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The Impact of Protest Movements on the Establishment: Dimensions, Models, and Approaches

Marco Giugni and Lorenzo Bosi

A broad consensus exists within the literature on collective action that protest movements can have a multitude of important, intended, and unintended impacts on the establishment. There is, however, less agreement on how we can measure such effects, a problem that has clearly hindered systematic investigations in this important area of research. This chapter argues that the methodological question of how to study the impact of protest movements on the establishment leads to a much broader theoretical issue and to the main challenge facing researchers of social movement outcomes to date, namely, how to establish a link between movement activities and political, social, and cultural changes.[1]

The aim of this chapter is to stimulate theoretical and methodological reflections about how to study the effects of protest movements on the establishment. We do this by extending our field of analysis and focusing not only on the impacts on the establishment, but more broadly on the range of potential outcomes associated with collective action. Throughout this discussion particular attention will also be directed toward how, conversely, the establishment responds to protest. We refer to this response as the external political dimension of social movement outcomes.

In the following sections we review the difficulties scholars can face in studying the impact of protest movements on the establishment, and give suggestions as to the most fruitful avenues for further research. In our view this particular field of study would benefit most from further comparative empirical research and from the search for those mechanisms and processes by which social movements provoke impacts on the establishment in a dynamic manner. Throughout, we draw on empirical examples obtained from the literature on contentious politics.[2]

Protest Movements and Their Areas of Impact

Several scholars have already established helpful classifications of movement outcomes, which point to two main differences. On the one hand, we can

distinguish between the political, cultural, and biographical impacts of movements. Political impacts are those effects of movement activities that alter a movement's political environment. Cultural impacts are changes wrought on a movement's broader environment, such as public opinion or the value orientations and life-course patterns of a society. Personal and biographical impacts are effects on the lives of individuals who have participated in movement activities—effects that have been brought about at least in part due to involvement in those activities.[3] On the other hand, some authors distinguish between internal and external impacts.[4] Internal impacts are those changes that occur, or are produced, within the movement or movement organization; external impacts refer to the effects that movements have on their external environment. If we combine these two dimensions, we obtain a schematic typology that includes six main domains where effects are possible (table 1.1). Although touching on all these different dimensions, our description of the external political dimension focuses particularly on the possible impacts of protest movements on the establishment.

An example of an internal political effect is a change in the power relations within a movement or a social movement organization. Social movements are not static or homogenous actors possessing a single, fixed program and strategy, but ongoing social processes of contention. The dynamic of internal power relations may induce competition among a movement's groups and organizations. Competition for influence over the support base and the sectors of public opinion that the movement wishes to represent is an ongoing process. Certain groups may demobilize, leaving the movement in the hands of other cohorts of activists. This can lead to change in the movement trajectory as a result of modifications in the composition of the movement itself.

External political effects[5] are those outcomes of movement activities that alter the movement's political environment. They are often referred to as "substantive political changes" or "changes in the political institutions."[6] Substantive political changes include the alteration of decision-making processes, especially of the state's provision of economic goods and changes to

Table 1.1 A typology of social movement outcomes

	Internal	**External**
Political	Power relations within a movement or social movement organization	Substantial (policy), procedural, institutional change
Cultural	Value change within a movement, social movement organization, or movement sector	Public opinion and attitudes
Biographical	Life-course patterns of movement participants	Aggregate-level life-course patterns Life-course patterns of movement targets

the legal rights of the challenging groups.[7] Apart from bringing about changes in decision making and legislative processes, social movements can contribute to the opening of new channels of access to the political system, increasing discussion between government and citizens or integrating social movement organizations in consultative bodies, such as roundtables and commissions.[8] Social movements can also provoke institutional changes[9] or new concepts of democracy[10] by altering power relations between different contenders within the political system.

In analyzing the outcomes of social movement mobilization, scholars have mostly been interested in explaining the positive effects of mobilization. As we know, protest movements can also have negative impacts.[11] The establishment's responses to protest movements, for example, can take the form of physical repression.[12] Yet, the range of different opportunities the establishment has for responding to protest movements is not limited to simple acceptance or repression. As Jack Goldstone writes, "the choices of repression or reluctant influence are only two steps on a much wider scale, especially once one recognizes the internal heterogeneity of 'the state' as involving multiple players and parties."[13] State establishments weigh the costs and benefits of sustained protests.[14] Joseph Luders's work reminds us of the importance of third parties (e.g., the Ku Klux Klan or the Citizens' Council in the American South) in constraining the responses by local establishments in different subregions of the southern United States to the civil rights movement's principal goals, from 1954 to the 1970s.[15] Third parties can act not only as constraints in the relation between the establishment and protest movements but countermovements can also be encouraged as actors capable of responding indirectly to social movement protest, for example, when the establishment sees a protest campaign as a threat, but is not willing to overtly repress it. In this situation, the establishment has the option to build or rely on new institutions in order to deal with the protest movement. During the 1960s, for example, the FBI launched a domestic counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) with the aim of undermining the growing New Left and Black Power movements in the country.[16] Another example at the international level is the U.S. State Department's development of the Inter-Agency Committee on Youth Affairs (IAYC), which aimed to challenge transnational youth activism in the early 1960s.

Cultural effects receive much less attention than political effects. Cultural effects entail changing participants' views and, in the long run, affecting the identity,[17] frames of reference, and discourse of larger movement sectors.[18] One example is the worker's movement in the late nineteenth century. We can also find more recent instances, such as the cultural legacy of the left-libertarian movements of the late 1960s and 1970s. The latter movements created a culture where personal politics were central, and also set the stage for the creation of countercultural communities. Social movements help to create social capital that is of high significance for their participants and is ultimately relevant in developing group identities.[19]

At the same time, effects on public opinion or on the attitudes of different sectors of society can be categorized as external cultural impacts.[20] The difficulty of identifying such broad cultural effects lies in the very definition of culture. Sociologists distinguish at least three different dimensions of culture,

each having its own long-standing tradition within the discipline.[21] These include the social-psychological dimension of culture, in which culture is embodied by individual values, beliefs, and meanings; the traditional sociological dimension relating to cultural production and practices, in which culture is formed by signs and their signified meanings; and a broader dimension usually embraced by anthropologists and social historians, in which culture frames the worldview and social situation of communities or subcultures. Scholars have explored the consequences of protest movements for all three dimensions of culture. The social-psychological approach examines the role of social movements in shaping the general public's values, beliefs, and opinions.[22] When approaching culture as cultural production and practices, social scientists look at the impact of movements on literature, media coverage, visual culture, music, fashion, science and scientific practice, language, and discourse.[23] The community-oriented approach, on the other hand, studies the effects of movements on the formation and reproduction of collective identities and subcultures.[24]

Finally, there is a substantial body of literature that deals with the biographical impacts of activism.[25] Virtually all of these scholars look at life-course patterns of movement participants. Most, but not all, focus on the impact of involvement in the New Left movements. Participation in social movements seems to have had profound effects on the lives of activists.[26]

While these studies deal with internal biographical effects, some scholars have also examined the aggregate-level changes induced by involvement in movement activities. In particular, McAdam and collaborators have highlighted the crucial role of the "baby boomers" as a generational cohort in the protest movements of the 1960s and the broader cultural shift resulting from it.[27] An impact of this kind goes well beyond individual life histories to affect broader processes of change at the structural level. A further silent zone, where research is much needed in the future, is the life-course patterns of movement's targets. We might look, for example, at how right-wing activism in a particular society affects the biographies of Jewish people or ethnic minorities living in that society. For this new strand of research, the literature on victims of violence can be particularly helpful, specifically as it entails the trauma experienced by victims of hate crimes.[28] In the end, however, these types of impact can be subsumed under the broader category of unintended cultural effects, as biographical impact refers at least partially to changes in cultural patterns among movement participants (internal) or of social movements' targets and the society at large (external).

Theoretical and Methodological Obstacles

The study of social movement outcomes, including the impact on the establishment, is one of the most problematic areas of inquiry in the field of collective action. A number of theoretical and methodological obstacles are connected with this: goal adaptation, time reference and effect stability, interrelated effects, unintended and perverse effects, as well as causal attribution.

Goal adaptation refers to the reaction of protest movements to changes in their environment and to the internal dynamics of different organizations and

groups within the movement itself. As movements transform, they adapt their goals accordingly. In other words, the aims of social movements are not immutable, but change over time. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement, for example, shifted from an inclusive movement demanding "British rights, for British citizens" to an exclusive one calling for "British out" during the 1960s and early 1970s.[29] Establishment responses—police repression, lack of political responsiveness, and counter-mobilization—together with the internal battles between moderates and radicals, transformed the movement's originally reformist agenda into an ethno-nationalist call for mobilization aimed at Irish reunification. The change in the movement's internal composition also eventually signaled a transformation of its goals. An analysis of the outcomes of a movement must not only look at how the movement's goals change over time, but also take into account the relations between its moderate and radical political factions. Social movements are too often seen as being comprised of homogeneous actors with static goals, an approach that overlooks the internal dynamics of competition between various groups and organizations.

Time reference and effect stability are terms that describe the notion that the impact of protest movements on the establishment may be delayed or temporary (meaning that they can be reversed or eroded). For example, a strong commitment by former activists to a movement's cause could affect policy outcomes if former activists penetrate the establishment. The integration of committed movement leaders and activists into the institutional process or professional communities is indeed one means of getting a movement's goals onto the public agenda and into policy. Because the time-lag between collective action mobilization and the manifestation of its impacts can be substantial, ranging from a few days to years or even decades, the challenge is to determine when an observed change can still be considered the result of protest activities. The French student movement of May 1968 is an example of temporal reversal in the impact of a movement on the establishment. The protest was successful in fostering an educational reform, namely, the Orientation Law for Higher Education, introduced by Education Minister Edgar Faure in July 1968. However, by September of the very same year, myriad revisions to the law served to erode its reforming effects after the struggle for power moved away from the streets and back to parliamentary politics.[30] Here, the initial outcome of the movement was reversed after only a brief period of time. However, in other cases the results of social movements erode after a longer period of time, posing further challenges for establishing causal connections.

When we speak of the interrelated effects of a movement, we refer to the idea that the consequences of collective action are not independent from each other, but rather mutually influential. For example, cultural changes can be translated into different establishment responses or bring new problems from the private realm to the public agenda. Protest movements have the ability to raise the public profile and salience of a particular set of issues by introducing changes in cultural values, opinions, and beliefs in social and political public discourse. Strong and clear changes in public opinion favorable to a movement's message can indirectly, but significantly, influence the process of policy change and, more specifically, the influence on the establishment.

If elected officials sense the prospect of electoral success or that increased support for their mission may be gained by placing the movement's message on their political agenda, it may be co-opted to form part of the governmental agenda, and eventually bring about changes in legislation. Looking at the history of the Civil Rights movement in the United States, for example, Thomas Rochon underlines that racial segregation was first de-legitimized at a cultural level and that only subsequently did blacks begin to obtain rights at the political level through the responses of the U.S. establishment.[31]

Unintended and perverse effects refer to protest movement consequences that are not among their stated goals. Major impacts of protest movements on the establishment often have little or nothing to do with a movement's stated goals.[32] Consider, for example, police repression, which arises in response to social protest. Or look at the long-term biographical consequences of collective action, at the spillover effects from one movement to another, and at the incorporation of new values, beliefs, discourses, and alternative opinions. These can all be examples of unintended changes, be they positive or otherwise, resulting from protest movements. Looking exclusively at a social movement's agenda therefore limits the analysis, excluding the broader consequences of movements, which are ultimately essential to understanding the dynamic development of the struggle. The issue of unintended and perverse effects is related to the problem of the often very narrowly defined concepts of success and failure. Success implies that the social movement's stated program has been realized. While looking at social movements' successes "provides a sharp focus and draws attention to specific ends of collective action and the means devoted to attaining them,"[33] this perspective can also limit the examination of unanticipated impacts of social movements that may or may not have been beneficial to the constituency of those movements.

The dilemma of causal attribution, finally, seems the most fundamental problem in this field of research. The term refers to the difficulty of establishing a cause-and-effect relationship between an observed change and its supposed causes. With regard to the study of the impact of protest movements on the establishment, causal attribution refers to the difficulty of determining whether or not a particular change, such as the establishment's revision of legislation, is actually the result of protest activities. The central question is how we can be sure that the relevant change we are attributing to a protest movement would not, in fact, have occurred without the movement. This problem is all the more important when we deal with movement consequences other than the impact on the establishment, such as broader cultural or biographical changes.

Fully acknowledging the significance of women's movement around the world in the last century, this would be another case that highlights the blurry boundaries and methodological challenges in reference to the dilemma of exact causal attribution. When looking at the history of the women's movement, the task is to ascertain that women's emancipation is a direct outcome of the mobilization capacity of the movement, separating it from other influences, such as the overall influence of modernization on the change in women's status and roles. To be sure, comparative studies on women's emancipation in different countries illuminate the relevance of the women's movement

in reducing economic, social, and political discrimination against women. These comparative cross-country studies can also lead us, counterfactually, to theorize about what might have happened had the women's movement not mobilized as it did. The challenge of postulating the existence of specific causal paths from such a comparison remains formidable, given the difficulty of methodologically distinguishing between the impact of actions attributed specifically to the women's movement and those of other sociopolitical actors or developments in the political system that cause the observed changes. It is easier to take a comparative approach if we look at political or legal outcomes that may be illustrated empirically, as opposed to cultural or biographical outcomes, which are more difficult to quantify. In short, the problem of determining causality in movement outcomes poses a major difficulty in disentangling the role of protest from other factors.[34]

Our task would be much simpler if there were only unambiguous relationships between movement activities and their alleged outcomes. Things are, unfortunately, much more complex. On the one hand, movements often have the greatest effect, as mentioned earlier, not by meeting their stated goals, but by bringing about other, unintended outcomes. Alternatively, influences other than social movements themselves usually contribute to outcomes, such as the independent actions of authorities, interventions of other interested parties, environmental changes, and the grinding on of nonmovement politics. The main task, therefore, is not so much to find ways to measure the general impact of protest movements, but rather, as Tilly suggests,[35] to find ways to show the linkages between movement activities and particular types of effect. One could then search for relationships between certain characteristics of social movements and specific impacts wrought on the establishment, for example.

Such an analysis leads to two interrelated conclusions: first, that the major effects of protest movements have little or nothing to do with the public claims their leaders make; second, that critical causal theories concern not only the effects of a movement, but the very dynamics of social movement mobilization and movement interactions with other actors. In other words, to cite Tilly again, "only well-validated theories of social movement dynamics will give analysts a secure grip on social movement outcomes."[36] To reach this goal, we face at least four challenges: to define the range of potential consequences of movements; to specify the types of consequences on which we want to focus; to search for the plausible relevant factors in such observed change; and to reconstruct the causal patterns or histories of the movement's actions that have led to the observed change.

A Research Agenda for the Future

The most recent works on the establishment's policy responses to protest movements are headed in the right direction. They shift the focus of attention from direct effects, such as the organizational features of movements likely to be conducive to success,[37] to look at indirect effects by taking into account the crucial role of external factors.[38] The most important findings of recent research come from the idea that protest movements' political impacts on the

establishment are contingent upon the presence of facilitating external factors pertaining to their social and political environment.[39] This new emphasis on the conditional and interactive nature of movements' effects bodes well for future research.[40]

Another promising line of inquiry exists in studies that go beyond a narrow focus on the establishment's adoption of policies (focusing on changes in legislation or government spending as indicators of public policy) in order to embrace a broader view, which also considers what comes before and after adoption.[41] Though we still know too little about the other effects of protest movements in the stages prior to and following the adoption of specific legislation, we will likely find that impacts on the establishment vary according to the stage of the policy process.[42]

Research can also be enhanced by bringing a comparative perspective to the study of the consequences of protest movements.[43] Recently, more comparative analyses in this area have been undertaken, but most previous existing studies are still confined to single case studies. Single case studies certainly provide important insights, but comparisons across both countries and movements will allow the researcher to situate findings in a broader perspective. The importance of a comparative perspective is underwritten by two basic tools of scientific research: controls, which lead to the rejection of rival hypotheses and explanations, and empirical generalizations, which help to extend research findings beyond the specific case at hand.

The most dramatic boost to the literature may actually be attained by shifting the focus of analysis from conditions favoring the impact of social movements to a search for the processes and mechanisms leading to protest movement impact, thus making a stronger case for causal linkages between movement activities and the establishment's policy response or other types of effects.[44] This would also be in line with the recent proposal by McAdam et al. to shift to more dynamic explanations of social movements and contentious politics.[45] Most importantly for our purposes, it follows directly from Tilly's insight that the study of social movement outcomes must start with a theory of their mobilization and interactions. At a preliminary level, for example, Bosi has built on Tilly's approach to support a reading of social movements' impacts that considers how different outcomes' domains (political, cultural, and biographical) mutually influence one another. Impacts in one domain may, in Bosi's view, affect another domain, and a consequence occurring at one stage can give a significant boost to future broader outcomes, sometimes even well past the end of the cycle of contention that has initially originated protest. Social movements that seem not to be achieving their explicitly stated goals at the policy level in the short term, for example, can gain cultural or biographical impacts that may be fundamental to subsequent political changes or victories in the long term. The reverse applies as well: immediate achievements may well vanish or be eroded in view of long-range developments. Understanding the reciprocity of social movement impacts is a fundamental challenge for researchers who want to better understand how contingently protest action relates to political and social change processes in order to more dynamically portray movement outcomes. The variety of ways in which movement outcomes may influence each other in the short term or

over an extended period of time can be broken down into different hypothetical trajectory processes, which do not follow a fixed order. Bosi shows that adopting such an approach could benefit both theoretical understanding and empirical analysis of the consequences of social movement mobilization.[46]

In conclusion, we suggest that the study of the impact of protest movements would benefit greatly by incorporating the cumulative knowledge derived from the two most frequently employed approaches: a static approach that makes use of meaningful comparisons to single out conditions and factors leading to the movement's impact; and a more dynamic approach that looks at the processes and mechanisms underlying the causal chains that lead from movement action to an observed change.

Notes

We thank Martin Klimke, Katrin Uba, and Laura Wong for their helpful comments on previous drafts of this chapter. We would like to invite readers interested in the topic of social movement outcomes to visit the website of MOVEOUT, an international network of scholars aimed at strengthening the research in this field, at the following address: http://www2.statsvet.uu.se/moveout/Home/tabid/2943/language/sv-SE/Default.aspx.

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2. Throughout this chapter, the terms "outcomes," "effects," "impacts," and "consequences" are used interchangeably, as are the terms "social" and "protest" movements.
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