methodological Advances in Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, 2023, pp. 13–35

3. Historical origins

We consider the origin of the modern movement in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth, contrasting this with an earlier form of protest, the food riot. We also consider how episodes of contention are linked by common repertoires of protest. How are new tactics invented? How do they spread across movements and across countries?

- What explains the origin of the modern social movement?
 - Why do repertoires of protest change over time?
 - What is distinctive about the modern repertoire of protest and when did it arise?
- Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848, parts i-ii, iv, and preface to 1882 English edition;
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/>
- E.P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’, *Past and Present*, vol. 50, 1971, pp. 76–136
- Wendy Thwaites, ‘Oxford Food Riots: A Community and Its Markets’, Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth (eds), *Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland*, Liverpool University Press, 1996, pp. 137–62
- Ho-fung Hung, *Protest with Chinese Characteristics: Demonstrations, Riots, and Petitions in the Mid-Qing Dynasty*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, ch. 6
- William H. Sewell Jr., ‘Collective Violence and Collective Loyalties in France: Why the French Revolution Made a Difference’, *Politics and Society*, vol. 18, 1990, pp. 527–52
- Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, chs 1, 2, 5
- Peter Stamatov, ‘The Religious Field and the Path-Dependent Transformation of Popular Politics in the Anglo-American World, 1770–1840’, *Theory and Society*, vol. 40, 2011, pp. 437–73
- Matteo Tiratelli, ‘The Changing Practice of Rioting: Revisiting Repertoire Transitions in Britain, 1800–1939’, *Mobilization*, vol. 25, 2020, pp. 201–219
- Mathis Ebbinghaus, ‘Decoupling Social Movements from Modernity: A Critical Reappraisal of Charles Tilly’s Theory on the Origins of Social Movements’, *Theory and Society*, in press, 2024
- Michael Biggs, ‘How Repertoires Evolve: The Diffusion of Suicide Protest in the Twentieth Century’, *Mobilization*, vol. 18, 2013, pp. 407–28
- Tomás Gold, ‘Contentious Tactics as Jazz Performances: A Pragmatist Approach to the Study of Repertoire Change’, *Sociological Theory*, vol. 40, 2022, pp. 249–71

4. Class bases

In contemporary democracies, social movements draw disproportionately from people with university education. Put crudely, protesters are privileged rather than disadvantaged. How can this association be explained? Relevant studies use survey evidence, which enables us to consider the strengths and weaknesses of this source of evidence. It is crucial to recognize that the association with privileged class position is not historically invariant; after all, the labour movement was paramount for most of the twentieth century. We also need to consider collective action by the most marginalized, which often takes the form of rioting.

- Why are university students and graduates so prone to protest?
 - Can we distinguish between the conditions that provoke riots and those that stimulate social movements?
 - What sort of people are most likely to participate in protest, and why?
- Darren E. Sherkat and T. Jean Blocker, ‘The Political Development of Sixties’ Activists: Identifying the Influence of Class, Gender, and Socialization on Protest Participation’, *Social Forces*, vol. 72, 1994, pp. 821–42

Russell J. Dalton, *The Participation Gap: Social Status and Political Inequality*, Oxford University Press, 2017, ch. 3

Alexander K. Mayer, 'Does Education Increase Political Participation?', *Journal of Politics*, vol. 73, 2011, pp. 633–45

Mikael Persson, 'Testing the Relationship Between Education and Political Participation Using the 1970 British Cohort Study', *Political Behavior*, vol. 36, 2014, pp. 877–97

Sirianne Dahlum and Tore Wig, 'Chaos on Campus: Universities and Mass Political Protest', *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 54, 2021, pp. 3–32

Vadim V. Ustyuzhanin, Patrick S. Sawyer, and Andrey V. Korotayev, 'Students and Protests: A Quantitative Cross-National Analysis', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, vol. 64, pp. 375–401

Bryn Rosenfeld, 'Reevaluating the Middle-Class Protest Paradigm: A Case-Control Study of Democratic Protest Coalitions in Russia', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 111, 2017, pp. 637–52

Michael Biggs, 'Has Protest Increased Since the 1970s? How a Survey Question Can Construct a Spurious Trend', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 66, 2015, pp. 141–62

Amory Gethin, Clara Martínez-Toledano, and Thomas Piketty, 'Brahmin Left Versus Merchant Right: Changing Political Cleavages in 21 Western Democracies, 1948–2020', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 137, 2021, pp. 1–48

Juta Kawalerowicz and Michael Biggs, 'Anarchy in the U.K.: Economic Deprivation, Social Disorganization, and Political Grievances in the London Riot of 2011', *Social Forces*, vol. 94, 2015, pp. 673–98

5. Social networks

One primary reason for people to participate in movements or protest is the fact that others in their social network have done so. Movements also create new social networks.

- What configurations of social network are most conducive for participation in social movements?
- To what extent does the diffusion of collective protest or of movement organization depend on social networks?
- Has the internet changed the way that social networks operate in mobilizing protest?

Jo Freeman, 'The Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 78, 1973, pp. 792–811

David A. Snow, Louis A. Zurcher, Jr., and Sheldon Eklund Olson, 'Social Networks and Social Movements: A Microstructural Approach to Differential Recruitment', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 45, 1980, pp. 787–801

Roger Gould, 'Why Do Networks Matter? Rationalist and Structuralist Interpretations', Mario Diani and Doug McAdam (eds), *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 233–57

Roger Gould, 'Multiple Networks and Mobilization in the Paris Commune, 1871', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 56, 1991, pp. 716–29

Shin-Kap Han, 'The Other Ride of Paul Revere: The Brokerage Role in the Making of the American Revolution', *Mobilization*, vol. 14, 2009, pp. 143–62

Debra Minkoff, 'The Payoffs of Organizational Membership for Political Activism in Established Democracies', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 122, 2016, pp. 425–68

Jennifer Larson, Jonathan Nagler, Jonathan Ronen, and Joshua Aaron Tucker, 'Social Networks and Protest Participation: Evidence from 93 Million Twitter Users', *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 63, 2019, pp. 690–705

Niklas Potrafke and Felix Roesel, 'Online versus Offline: Which Networks Spur Protests?', *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, vol. 229, 2025, article 106856

Michael Biggs, 'Who Joined the Sit-ins and Why: Southern Black Students in the Early 1960s', *Mobilization*, vol. 11, 2006, pp. 241–56

James M. Jasper and Jane D. Poulsen, 'Recruiting Strangers and Friends: Moral Shocks and Social Networks in Animal Rights and Anti-Nuclear Protests', *Social Problems*, vol. 42, 1995, pp. 493–512

7. Protest volatility

Protest is one of the most volatile social phenomena; periods of quiescence are punctuated by waves. With hindsight, sociologists can always find exogenous changes to 'explain' the eruption of protest, but they never predict them in advance! Volatility may be explained by the fact that participation in collective action depends on the actions of others, and so protest is subject to positive feedback.

- 'The threshold model is useless because it cannot be empirically tested.' Do you agree?
- How useful are formal models of individual action in explaining why protest tends to cluster in waves?
- Why does protest tend to cluster in time, so that periods of quiescence are punctuated by large waves?
- To what extent are protest waves explained by diffusion?

Mark Granovetter, 'Threshold Models of Collective Behavior', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 83, 1978, pp. 1420–43

Blaine G. Robbins, Ross L. Matsueda, and Steven J. Pfaff, 'Mapping the Production and Mobilization Functions of Collective Action', *Socius*, vol. 6, 2020, pp. 1–12

Davide Cantoni, David Y. Yang, Noam Yuchtman, and Y. Jane Zhang, 'Protests as Strategic Games: Experimental Evidence from Hong Kong's Antiauthoritarian Movement', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 134, 2019, pp. 1021–77

Kenneth T. Andrews and Michael Biggs, 'The Dynamics of Protest Diffusion: Movement Organizations, Social Networks, and News Media in the 1960 Sit-ins', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 71, 2006, pp. 752–77

Toke Aidt, Gabriel Leon-Ablan, and Max Satchell, 'The Social Dynamics of Collective Action: Evidence from the Diffusion of the Swing Riots, 1830–1831', *Journal of Politics*, vol. 84, 2022, pp. 209–25

Michael Biggs, 'Strikes as Forest Fires: Chicago and Paris in the Late 19th Century', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 110, 2005, pp. 1684–1714

Dingxin Zhao, 'Ecologies of Social Movements: Student Mobilization During the 1989 Prodemocracy Movement in Beijing', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 103, pp. 1493–1529

Michael Biggs, 'Size Matters: Quantifying Protest by Counting Participants', *Sociological Methods and Research*, vol. 47, 2018, pp. 351–83

Kurt Weyland, *Making Waves: Democratic Contention in Europe and Latin America since the Revolutions of 1848*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, ch. 4

Ruud Koopmans, 'The Missing Link Between Structure and Agency: Outline of an Evolutionary Approach to Social Movements', *Mobilization*, vol. 10, 2005, pp. 19–33

Paul Y. Chang and Kangsan Lee, 'The Structure of Protest Cycles: Inspiration and Bridging in South Korea's Democracy Movement', *Social Forces*, vol. 100, 2021, pp. 879–904

7. Political linkages

Social movements are intimately connected to the political system. Political opportunities can help to explain increasing mobilization in some cases, but by no means all. The boundary between movements and conventional politics is sometimes permeable, with bureaucrats and politicians promoting the cause from within the system.

- How important are political opportunities in explaining the origins of social movements?
- 'If movement emergence is explained by political opportunities, it becomes impossible to account for many cases where movements fail—because in those cases the opportunities turned out to be nonexistent.' Do you agree?
- Can social movements create their own political opportunities?
- To what extent is collective protest an extension of institutional politics?

Herbert P. Kitschelt, 'Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies', *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 16, 1986, pp. 57–85

Doug McAdam, 'Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions', Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald (ed), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, Cambridge University Press, 1996

David S. Meyer, 'Protest and Political Opportunities', *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 30, 2004, pp. 125–45

Jeff Goodwin, 'Are Protestors Opportunists? Fifty Tests', Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper (eds), *Contention in Context: Political Opportunities and the Emergence of Protest*, Stanford University Press, 2011, pp. 277–302

Joshua Bloom, 'The Dynamics of Opportunity and Insurgent Practice: How Black Anti-Colonialists Compelled Truman to Advocate Civil Rights', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 80, 2015, pp. 391–415

Marion Fourcade and Evan Schofer, 'Political Structures and Political Mores: Varieties of Politics in Comparative Perspective', *Sociological Science*, vol. 3, 2016, pp. 413–43

Jack A. Goldstone and Bert Useem, 'Prison Riots as Microrevolutions: An Extension of State-Centered Theories of Revolution', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 104, 1999, pp. 985–129

David S. Meyer and Sidney Tarrow, 'A Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century', David S. Meyer and Sidney Tarrow (eds), *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century*, 1998, pp. 1–28

8. Evaluating outcomes

We like to think that social movements can be transformative, but robust evidence for this is surprisingly scarce. The challenge is to isolate the effect of protest and mobilization from

the effect of other social changes that facilitate protest and mobilization. Devil's advocates need to be taken seriously.

- Why do some movements succeed while others fail?
- 'The achievements of any movement depend largely on the reaction of the state rather than the movement's own strategies.' Discuss.
- In assessing the success of social movements, what outcomes should we measure?
- How robust is the evidence that social movements can exercise a causal effect on society and politics?

Paul Ingram, Lori Qingyuan Yue, and Hayagreeva Rao, 'Trouble in Store: Probes, Protests, and Store Openings by Wal-Mart, 1998–2007', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 116, 2010, pp. 53–92

Michael Biggs and Kenneth T. Andrews, 'Protest Campaigns and Movement Success: Desegregating the U.S. South, 1960–61' *American Sociological Review*, vol. 80, 2015, pp. 416–43

Omar Wasow, 'Agenda Seeding: How 1960s Black Protests Moved Elites, Public Opinion and Voting', *American Political Science Review*, vol. 114, 2020, pp. 638–59

Michael Biggs, Christopher Barrie, and Kenneth T. Andrews, 'Did Local Civil Rights Protest Liberalize Whites' Racial Attitudes?', *Research and Politics*, vol. 7, 2020, pp. 1–8

Andreas Madestam, Daniel Shoag, Stan Veuger, and David Yanagizawa-Drott, 'Do Political Protests Matter? Evidence from the Tea Party Movement', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 128, 2013, pp. 1633–85

Regina Branton, Valerie Martinez-Ebers, Tony E. Carey Jr, and Tetsuya Matsubayashi, 'Social Protest and Policy Attitudes: The Case of the 2006 Immigrant Rallies', *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 59, 2015, pp. 390–40

Neil Ketchley and Thoraya El-Rayyes, 'Unpopular Protest: Mass Mobilization and Attitudes to Democracy in Post-Mubarak Egypt', *Journal of Politics*, vol. 83, 2021, pp. 291–305

Travis Campbell, 'Black Lives Matter's Effect on Police Lethal Use-of-Force', *Journal of Urban Economics*, vol. 141, 2024, article 103587

Mathis Ebbinghaus, Nathan Bailey, Jacob Rubel, 'The Effect of the 2020 Black Lives Matter Protests on Police Budgets: How "Defund the Police" Sparked Political Backlash', *Social Problems*, in press, 2024

David John Frank, Bayliss J. Camp, and Steven A. Boutcher, 'World-Wide Trends in the Criminal Regulation of Sex, 1945 to 2005', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 75, 2010, pp. 867–93

Eric Shuman, Martijn van Zomeren, Tamar Saguy, and Eran Halperin, 'Disrupting the System Constructively: Testing the Effectiveness of Nonnormative Nonviolent Collective Action', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 121, 2021, pp. 819–41