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## THE CONTENTIOUS POLITICS OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN EUROPE: AN INTRODUCTION\*

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The contributions to this special issue of *Mobilization*, “The Contentious Politics of Unemployment in Europe,” originated in a cross-national comparative research project funded by the European commission through the Fifth Framework Program. The UNEMPOL project (The Contentious Politics of Unemployment in Europe: Political Claim Making, Policy Deliberation and Exclusion from the Labor Market) was coordinated by Paul Statham and the present author. The main objective of this project—conducted between 2002 and 2005—was to shed light on what we have called the “contentious politics of unemployment,” that is, the relationships between political institutional approaches to employment policy and political conflicts mobilized by collective actors over unemployment in the public domain. In so doing, the project aimed to provide a more integrated approach to the study of unemployment by systematically linking the analysis of policy issues related to labor and employment with the analysis of political contention relating to unemployment. The final report (Giugni and Statham 2005) can be downloaded from the project’s website, <http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/eurpolcom/unempol>.

The project began as a smaller study of the mobilization—or rather the lack of mobilization—of the unemployed in Switzerland. That study was financed by the University of Geneva and conducted by the present author. Movements of the unemployed have been largely neglected in the social movement literature; perhaps because scholars have assumed that unemployment is a temporary condition which is not very conducive to political organization and mobilization (see Giugni, this issue, for a review of existing works). However, it soon became clear that an analysis of the mobilization of the unemployed should be embedded in a larger framework. The analysis was therefore broadened in four directions. First, we adopted a comparative perspective in order to link variations in the mobilization of the unemployed to differences in the states’ approaches to unemployment and the political opportunities stemming from them. Second, in addition to the mobilization of the unemployed, we took into account the intervention of other actors in the field. These included policy actors in particular, but also civil society actors such as private businesses and trade unions, as well as organizations defending the interests of the unemployed. Third, in addition to actions in the public domain, we took into account less visible forms of intervention in the field, such as “insider lobbying” and, more generally, policy deliberation in the multi-organizational field. Fourth, in addition to the national level, we took into account the role of the European Union in shaping national policy agendas in the field and vice versa, thus addressing the “multileveling” of the contentious politics of unemployment.

This broadening of the scope of the project led its initiator to look for partners in other European countries. A combination of theoretical (variations in welfare regimes) and pragmatic (existing research network) criteria suggested the following countries and scholars for inclusion in the research: France (study led by Didier Chabanet at the University of Lyon

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2); Germany (Christian Lahusen at the University of Bamberg); Italy (Donatella della Porta at the University of Florence); Sweden (Annulla Linders at the University of Karlstad); and the UK (Paul Statham at the University of Leeds). The latter was the coordinator of the project, while the present author played the role of scientific coordinator. All the authors of the articles included in this special issue have actively collaborated in this research.

The UNEMPOL project has resulted in a number of published papers which have focused mainly on specific national contexts (e.g., Baglioni et al., 2008; Berclaz et al. 2004; Linders and Kalander 2007), including country chapters in a forthcoming edited volume on the mobilization of the unemployed (Chabanet and Faniel, forthcoming). Published works have focused on two-country comparisons (e.g., Lahusen and Baumgarten 2006) as well as the EU-level (Lahusen, forthcoming). In addition, an edited volume derived from the project's closing conference is currently in press (Giugni, forthcoming). With the exception of a recently published edited volume (Chabanet and Giugni 2008), the contributions included in this special issue present systematic, cross-national findings for the first time. Each provides analyses based on empirical evidence gathered during the course of the project. Before describing this data in greater detail, an overview of its theoretical underpinnings will contextualize the following contributions.

### **THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS**

The UNEMPOL project's underlying idea is that the prevailing view of the welfare state—and its crystallization in institutional approaches to unemployment—impinge in significant ways upon both the public debates on unemployment and collective mobilizations of the unemployed. Drawing from the literature on political opportunities for collective action (see Kriesi 2004 and Meyer 2004 for reviews), we see dominant conceptions of the welfare state as defining a specific political opportunity structure that enlarges or constrains the options for action available to collective actors intervening in this field (Berclaz and Giugni 2005).

In a way, the idea is not new. In fact, the UNEMPOL project took inspiration from a project which had previously engaged several of the authors in this volume: the MERCI project (Mobilization on Ethnic Relations, Citizenship, and Immigration). That project elaborated a theoretical framework for the study of political claim making in the immigration political field (see Giugni and Passy 2006; Koopmans et al. 2005 for detailed analyses and findings). In this perspective, cross-national variations in political contention over immigration and ethnic relations can be explained by the institutional and discursive opportunities stemming from different conceptions of national identity as well as their crystallization in country-specific integration and citizenship policies. The latter determine the rights and duties of immigrants, as well as the institutional resources and channels available to collective actors to address claims to the state and other social actors. Furthermore, cultural notions of citizenship and national identity determine which perspectives on the relations between immigrants and the host society are considered as sensible, which constructions of reality are considered as realistic, and which claims and collective actors are considered to be legitimate within the political system (Koopmans et al. 2005). Such institutional and discursive opportunities facilitate the mobilization of certain collective actors with certain kinds of collective identities and specific demands, for example migrants and minorities, while preventing or making more difficult the mobilization of other actors and the expression of other identities and demands.

The UNEMPOL project took the challenge of going beyond a general and abstract definition of political opportunities towards a more specific definition and applies it to the field of unemployment politics, focusing on the ways in which institutional approaches to unemployment channel the political claim making. Following this neoinstitutional perspective, we looked at political conflicts over the sectors of the population who suffer from

marginalization through the exclusion from the labor market (partial or full, temporary or permanent), on one side, and the policy measures which are designed to address such issues, on the other. Of course, the contested and negotiated character of this policy field expresses itself both in the public domain and in the institutional arenas for interest mediation. Therefore we looked both at political claim making in the public domain and policy deliberation within the polity. Within this framework, an important aim was to examine the relationship between public claims, collective mobilizations, and policy decisions. We looked at the ways in which the issue of unemployment and related issues are addressed in the public domain by social and political actors, and how this relates to the formulation and implementation of policies and legislation to fight unemployment and promote employment.

In addition to the cross-national comparative framework incorporating the six countries mentioned earlier we explore current—alleged or actual—trends towards Europeanization and globalization. This is accomplished by addressing the transnational dimension of the contentious politics of unemployment. By doing so we aimed to determine to what extent the labor politics field has been Europeanized by the growing influence of European institutions and initiatives, by European umbrella associations and NGO-networks, and/or by transnational debates on the issue.

Thus, the overall design of the UNEMPOL project had three main components. The first component involves mapping the field of political contention (i.e., the structures of ideological cleavages and actor relationships) over time (1990-2002) in the six countries included in the study. In so doing, we systematically compare the form and contents of political claim making to examine the relationship between claim making over unemployment issues and decision making by political elites, and to examining the degree of convergence/divergence in national political issue-fields, and for signs of Europeanization. The second component examines the nature of the multiorganizational field which extends from the core policy domain to the public domain, that is, networks and channels of political influence between core policy actors, political parties, trade unions, employment associations, on one side, and civil society organizations and social movements representing the unemployed (including the unemployed themselves), on the other. The third and final component focuses on the nature of the interaction between the EU-level and national policymaking in the unemployment politics field. It aims to determine the nature of channels of political influence that exist between European institutions and national policy domains in the field, and to examine to what extent there are new political opportunities for the empowerment of citizens' organizations that represent the interests of the unemployed (including the unemployed themselves) as a consequence of the emergence of the European Union as an actor in the field. The articles included in this special issue address all three aspects.

### **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND DATA**

In addition to policy documentation and secondary literature, the UNEMPOL project relied on three sources of primary data: claim-making data gathered through a content analysis of newspapers; semi-structured interviews with relevant policy actors; and more open-ended interviews with organizations of the unemployed.

Gathering systematic and comparative data on claim making from newspaper sources was the basis for the analysis of both public discourse and the positions of various collective actors making public demands or mobilizing around unemployment issues. This method allows for analysis of both the shares and positions of different collective actors in national public spheres, of the extent to which collective actors are involved or addressed in this field, and of how issues relating to it are framed. This method served as the backbone of the project, providing a systematic comparative picture of the general differences between the contentious politics of unemployment in the countries included in the study.

This methodological approach follows Koopmans and Statham's (1999) work on "political claims analysis." This analysis extends and complements the more traditional protest event analysis which has become increasingly popular in work on social movements and contentious politics, especially for comparative studies (e.g., Beissinger 2002; Kriesi et al. 1995; Rucht 1994; Rucht et al. 1998; Tarrow 1989; Tilly 1995, 1997; Tilly et al. 1975). In fact, political claims analysis is an event-based method that builds on the tradition of protest event analysis (see Koopmans 1998; Koopmans and Rucht 2002; Olzak 1989; and Rucht and Ohlemacher 1992 for reviews), but extends the method to include speech acts and public discourse variables highlighted by frame analysis (see Benford and Snow 2000 and Snow 2004 for reviews). More precisely, while protest event analysis, as its name suggests, focuses mainly on protest events and social movement actors from a quantitative point of view (counts of events), political claims analysis extends this in three directions: (1) by focusing on actors outside social movements (e.g., political parties, state and policy actors); (2) by covering non-protest event forms (e.g., verbal statements, policy decisions); and (3) by paying much more attention to the very content of the claims (e.g. thematic foci, objects, policy positions, framing).

The main unit of analysis is the claim, which can be defined as "a unit of strategic action in the public sphere that consists of *the purposive and public articulation of political demands, calls to action, proposals, criticisms, or physical attacks, which, actually or potentially, affect the interests or integrity of the claimants and/or other collective actors*" (Koopmans et al. 2005: 24; emphasis in original). In other words, a claim is any intervention in the public domain whose realization would affect, positively or negatively, the interests, rights, and identity of an object population (which may be the same as the author of the claim). This includes both protest actions and verbal statements. Furthermore, political decisions and policy implementation are defined as special forms of claim making, namely ones that have direct effects on the objects of the claim. This definition, which translates into empirically usable terms the contentious politics approach of McAdam et al. (2001), redirects the attention of scholars towards processes of interaction between actors (coalitions, alliances, and networks) within a multiorganizational field.

Each claim is then broken down in its elementary units. Inspired by Franzosi's (2004) idea to use the structure of linguistic grammar to code contentious events (see also Tilly 1995; 1997) we have broken down the structure of claims into seven elements: (1) the location of the claim in time and space; (2) the actor making the claim; (3) the form of the claim; (4) the addressee of the claim; (5) the substantive issue or thematic focus of the claim; (6) the object actor who is or would be affected by the claim; and (7) the justification for the claim. All this information has been coded in machine-readable format and analyzed through standard statistical tools (e.g., SPSS).

Our core data on political claims were retrieved from one national newspaper for each country (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* for Switzerland, *Le Monde* for France, *La Repubblica* for Italy, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* for Germany, *Dagens Nyheter* for Sweden, and *The Guardian* for the UK). These are all independent newspapers of public record with a nationwide scope of coverage and readership. Each is a broadsheet newspaper with a reputation for consistent and detailed coverage of the field of unemployment politics. From these newspapers, the main news sections of each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday issue (Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday in France's case) were sampled and coded for all political claims which belong thematically to the issue field of unemployment, which is narrowly defined as follows. Specifically, we coded all claims (political decisions, verbal statements, and protest actions) which dealt with the following themes: unemployment, underemployment, joblessness, exclusion from the labor market, measures and provisions for unemployed people (including training courses, financing of unemployment insurance, and workfare). We also coded claims referring to related fields, but only if they explicitly referred to the issue field of unemployment. Thus, employment policy, economic development policy, and other issues

concerning the labor market or the creation of jobs were only included if the claim made an explicit reference to unemployment, underemployment, or joblessness. Finally, given our specific interest in the mobilization of the unemployed, all claims by organized groups of unemployed were coded, regardless of their thematic focus. The sample includes information on news reports from 1995 to 2002 inclusive.

The use of media sources to track protest events and social movement activities has been the object of numerous methodological discussions for many years now (e.g. Danzger 1975; Snyder and Kelly 1977). In particular, the use of newspaper data has raised a number of criticisms and discussions (see Earl et al. 2004 and Ortiz et al. 2005 for overviews; see Franzosi 1987 for a broader discussion of the use of the press in sociohistorical research). Three main sources of bias have been stressed in this regard: selection bias, description bias, and reliability and validity problems (McCarthy et al. 2008). Although some attention has been paid also to the second (e.g. McCarthy et al. 1998) and third (e.g., Barranco and Wisler 1998; Strawn 2008) of these three potential sources of bias, the first—selection bias—is by far the most often discussed in the literature (e.g., Hocke 1998; McCarthy et al. 1996; Myers and Schaefer Caniglia 2004; Oliver and Maney 2000; Oliver and Myers 1999; Muller 1997).

Despite the lack of consensus in the literature on methodology, we maintain that the quality standards of the event-based analysis in comparison to other instruments of data retrieval (such as surveys) score well. Thus, newspapers data can be used effectively so long as certain distortions are known (see McCarthy et al. 1996). Furthermore, the use of additional sources does not seem to lead to fundamentally different results (Myers and Caniglia 2004), whereas the choice of a single national quality newspaper provide a more economic and reliable source for cross-national comparative and longitudinal analyses. For example, a test of the representativeness of the newspaper sources for the field of immigration and ethnic relations has shown that while there are important differences across alternative sources in the rate of coverage of relevant claims (especially between national quality papers and tabloid and regional papers) such differences in coverage rates coincide with strikingly similar distributions of acts on important variables (Koopmans et al. 2005).

Yet, on a more fundamental level, the selection bias criticism points to the fact that the method yields a distorted communicative reality rather than a social reality. Newspaper coverage is obviously not an undistorted and complete mirror of reality. From the multitude of claims that are made on a daily basis by a variety of groups in liberal democracies, only a fragment is actually reported in the media. In the final analysis, however, such distortions are not problematic for at least two reasons. First, from the point of view of protest event analysis, it is precisely such communicative reality which is relevant for the population and the political decision makers since, with few exceptions, this is how they learn of protests (Koopmans and Rucht 2002). In this sense, one could say that unreported events remain invisible and have the same impact as no event at all. Without media coverage, they remain largely private events known only to their participants and perhaps their targets and the occasional bystander.

Second, and perhaps most important, the analysis of political claims such as those highlighted herein actually presupposes that there are strong selection mechanisms in the public sphere that determine the chances of access of specific types of claim making (Koopmans et al. 2005). For example, one of the main thrusts of the UNEMPOL project is that the prevailing conception of the welfare state in a given country and the institutional approach to unemployment stemming from it determine the legitimacy, resonance, and visibility of certain claims and therefore their chances to enter the public domain. Newspaper data—or other media sources, for that matter—captures precisely the communicative reality we want to highlight. In other words, the fact that the newspaper data in such cases are partly the result of media selection processes is not a problem for our approach, but, instead, captures precisely what we want to measure. Thus, the aim here is not to provide a full picture of all the attempts at claim making that occur, but to explain the pattern of those claims that are actually able to

penetrate the mass media and thereby may become part of the processes of policy making and public debate and deliberation.

The information derived from newspapers on political claim-making forms the main data source for the project as well as for two of the papers included in this special issue (della Porta, mainly in a descriptive fashion, and Giugni, on a more explanatory tone). This type of information, however, is not well suited to grasp certain aspects of the contentious politics of unemployment, such as less visible forms of public campaigning by collective actors within the field under study and their participation in processes of policy deliberation in the national policy domains. We therefore conducted in each country a series of semistructured interviews with various actors involved in the unemployment political field at the national level: core national policy makers; politicians; leaders of employers' association and trade union leaders; leaders of civil society and third sector organizations, NGOs, pro-welfare and anti-social exclusion movements; and organizations of the unemployed themselves. These interviews provided crucial information on the structural characteristics, activities, ideological positions, and the networks of actors in the multiorganizational field of unemployment politics. The information derived from such interviews is used mainly in two of the articles in this special issue (Baglioni, Baumgarten, Chabanet, and Lahusen, and Cinalli and Füglistner). In order to study of actor relationships and networks at the supra- and transnational European level, we conducted similar interviews with policy, civil society, and NGO actors at the EU level. One of the issue's articles draws heavily on these data (Chabanet).

The questionnaire used in the semistructured interviews included a set of questions whose answers can be treated through formal network analysis techniques and software (e.g., UCINET). This was done in order to give a more accurate picture of the multiorganizational field of unemployment as well as of the relationships among actors in this field. Specifically, we gathered data concerning three types of network ties: disagreement, cooperation, and influence. These data provide crucial information on the structure of the policy networks in the field of unemployment and allows to gaining a deeper understanding of the nature and type of relationships within unemployment politics, both horizontally (cross-national) and vertically (national to European and vice versa). This kind of data is applied in one of the reports in this special issue (Cinalli and Füglistner).

As said, the semistructured interviews were also used to gather information on the organization and activities of the unemployed. However, given the unstructured and informal organizational settings in which this group is embedded and also given the lack of knowledge about the unemployed as a political collective actor, we also examined in more detail their organizational structure and campaigns. This was done by conducting open-ended interviews with key activists in unemployed organizations in order to better understand the internal dynamics and strategies of their mobilization. This more qualitative source of information was helpful in all of articles, but were used mainly in Baglioni, Baumgarten, Chabanet, and in Lahusen, and Chabanet.

### **THE CONTRIBUTIONS IN THIS ISSUE**

This special issue includes five articles. Each draws more or less extensively from the empirical evidence gathered in the UNEMPOL project, whether through the analysis of newspaper data, semistructured interviews, or more qualitative sources. Two articles look at actors' intervention in the field of unemployment politics from a broader perspective. Manlio Cinalli and Katharina Füglistner analyze the exchange networks that are created among collective actors who intervene in this field. In particular, they compare networks of cooperation in three of the countries included in the original project: Britain, Germany, and Switzerland. By applying network analysis techniques—a method that it is still quite rarely used in research on social movements—to the data stemming from the interviews, the authors

show how the mobilization of the unemployed depends on patterns of interorganizational exchanges specific to the field within which they are situated. As such, organizational networks can be seen as part of political opportunity structure for the mobilization of the unemployed and transforming the conditions for mobilization within a national political field into instances of collective action.

The article by Donatella della Porta focuses on the existence and heterogeneity of protest on unemployment, looking at the more sporadic and disruptive outbursts of long-time unemployed, better structured protest against dismissals, and the intertwining of protest on unemployment with that on other issues during cycles of protest. Using newspaper data and following a political claims analysis approach, she examines different aspects of collective action in the field of unemployment: the political opportunities for the emergence and development of protest in this field, the actors and alliances they establish with each other, their forms of the protest, and the framing of the issue they raise. She looks at the impact of changes in the social structure, the availability of organizational resources, and political and discursive opportunities for collective action to show that, in general, the status of unions as well as the traditional assets of industrial relations will affect the chances of protest in this field.

The other three articles focus on the mobilization of the unemployed. The contribution by the author (Marco Giugni) most directly addresses the central theoretical tenet of the UNEMPOL project. The article compares the level of mobilization of the unemployed across the six countries included in the study and follows a revised political opportunity approach that stresses the role of specific opportunities. In particular, specific opportunities for the mobilization of the unemployed are created through the ways in which the unemployment political field is collectively defined, and through the institutional approaches stemming from them. More generally, the author proposes a theoretical framework for explaining the claim making by the unemployed which stresses the role of general opportunity structures, specific opportunity structures, and the discursive context of claim-making. The findings provide some support to the proposed theoretical framework, but also point to its shortcomings, especially in the lack of attention to economic factors, which might play an important role in this field.

The article by Didier Chabanet looks at the mobilization of the unemployed at the European level. He focuses in particular on an important movement which mobilized strongly especially between 1997 and 1999: the European Marches against Unemployment, Job Insecurity and Social Exclusion. He shows how a small number of leaders, despite the weak support of the institutional representative frameworks, succeeded in giving collective and political meaning to the grievances of the unemployed. Focusing on a European agenda, the movement was then able to make itself visible to the media and the public opinion, which it used as resources. This led to a new form of Europeanization of collective action: the externalization of protest. In the end, however, the movement was unable to survive to the global justice movement, of which it was one of its first expressions.

Finally, in a joint effort to better understand the impact of macrostructural factors and political opportunities, Simone Baglioni, Britta Baumgarten, Didier Chabanet, and Christian Lahusen compare the mobilization of the unemployed in France, Germany, and Italy, three countries in which the unemployed were able to organize and mobilize over a sustained period of time. Yet such mobilization remains very fragile and depends on the existence of favorable windows of opportunities. Specifically, they show how the unemployed benefited from external developments that produced changes in potential mobilizing resources and created new allies and political entrepreneurs. At the same time, however, such opportunities were actively seized and produced by contentious actors, including the unemployed themselves.

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