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Social Movements in Interaction with Political Parties

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Introduction

Social movements and political parties play vital and often complementary roles for democratic representation (e.g. Kitschelt 1993). At the same time, social movement and party scholars often fail to engage in a fruitful dialogue in order to understand large-scale processes of social and political change. However, new attempts have been made to revitalize this discussion. Among others, McAdam and Tarrow (2010, 2013) have outlined a research agenda on social movements and electoral politics based on the “contentious politics approach.” Moreover, recent research has brought back the cleavage concept to social movement studies (Hutter 2014; Kriesi et al. 2012). Finally, the rise of new hybrid political forces has revived interest in concepts like Kitschelt’s (2006: 280) “movement parties” (defined as coalitions of activists who emanate from social movements and try to apply the organizational and strategic practices of social movements in the electoral arena) or Almeida’s (2010, 2014) “social movement partyism” (defined as opposition parties that align with civil society organizations and use their organizational resources to heavily engage in street protests).

In this chapter, we take up these recent attempts and sketch a research agenda that conceptualizes and empirically studies how movement-party interactions might vary both quantitatively and qualitatively under conditions of functioning representative linkages, on the one hand, and a “crisis of representation” (Mainwaring 2006), on the other. A “crisis of representation” is characterized by unstable patterns of representation and citizens who believe that they are not well represented. Telling examples come from Latin America in the 1990s and early 2000s (e.g. Lupu 2014; Mainwaring, Bejarano and Pizarro Leongomez 2006; Roberts 2013) but also, more recently, from Southern Europe in the early 2010s. In Southern Europe, new political actors have entered the scene after the onset of the Great Recession in late 2008. In a

first phase, social movements have taken to the streets to oppose not only austerity policies, but also the way representative democracy currently works (e.g. Ancelovici, Dufour, and Nez 2016; Giugni and Grasso 2016). They occupied the squares and encouraged political deliberation to give voice to those whose demands remained unanswered. In a second phase, new parties have been created to bring these demands to the institutional arena (e.g. della Porta et al. 2017). Thus, we have seen sustained, accelerated, and complex interactions and fusion of movements and parties. These developments have been linked to declining political trust and dissatisfaction with democracy and have resulted in some of the highest electoral volatility levels ever recorded in the post-war period in Europe (e.g. Hernandez and Kriesi 2016).

To develop our ideas on how movement-party interactions play out in “normal” and “crisis” periods, we proceed in four steps. First, we briefly introduce political parties and social movements as key actors for democratic representation and highlight the various functions that they perform. Second, we present four selected research fields that treat political parties and social movements as separate entities and attempt to understand the various linkages and interactions at work. Third, we bring in the idea of a “crisis of representation” and how this might influence party-movement relations. Finally, we conclude with a discussion on how well our ideas might travel to non-democratic settings.

Movements and Parties: Two Key Actors for Democratic Representation

We begin by defining the two actors that we are discussing in this chapter: social movements and political parties. Political parties are organizations that represent and aggregate citizens’ interests so that electoral majorities can be built to govern a country (Mudge and Chen 2014). They compete with other political parties through electoral contests to gain votes and access to power. Social movements, by contrast, are “networks of informal interaction between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political and/or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity” (Diani 1992: 3). The key features of social movements relate to informal interactions, shared beliefs and solidarity, and contentious participation through collective non-institutional political action.

Tilly (1978) proposed a distinction between social movements and polity members, the former being challengers who seek access to the institutionalized realm of politics, the latter having routinized access to decision-making. However, as Goldstone (2003) noted, the boundaries between these two realms of politics are fuzzy and permeable. In a similar vein, Kriesi (2015) argues that social movement and parties are linked in different ways that go beyond alliances between the two. In general terms, parties can become social movements in as much as they are based on strong social movements and use the social movements’ mobilization strategies, while social movements can choose to become political parties in order to defend and represent their interests directly in the electoral channel. Moreover, we have recently seen the emergence of a rather contradictory political actor, the anti-party as an organization competing for election through attacks against the mainstream parties (for examples, see below).

In democracies, political parties and social movements fulfill similar functions in that they both are key actors in the process of democratic representation (e.g. Kitschelt 1993, 2003). They both contribute to articulating citizens' demands and preferences, as well as to decision-making by aggregating preferences and by providing information. In a well-functioning democracy, they may play complementary roles in the representation of interests. Political parties offer political programs and participate in elections in order to gain access to government and to implement them. Social movements seize new demands that remain unanswered by institutional actors and articulate them in the non-electoral channels of the public sphere. Together with interest groups which we do not address in the present chapter, both parties and movements constitute the backbone of citizens' representation.¹

Historically, parties emerged as the "political creatures of social groups" (Mudge and Chen 2014: 311), but they moved away from their representative function – aggregating demands and preferences – and increasingly sought to gain office by shaping policy preferences of voters and complying with interest groups' demands. We witnessed the transformation of parties into catch-all parties which recruit their voters from all walks of life, the withdrawal and transfer of the leadership of the mainstream (cartel-)parties into the government institutions, and the de-politicization and convergence of mainstream parties on the major policy issues. Mair (2013) attributed this erosion of the mainstream parties' representative function to the increasing tension between "responsibility" and "responsiveness," i.e. the tension between the parties' role as representatives of the national citizen publics and their role as governments being responsible to a wide range of domestic, inter- and supranational stakeholders. This process opened a "window of opportunity" for new challenger parties and social movements which constitute alternatives to political parties when they are not delivering on their representative functions. Indeed, social movements advance demands that are unheard or unaddressed by political parties. They relate to conflicts in society that are not (yet) articulated in institutional politics. Contrary to political parties, social movements are not always at the forefront of political conflict, however. Nevertheless, social movements remain active in other fields, such as the cultural one, when they are less visible in the political arena (Diani 1992; Taylor 1989). During periods of intense political conflict they may regain visibility and play a key role in shaping and transforming political parties and systems.

Movement Versus Parties: Mutual Influence and Interdependence

We identified four strands in the literature that study the relations between social movements and political parties but keep them analytically apart. All four strands emphasize the dynamic nature of the interactions at play, but they differ in terms of how they conceptualize the interactions and the time frame studied. More specifically, we introduce: (1) the idea of parties as allies in the political process approach; (2) parties and movements as key actors involved in the articulation of new societal cleavages; (3) research on the agenda-setting power of protest; and (4) the contentious politics approach to movements and elections.

In the political process approach, political parties mainly enter the stage as part of the political context of social movements and protest politics (see Chapter 1 by

McAdam and Tarrow, in this volume). That is, political parties are part of the alliance and conflict structure in which social movements are embedded. The party system, in turn, is seen as shaped by the institutional structure, most importantly, by the electoral system, which determines to a large extent the number and orientation of the parties available as possible allies of the social movements. It is this idea of parties as potential allies that has been most important in this strand of the literature (but see Van Dyke 2003, on the role of threats). Ideally, social movements expand a given issue-specific conflict in the general public, i.e. they create public controversy where there was none before, they draw the public's attention to the issue in question and frame it in line with their own demands, and, by doing so, they strengthen the hand of their allies, particularly political parties within the parliamentary arena. To put it differently, the expansion of conflict in the public sphere is seen as the general "weapon of the weak" that allows social movements to create political opportunities for elites, not only in the negative sense of repression, as Tarrow (1994: 98) has observed, but also in the positive sense that politicians seize the opportunity created by the challengers and defend their cause within the political system. Parties and their representatives may pick up the cause of the challengers for opportunistic reasons, as is the case when political entrepreneurs seize the opportunity created by the challengers to proclaim themselves tribunes of the people. They may also do so for more substantive or ideological reasons. Telling examples of both dynamics can be found in partisan reactions to the nuclear incident in Fukushima and the anti-nuclear protests that it spurred (see Müller and Thurner 2017). Viewed from the party's perspective, the challenger's outside mobilization may be a welcome support for the party's long-term agenda in a given policy subsystem, which may help the party to undermine the established policy monopoly in the subsystem in question.

In line with the idea of parties as allies, work in the tradition of the political process approach has emphasized the role of ideologically close parties. In the European context, this was mainly about the role of radical and mainstream parties from the left as movement allies (e.g. della Porta and Rucht 1995; Kriesi et al. 1995; Maguire 1995). Moreover, government participation of these parties was identified as a crucial condition for the facilitation of movement activities. In opposition, the left-wing parties were more likely to act as allies of ideologically close movements, such as the new social movements in the 1970s and early 1980s.

A second and related strand of the literature deals with the rise of new cleavages and the interplay between movement and party politics. Here, the starting point of the analysis is newly emerging social divisions and how they are politically articulated and organized. While the cleavage concept figured still prominently in the literature on the "new social movements," it has only recently been brought back to the analysis of social movements (see della Porta 2015; Hutter 2014; Kriesi et al. 2012). The aim of the approach is to study the long-term development and relations of political conflict in different arenas. The question of who is being organized into politics by whom is a key subject of cleavage models, which not only focus on the perpetuation of established cleavages but also on the emergence of new divides (see Bartolini 2000; Rokkan 2000).

In this spirit, Kriesi and colleagues (2008, 2012) have shown that two major waves of political change have fundamentally altered the structure of political conflict in Western Europe since the 1980s, giving rise to what they call a new

“integration-demarcation” cleavage that divides the “losers” and “winners” of globalization. In party politics, the new populist right, rather than simply articulating a populist challenge to the mainstream parties which habitually govern, has given voice to this new structural conflict by successfully mobilizing the cultural anxieties of those social strata that feel threatened by increasing economic, cultural, and political globalization. By contrast, the Greens and other new left parties constitute their most clear-cut opponents in this new structural conflict.

Based on the idea of how social divides are politically articulated, Kriesi and his colleagues have taken into account a broader view on movement-party relations (see, especially, Hutter 2012, 2014). They have also started from the most common assumption of the political process tradition, i.e. “a simple, positive relationship between openings in the political structure [electoral politics, in our case] and protest mobilization” (Meyer and Minkoff 2004: 1484). However, as Goldstone (2003: 9) suggested, they have also taken into account that protest politics might be “both an alternative and a valuable supplement” to electoral politics. More specifically, their empirical analysis on the way new conflicts are articulated in protest and movement politics in Western Europe shows that the relationship between the two arenas depends on the political actors involved. In Western Europe, the political left and right follow different logics with respect to the relationship between electoral and protest mobilization. The left waxes and wanes at the same time in both arenas, while the right alternatively turns to one arena or the other, but not to both at the same time. The differences in the way protest and electoral politics are used to mobilize the adherents are rooted in differing ideological and strategic orientations.

Other empirical research indicates that the idea of “different logics” tends to hold in the Western European context only. When summarizing the development of US politics in the last decades, McAdam and Tarrow (2013) highlight positive relations between protest and electoral politics for both the political right and the left. In line with the dominant view in the political process approach, they argue that while the dominance of the left in electoral politics triggered left-libertarian movements, the hegemony of right-wing forces came with strong right-wing and conservative movements. By contrast, in Central and Eastern Europe, Cisar and his colleagues (Cisar and Navrátil 2015; Cisar and Vrablíková 2016) observe negative relations between movement and party politics for all ideological camps in the years since 1989. Thus, the *more* certain collective actors and their claims are represented in party politics, the *less* visible they are on the streets in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia.

A third approach to movement-party relations focuses on the agenda-setting power of social movements and protest activities (for an overview, see Walgrave and Vliegthart 2012). This research area also builds on the general insights of the political process approach, but it presents a specific and more short-term view of the processes at stake. More precisely, it adopts the agenda-setting literature’s emphasis on issue attention as the main mechanism of how to study linkages across different arenas or sites. If different actors, in our case, movements and parties, emphasize an issue in a sequential way, one can assume some kind of interdependence at play. Such a view on movement-party relations allows for “standardizing” the measures of protest and party politics. The unit of analyses is the attention devoted to a given issue during a specific time period, which introduces the possibility of comparing the effect of protest across issue areas, over time, and across countries.

Most of the existing agenda-setting studies indicate that protest matters in terms of which issues are emphasized by other actors. Political elites start giving more attention to an issue when protests over this issue increase. This finding raises the question of why other actors (in our case, political parties) should care about the signals sent by protesters. Vliegthart et al. (2016) argue that protests can be seen as a particular type of information about urgent societal problems communicated to elites. The protest signal seems particularly attractive because “it is public and accessible, negative, most of the time unambiguous, with a clear evaluative slant, applicable to one’s task, and (for some elites) compatible with existing predispositions” (ibid.: 8). Moreover, involvement in protest allows participants to raise issue-specific concerns, and it shows their commitment implied by the fairly high “costs” involved in this form of political participation. Thus, protest – and especially protest that gets into the news – is a strong signal sent by a mobilized part of the population. Depending on the strength of the signal, political parties might ultimately interpret it even as an electoral threat (e.g. Burstein 1999; Lohmann 1993; Uba 2016).

Based on the idea that protest is an informative signal and that its effects depend on both the characteristics of the signal and the recipient, previous studies have shown that, for example, protest size matters more than protest frequency (e.g. McAdam and Su 2002), and that protests related to certain issues matter more than others (e.g. Walgrave and Vliegthart 2012). Regarding the recipients, the existing literature usually compares different political agendas (like the parliamentary or governmental agenda). Studies in the US context indicate that protest is especially effective early on in the policy cycle (e.g. King, Cornwall, and Dahlin 2005; Soule and King 2006). In the case of Belgium, the government seems to react more than parliament, however (Walgrave and Vliegthart 2012). A recent study by Hutter and Vliegthart (2016) on four West European countries does not treat the parties in parliament as a unitary actor but focuses on the responses of single parties. Overall, their results indicate that parties are more likely to respond if they are in opposition and if their competitors have reacted to the issue previously. Once opposition status is controlled for, left-right orientations no longer significantly affect parties’ reactions to social movement activities.

Overall, agenda-setting presents a highly instructive and systematic way to study the political consequences of movements, i.e. the translation of movement claims into political decisions. At the same time, the broader literature on political movement outcomes (for recent reviews, see Chapter 25 by Amenta, Andrews, and Caren, in this volume; Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2016) stresses even more the crucial role played by incumbent parties in government. Incumbent parties have the key resources at their disposal to repress or make concessions to social movements, and such concessional responses go beyond agenda-setting and include policy change and cooptation into government. In line with the argument that we propose here, Bosi et al. (2016: 14ff.) emphasize that research on the political consequences of movements could profit from an even closer attention to the “targets” of protests and the mechanisms linking social movement activities and the reactions of (party) political decision-makers.

Finally, McAdam and Tarrow (2010, 2013), drawing on the contentious politics approach, have introduced a set of mechanisms that link elections, parties, and social movements. In part, the mechanisms build on earlier work in the political process approach. However, they move beyond it and hint at the fuzzy boundaries between electoral and movement politics. More precisely, McAdam and Tarrow (2013: 328)

introduce five types of what they call “electoral contention” – defined as a “set of recurring links between elections and movements that powerfully shapes movement dynamics and electoral outcomes.” These processes include elections as movement tactics, proactive and reactive electoral mobilization by social movements, the long-term impact of changes in electoral outcomes on patterns of movement mobilization (similar to what we have discussed in view of changing cleavage structures) and, finally, movement-induced party polarization.

Let us briefly turn to McAdam and Tarrow’s last process as it presents a sequential view of movement-party interactions. In a nutshell, this process refers to the possibility that the victory of movement allies in party politics may trigger reactive mobilizations on the part of the movement after the electoral contest. While such mobilizations in the streets by close movement allies may strengthen the governing party, they can also backfire as they might increase the tensions between the “logics of movement and electoral politics,” as McAdam and Tarrow (2013: 333) suggest – or in the terms used by Mair (2013), such mobilizations may foster the tension between “responsibility and responsiveness.” That is, political parties may be keener to collaborate with social movements before elections when they seek their support to show commitment to specific issues or their help to bring out the votes in the campaign. Once in government, the party ally has to take into account various stakeholders and appeal to the median voter, and might therefore shy away from a strong commitment to single issues and the radical solutions promoted by the social movement. By contrast, the movement that has been closely aligned with the new incumbent party tends to stick to its more radical solutions on the issue it pursues. McAdam and Tarrow (2010, 2013) argue that the movement activists will challenge the compromise-seeking solutions of their party allies and even attempt to take control of the party organization. If they are successful in this effort, the party in office may adopt policy solutions that may encourage “defections by moderate voters who now regard the party as too extreme in its views” (McAdam and Tarrow 2013: 333). In other words, too close relations between movements and parties can lead to the capture of parties by movement activists and polarization that might not be electorally beneficial for the party in the mid to long term.

In the USA, social movements from the left and right – i.e. from the civil rights movement in the 1950 and 1960s to the Tea Party movement in more recent years – have pushed both major US parties (the Republicans and Democrats) toward the fringes of the political spectrum. McAdam and Tarrow (2010) nicely illustrate this process with the example of the antiwar movement and its influence on the American party system after 9/11 (see also Heaney and Rojas 2007, 2015). Similarly, McAdam and Kloos (2014) show how social movements contribute to the radicalization of party stances and to the polarization of institutional politics more generally. Their study is important in offering an in-depth analysis of parties on the right of the political spectrum. It shows that although social movements of the right do not often occupy the public space or resort to protest activities, they do have a strong influence on party positions and agendas by other means. In the UK, the British Labour Party under Michael Foot and Jeremy Corbyn offers ample illustrations of these kinds of processes as well.

Overall, the four research fields indicate the complexity and dynamic nature of the interactions between social movements and political parties. They highlight that

alliance building is a core type of interaction, but that there are other potential ways for parties and movements to influence each other, and that parties' strategic considerations are key to understanding the processes at work. At the same time, they do not systematically discuss the way a more profound crisis of representation might affect the interplay of movements and parties.

Crises of Representation and the Emergence of New Parties

As stated in the Introduction, a crisis of representation refers to unstable patterns of representation and citizens who believe that they are not well represented by the political elites (Mainwaring 2006). Thus, the functioning of the representative linkages between parties and popular preferences is put into question. According to Mainwaring et al. (2006), both attitudinal and behavioral indicators signal such a situation. More specifically, a crisis of representation is related not only to attitudinal factors such as suddenly increasing political distrust and dissatisfaction with how democracy works, but also to behavioral factors such as lower turnout at the polls, increasing electoral volatility, and protest behavior. Overall, these factors might render movement-party interactions more frequent, conflictive, and complex. Moreover, these short-term interaction dynamics blur the boundaries between movement and electoral politics and they may result in prominent outcomes such as policy changes or the rise of new political forces. In this section, we briefly sketch how a crisis of representation opens opportunities for the emergence of specific types of social movements and the creation of new parties. We discuss first how movements transform parties, then we introduce the idea of new parties created by social movements, and, lastly, we discuss some social movements that take up the form of hybrid political parties.

The first notable instance of transformed relationships between social movements and parties in times of a crisis of representation relates to the capacity of social movements to transform existing political parties. Notably, in two-party systems, social movements choose to gain influence through intra-party mobilization since they have very little or no chance of winning any electoral contest. In particular, research shows that the introduction of primaries and the selection of candidates by members of the parties contributed to the growing influence of social movements over established political parties (McAdam and Kloos 2014). This finding is based on a thorough historical research on the links between the Tea Party and the Republican Party in the USA. This example illustrates the transformative capacity of a social movement and, in particular, the radicalization of the Republican Party under the growing influence of the Tea Party. In Austria and Switzerland, radical populist right parties resulted from the transformation or adaptation of liberal-conservative and agrarian parties to the emergence of new issues (anti-immigration) and to new social cleavages (opposing winners and losers of globalization) (Kriesi et al. 2008). Hence, the transformation of existing political parties can also happen in the absence of a strong and highly visible social movement external to the party system. These two examples illustrate the transformations of political parties in multiparty systems.

Another illustration of the transformation of political parties by social movements comes from the social movements of the 1970s and 1980s in Western European

countries. These social movements reflected changes in the class structure and the cultural preferences of the middle class in Western democracies. The left libertarians demanded new rights related to cultural liberalism and individual freedom. In this context, contestation on the streets often resulted in an alliance between existing parties on the left and these social movements (Kitschelt 1988, 1989). In particular, in countries where the social democrats were not threatened on their left by a communist party, they responded to the demands of the new social movements by including cultural liberalism and environmental concerns in their programmatic stances (Kriesi et al. 1995). In other words, social movements and parties can make alliances that build on respective strengths – bringing to the institutional arena the issues defended by social movements and reinforcing the popular support of parties (Heaney and Rojas 2015; Schwartz 2010). However, as this example also illustrates, such close alliances are not without consequences for the parties involved: as a result of their alliance with the new social movements, the social democrats have become middle-class parties in almost all countries of Western Europe (Gingrich and Häusermann 2015; Kitschelt 1994).

Second, some movements create opportunities for the emergence of new parties or they themselves enter the electoral contest and, therefore, constitute a political party. The creation of a party is a strategic choice made by social movement actors to innovate when confronted with the failure of other mobilization tactics (Cowell-Meyers 2014). The creation of new parties is more likely in proportional systems, as these offer more chances of electoral success. Therefore, running for election is a potential strategy to advance issues neglected by the mainstream parties (Kitschelt 2006; Kriesi 2015). The history behind the creation of the Green Parties in many European countries illustrates the social movements' adoption of an electoral strategy. The Green Parties were first founded in the 1980s once the social movement actors who had mobilized against nuclear power plants realized that their alliance with the parties on the left did not bring about the expected change in terms of energy policies (Kitschelt 1989; Poguntke 1993).

Another illustration comes from Latin America, where social movements supported the emergence of indigenous political parties. The social movements of the late 1990s emerged as a response to neoliberal reforms and brought about revolutions in the political landscape of many Latin American countries (Almeida 2007; Johnston and Almeida 2006; Shefner, Pasdirtz and Blad 2006). Research on Latin America shows that the failure of existing parties to address the grievances of their constituencies led to a class alliance between the poor and the middle class who joined forces to oppose neoliberal measures (Walton and Ragin 1990). As mainstream parties converged towards austerity measures and neoliberal reforms, parties lost their brand and their distinctive appeal to their constituencies (Lupu 2014). In a process described by multiple studies (see, for instance, Bellinger and Arce 2011; Lupu 2014; Roberts 2013; Weyland 2003), the adoption of austerity measures across the political spectrum, the broad dissatisfaction among the population, the rising violence in the streets, and ultimately the alliance between social classes weakened political parties and created opportunities for the emergence of indigenous-based parties. It is interesting to note here that “brand dilution” and the loss of electoral appeal were stronger among the left-wing parties which, as incumbents, were forced to embrace neoliberal ideologies. As mainstream parties from the left lost votes, new

parties with a strong indigenous base gained power. These parties were deeply connected to social networks promoting the rights of indigenous groups (Rice and Van Cott 2006). Similar processes can be observed when studying party competition in Southern Europe since 2010. The most extreme example is PASOK, the incumbent social-democratic party in Greece when the euro-crisis struck in early 2010. The electorate punished the party heavily, much more than the mainstream parties from the right. Moreover, the most dramatic change in the Greek party system was the rise of a challenger party (Syriza) from the left of the political spectrum (see della Porta et al. 2017; Hutter, Kriesi, and Vidal 2018).

Third, some social movements form hybrid political parties, as recent examples illustrate. Kriesi (2015) refers to some of these hybrid organizations as “anti-party,” which is a contradiction in terms, but nevertheless an empirical reality: it is a political organization that mobilizes against the established party system as a whole by competing with the established parties in the electoral channel. For instance, in Italy, the Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S) represents an example of a social movement that evolved into an anti-party. The M5S started as a social movement during the V-tour in 2007 (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013). In this event, taking place across Italian cities, the activists collected signatures for an initiative demanding to reform the law on political candidates and the criteria for eligibility. In this first phase, the movement opposed corruption in Italian politics. Only a year later, the movement decided to enter the electoral contest through “civic lists” supported by Beppe Grillo, the movement’s leader, and, in 2010, some candidates emerged more directly from the M5S to run for elections at the local level. From there, M5S moved on to participate in regional (2012) and national (2013) elections. Although the M5S increasingly entered the electoral competition, it retained an anti-party character, as the militants of the movement continued to defend direct democracy and deliberation, denounced politicians as being corrupt, and dissuaded party leaders from running for election (e.g. Baldini 2013; Biorcio 2013).

In part, our discussion on the way movement-party interactions work in times of a crisis of representation differs from the four lines of research presented above because it questions the neat separation of movement and party politics, points to accelerated interaction dynamics, and the rise of what can be called anti-parties, i.e. organizations competing in elections through attacks against the mainstream parties at large. This calls for research that is more process-oriented, integrates long-term and short-term interaction dynamics, and focuses on hybrid actors.

Broadening the Perspective: Transformations in Context

Most studies presented so far are theoretical accounts of processes that took place in Europe and the United States, with a small incursion into Latin America. We have presented four research fields on how parties and social movements interact in “normal” political times and we have sketched ideas of a changing relationship in times of a crisis of representation. Yet, we have not touched upon the idea of party-movement interactions in non-democratic contexts. This question is interesting for it paves the way to research that is less western-centered and that systematically compares stages of party-movement relationships in consolidated democracies, in

troubled democracies, and during transitions to democracy. In concluding this chapter, we want to broaden the discussion to two specific cases of such interactions in authoritarian regimes. Research shows that protests in non-democratic settings emerge in times of economic turmoil because citizens are no longer ready to comply with corrupt, anti-democratic elites when they do not supply economic welfare (Brancati 2014). Furthermore events play a crucial role in triggering protest, thanks to their transformative potential (Berezin 2012). Moreover, both our examples highlight the accelerated and more contingent interactions of movements and parties in such contexts and how these interactions may shape the outcome of the transition processes.

The Arab Spring seems a perfect illustration of a protest wave in a non-democratic setting where the weakness of social movements and the quasi-absence of political parties played a considerable role in the emergence of the protest and its aftermath. The Arab Spring came as a surprise to many observers in the light of the weakness of civil society and the strength of the state (Dupont and Passy 2011). Nonetheless, widespread dissent brought down authoritarian regimes first, in Tunisia, then in Egypt, and next in Libya. These movements built on broad dissatisfaction among the population, in particular among young people who benefitted from access to higher education but could not enter the labor market. Yet, grievances alone did not bring about these revolutions (Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule 2003; Gamson 2011). In the case of Tunisia, a strong labor movement sustained a series of strikes and the dissidents of the 1980s (union activists and Islamist militants) were at the core of the mobilization (Anderson 2011). In Egypt, family ties, as well as neighborhood and mosques relations contributed to spreading information and sustaining mobilization (Diani 2011). In addition to civil society organizations and private networks, it is interesting to analyze the specific role of parties in Tunisia and Egypt where opposition parties existed in spite of their ban from public life (Lesch 2014). In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood endorsed Tahrir Square mobilizations quite rapidly and, thanks to their experience in campaigning for votes, they obtained more than 40% of the votes at the first elections. Similarly, in Tunisia, Ennahda obtained electoral success at the first elections. Yet, the two countries' fate was quite different subsequently. In Egypt, a strong polarization emerged when the pro-Morsi/Muslim Brotherhood camp confronted the party that endorsed the legacy of Mubarak, the SCAF (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces), whereas, in Tunisia, political elites tried to build a broad consensus by involving all parties and political tendencies to write the Constitution (Lesch 2014). Note that multiple organizations played a critical role in bringing about socio-political transformations. But when these other organizations are weak, the transition to a new (democratic) regime is rendered more difficult. More generally, the limited political experience of political parties and other political organizations in a context of authoritarianism hinders the capacity of such organizations to effectively govern.

A last illustrative example of the dynamic interactions between social movements and public authorities in times of transition to democracy is provided by Beissinger's (2002) study of nationalist mobilization and the collapse of the Soviet Union. In his impressive study, Beissinger argues that the sweeping institutional change obtained by nationalist mobilization in the streets was far from predetermined by structural factors but can only be understood by a close analysis of the processes that unfolded

in the period 1987–1991. Based on a combination of qualitative process-tracing with various kinds of quantitative techniques that take time seriously, such as event history and cross-sectional time series analysis, he shows how the wave of nationalist mobilization emerged, how it was related to other struggles, and how it ultimately contributed to the fall of the Soviet State. The pace of the events outstripped the reaction capacity of the institutions and the understanding of the leaders (to say nothing of outside observers). The tidal force of nationalism produced enormous confusion and division within Soviet institutions, making it even more difficult to find institutional solutions. The nationalist mobilizations developed their own self-reinforcing dynamics as recursive and emulative processes multiplied. While structural factors such as the prevailing ethnic composition and the degree of urbanization of a given territory facilitated early mobilizations, their effect weakened over time as the mobilization shifted to groups with less propitious initial conditions who emulated the early risers.

For the present purpose, it is most interesting to point out that during such critical junctures interactions between challengers in the streets and the party in power are contracted in time and their outcomes are far more contingent than during “normal periods.” To put it differently, Beissinger highlights the dynamic role that protest events have in challenging those in power but also in shaping the agency of those involved in the struggle and their future actions. Thus, protest events have the potential to become a causal variable in the chain of subsequent actions:

As the constraints of order weaken, the clustering and linkage of contentious events themselves can provide a structure-like patterning of action that can gain a particular weight and alter expectations about the possibilities for future action, thereby facilitating further agency. In this way, events can come to act as part of their own causal structure.

(Beissinger 2002: 17)

Once such a dynamic development is set in motion, party-movement interactions take place under far less predictable conditions than in “normal” periods of more stable interaction patterns and incremental change. In such context, protest activities might lead to more profound (and often unintended) changes in the alliance and conflict structure in which social movements are embedded.

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Note

- 1 As ideal types, interest groups operate mainly through pressure politics in and through institutions, and they have heavily invested in organization-building (see Kitschelt 2003).

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