This paper explains the origins and outcomes of social movements and collective protest. Readings range widely in subject matter—from food riots in the eighteenth century to the occupation of Gezi Park in 2013. 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 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. The essay should refer to all the assigned readings plus one other article published since 2010. Sharing your essays will help with revisions for the examination. Email me the essay before 9am on Friday. Late essays will not receive comments.

- For one week you will give a presentation (no longer than 5 minutes) which sketches a feasible empirical research project (the size of an article or MSc thesis) that would contribute to the literature discussed that week.

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

READING LIST († to be circulated)

**General**


I. Theory and method

Three scholars have shaped the field for decades: Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam. We will scrutinize their recent contributions, along with dissenting critiques. Aside from theory, a particular method—the cataloguing of protest events or ‘contentious gatherings’—has even more important in shaping the field.

- What is theoretically distinctive about the ‘contentious politics’ approach? What are its advantages and disadvantages?

- Riots, demonstrations, strikes, occupations, boycotts—do these forms of action share similarities? How do they differ from voting?


2. Origins and repertoires

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. After an overview of movements in the 20th century, we 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?

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848,


3. Gay and lesbian rights

The movement for gay and lesbian rights is a useful case study, as it has been the most successful movement from the 1960s. We will consider the history of the movement in Britain, and the American campaigns against AIDS and for same-sex marriage.


4. Contesting power

A fundamental theoretical question is how protest can bring about social change. We investigate the distinct logics of coercion and persuasion. Curiously, recent literature has relatively little to say about these logics, and indeed the most insightful books were published over half a century ago: you must read at least one of these.

- How can ‘collective protest’ (sometimes) overcome structural powerlessness?
- ‘Protest is only effective when it inflicts costs on opponents, and thereby forces them to grant concessions.’ Discuss.


Michael Biggs, ‘When Costs are Benefits: Communicative Suffering as Political Protest’, 2014; http://users.ox.ac.uk/~sfos0060/beneficialcosts.pdf

Sarah Gaby and Neal Caren, ‘The Rise of Inequality: How Social Movements Shape
5. Dynamics: positive feedback

With hindsight, sociologists can always find exogenous changes to ‘explain’ the eruption of protest. Curiously, however, waves of protest are never predicted in advance! This leads to a crucial theoretical point: an individual’s decision to participate in collective action depends on the actions of others, and so protest is subject to positive feedback. The diffusion of protest is structured by mass media and by social networks.

• ‘The threshold model is useless because it cannot be empirically tested.’ Do you agree?

• Why does protest tend to cluster in time, so that periods of quiescence are punctuated by large waves?


Laura Barberena, Hortencia Jiménez, and Michael P. Young, “It Just Happened”: Telescoping Anxiety, Defiance, and Emergent Collective Behavior in the Student Walkouts of 2006’, *Social Problems*, vol. 61, 2013, pp. 1–19


Toke Aidt, Gabriel Leon, and Max Satchell, ‘The Social Dynamics of Riots: Evidence from the Captain Swing Riots, 1830–31’, 2016† [those who did not take Sociological Analysis may skip this]


Shin-Kap Han, ‘The Other Ride of Paul Revere: The Brokerage Role in the Making


6. Movement cultures and organization

Social movements create new forms of social organization and new cultures. The readings on this topic are less coherent, so we will have to tease out the significant themes for ourselves. Some of the previous readings on social networks can be discussed also in this context.

• What, if anything, can ‘framing’ explain?
• How does the organizational structure of a social movement influence the kinds of actions it undertakes?


Luther P. Gerlach and Virginia H. Hine, People, Power, Change: Movements of Social Transformation, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970, ch. 3†


Randall Collins, ‘Social Movements and the Focus of Emotional Attention’, Jeff
7. Do social movements make a difference?

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 organization from the effect of other social changes that facilitate protest and organization. The 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.


Fabrice Lehoucq, ‘Does Nonviolence Work?’, *Comparative Politics*, vol. 48, 2016, pp. 269–87 (focus on Chenoweth and Stephan)

8. Contemporary trends

We conclude by considering trends over the last few decades. The notion of a ‘social movement society’ will be scrutinized. We will consider the rise of online mobilization as a phenomenon, and also as a new source of data.

• To what extent can contemporary Western democracies be called “social movement societies”?

• What differences has the internet made to collective mobilization?


  Zeynep Tufekci, Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest, Yale University Press, 2017


