

RESEARCH IN SOCIAL  
MOVEMENTS, CONFLICTS AND  
CHANGE

# RESEARCH IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, CONFLICTS AND CHANGE

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RESEARCH IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, CONFLICTS AND  
CHANGE VOLUME 42

**RESEARCH IN SOCIAL  
MOVEMENTS, CONFLICTS  
AND CHANGE**

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**Nicolás M. Somma** is Associate Professor of Sociology at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. He earned a PhD in Sociology from the University of Notre Dame. His research focuses on social movements, political sociology, and comparative-historical sociology. His work has appeared in several journals, including *Party Politics* (Sage Publications), *Comparative Politics* (Sage Publications), *Latin American Politics and Society* (Wiley), and *The Sociological Quarterly* (Wiley), as well as in several book chapters. He also co-authored the book *Vínculos, Creencias e Ilusiones. La Cohesión Social de los Latinoamericanos* (Links, Beliefs, and Hopes. The Social Cohesion of Latin Americans, Uqbar Editores, Santiago de Chile, Colección CIEPLAN, 2008). Currently, Nicolás is studying the social profiles, motivations, and mobilization trajectories of participants in eight demonstrations in Argentina and Chile through the use of structured survey questionnaires (following the *Caught in the Act of Protest* methodology). He is also exploring the political and economic determinants of collective protest in Chilean localities with the help of a protest events dataset based on several national and regional media.

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dissertation “Insurgent Dynamics: The Coming of the Chinese Rebellions, 1850–1873” won the 2017 Distinguished Contribution to Scholarship Dissertation Award from American Sociological Association’s Section on Collective Behavior and Social Movements. Building upon this dissertation, Zhang’s book manuscript examines the emergence and development of large-scale religious and ethnic rebellions in the Qing Empire of China during the mid-nineteenth century. In other projects, Zhang studies the interaction of state officials, ENGOs, and grass-roots activists in environmental movements in contemporary China.

# INTRODUCTION

Patrick G. Coy

Although it is not always the case, social movements frequently sport a somewhat troubled relationship with the state. Some of that troubled relationship may be owed, in part, to the fact that much social movement activism is largely extra-institutional, occurring outside of the normal, routinized, and even codified mechanisms for doing politics.

Made up of individual actors and organizations that share some salient dimensions of collective identity who are working in a somewhat organized and sustained way over time toward a common goal of social, political, or cultural change, social movements don't just exhibit uneasy relationships with the state and its various manifestations on regional and local levels. The same often holds true for the dealings of social movements with other institutions beyond the state itself.

Social movements may target these other institutional actors in a secondary way, that is, attempting to enlist them as active and influential allies in a campaign that may be aimed at state-based change. And sometimes social movements and their organizations will also seek out allies within the state apparatus itself, working in cooperative and even collegial ways to change governmental policies, revise state structures, remove particular politicians from office, reform political parties, or even bring down governments.

One might be forgiven for thinking that social movements only or even primarily earmark the state for change given the locus of much of the historic scholarship on social movements; being forgiven, however, doesn't change the erroneous nature of the understanding. The fact is, social movements frequently target other institutions for significant change, including national or transnational corporations, local businesses, ecclesiastical or religious judicatories, universities and schools, and professional associations — such as the Academy of Motion Pictures and Sciences.

All of this is to say that the relationships that social movements and their organizations have with the state and other institutional actors are exceedingly complex and not easily reduced to flattened explanations or pithy formulations.

In this volume of *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, we tackle some of these thorny issues with four chapters in the first section, titled, “Social Movements and Their Institutional Relations.”

Too much of what we do know about the relationships that social movements have with institutional actors is drawn from studies conducted in the context of various manifestations of democracy in the global north and west. We know much less about the various sorts of roles that institutional actors and even allies may play with social movements operating in settings of authoritarian governance. Thankfully, in our lead chapter, “Allies in Action: Institutional Actors and Grassroots Environmental Activism in China,” Yang Zhang tackles this issue with his thorough analysis of the Anti-PX Movement in the city of Xiamen, China, in 2007.

This major case of successful Chinese environmental activism against the location of a chemical plant provides an opportunity to uncover the complex ways that mass mobilization driven by grassroots activism in China may rely, at least in part, on support from state actors and agencies and social elites. This includes uncovering how and why these institutional actors may play supportive roles for oppositional movements in a political system that is largely averse to independent social activism, illustrating both their effects and their limitations.

Contributing to social movement theory-building, Zhang’s careful detailing of the internally ambiguous and at times contradictory approaches of institutional actors includes presenting them as distinctive dimensions of the political opportunity structure in China. Zhang shows that in authoritarian settings, there is a rich interactive effect obtaining between non-violent yet transgressive grassroots mobilization and institutional activism, with the former creating opportunities for the latter. Based on 45 interviews conducted in China during two periods of field-based research, one of our reviewers noted that this chapter is likely the most detailed and well-researched account of this landmark Chinese social movement case to date. I think you will find that it is also carefully reasoned and theoretically rich.

In the second chapter, “A Tale of Two Bike Lanes: Consensus Movements and Infrastructure Delivery,” Kate Gasparro turns our attention away from conflict movements and oppositional movements toward consensus movements in support of local infrastructure projects. A fairly robust literature has developed examining oppositional NIMBY or “not in my backyard” activism, which is generally focused on stopping projects of various sorts, sometimes including infrastructure developments. These NIMBY movements only infrequently enlist the support of state officials, which is one of the reasons why the Anti-PX Movement in China analyzed in our opening chapter is so significant.

Gasparro’s research is based in the United States in the years immediately following the great recession of 2009. This is a matched-pairs case study about two protected bicycle lane projects in Denver, Colorado; it relies on document analysis and on interviews with activists, key stakeholders, and public officials from the two cases. Notably, consensus movement tactics and crowdfunding were used in one case, while the other relied on a more traditional top-down approach. Gasparro effectively interlaces social movement frameworks with an

urban planning case and usefully connects this to the still under-studied emergence of crowdfunded civic projects. Her analysis suggests that in activism focused on infrastructure delivery, relations with state-based allies are more critical than even in typical consensus movements since infrastructure delivery always involves the distribution of state resources. The fluid and contingent nature of the respective roles and relations that exist between social movement organizations, grassroots activists, institutional allies, and the state are made clear in this research in ways that move our understandings of consensus movements forward in important ways.

The first two chapters in this section demonstrate that at least in certain contexts and with certain movements and issue arenas, a fuzzy or indistinct line separates institutional politics from the work of many social movement activists and organizations. This raises the question as to whether this also holds true with regard to political parties' direct involvement in movement protests. After all, some social movements may eventually develop political party-like features. Equally true is the fact that some political parties may cross over into protest politics in the streets and elsewhere. As a result, this is a fecund area of research for political scientists and sociologists alike. These issues are particularly rich and relevant with regard to the Latin American region – where many countries emerged from authoritarian or military rule within the last two or three decades. It is to that region that we turn next with Nicolás Somma's chapter, "When Do Political Parties Move to the Streets? Party Protest in Chile (2000–2012)," on party protest in Chile from 2000 to 2012.

Using a dataset of 2,342 protest events during the 13-year period and relying on statistical regression, Somma finds that in only 6% of the cases in Chile did political parties take part. Equally important, he uncovers a complex and interesting set of political and geographic factors that influence, and seem to limit, the likelihood of political party protest activities. These findings suggest that perhaps the line of demarcation between institutionalized politics and social movement protests may be more pronounced than some scholarship has been suggesting.

The risks that social movement activists face and those that their institutional allies encounter are not alike; they often differ dramatically, and for a variety of reasons. Those reasons have to do with the political and economic context, the degree of contention, the tactics used by the movement, and the issue arena. It is also true that the risks individual grassroots activists face are not the same across a movement. This is owed to the nature of the movement activist's relationship to the state, and this in turn may be tied to the activist's ethnicity, their nationality, their citizenship, and the differential treatments thereby accorded to them by the state. So for this section's final chapter, entitled "Building Solidarity across Asymmetrical Risks: Israeli and Palestinian Activists," we move to the Palestinian West Bank, occupied by Israel, where Michelle Gawerc interrogates this particularized dimension of the broader question of how social movement organizations and their activists relate to the state, and consequently to each other within the movement.

Gawerc has been doing sustained field research for many years in the region on various aspects of collective identity, including with Combatants for Peace.

This is a joint Israeli-Palestinian peace organization that has had to maneuver nimbly amidst radical asymmetries in a protracted ethnic conflict in order to build solidarity. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and 34 in-depth interviews with both the Israeli and the Palestinian activists, the author convincingly demonstrates that solidarity can be built in even deeply asymmetric contexts, provided activists face those risk asymmetries in an open and honest fashion, thereby building trust within the asymmetries. More specifically, Gawerc argues that solidarity in such contexts requires a clear commitment to shared goals, a demonstrated willingness to support and defend one another, and some deference to each other's respective risk boundaries, broadly conceived. Although significant in its own right, the generalizability of the findings about Combatants for Peace is bolstered further by Gawerc critically applying them to the joint non-violent resistance in the Palestinian village of Bil'in. Future scholarship on the dynamics of differential risks in social movement activism will likely pay close attention to this chapter.

The second section of the volume, "Frames and Discourses in Conflicts and Social Movements," consists of three chapters linked by the use of frame and discourse analysis to interpret the work of various movements in Tunisia, the United States, and Russia. It opens with Mohammad Yaghi's insightful chapter, "Frame Resonance, Tactical Innovation, and Poor People in the Tunisian Uprising," on the 2011 non-violent revolution in Tunisia, one of the few uprisings within the so-called Arab Spring that brought lasting change and increased openness and democratization. The research is based on fieldwork conducted in Tunisia, 81 interviews with participants from various movement organizations, analysis of 19 statements from movement organizations, and examination of 181 slogans used by the movement and drawn from videos posted on the internet. Yaghi argues that the movement's careful attention to frame resonance within collective identities, the use of imaginative and inventive tactics and discourses, and locating protests within poor neighborhoods all contributed to movement outcomes.

The frame transformation strategies of the three founding women of the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States is the focus of our next chapter, "Black Lives Matter: (Re)Framing the Next Wave of Black Liberation," authored by Amanda Clark, Prentiss Dantzler, and Ashley Nickels. The data sources include a qualitative analysis of 37 newspaper and magazine print articles about the three founders and speeches by them, as well as 23 video interviews with them about Black Lives Matter during the two-year time period of October 2014 to October 2016. The authors suggest that the Black Lives Matter movement includes not just a continuation of past struggles for racial justice by the civil rights movement and the black power movement, but ultimately a reframing and a transforming of the struggle for black liberation in the US. Notably, they show convincingly that this transformation includes an intentional fusing of the movement with a commitment to intersectionality so that it is clear that all Black Lives Matter — irrespective of gender, age, sexual orientation, and so-called criminality.

The third article in this section on framing and discourses takes us to Putin's Russia where both corruption and the everyday violence of the state may seem to many to be so endemic as to close off meaningful avenues of resistance. Not so, says Alexandra Orlova whose chapter, "Challenging Everyday Violence of the State: Developing Sustained Opposition Movements through Anti-corruption Protests, examines how discursive anti-corruption norms and contentious activism can be birthed even in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian settings that repress dissent. Orlova rightly notes the steep hill that Russian oppositional movements encounter. This hill includes significant repression, a sense of futility, robust informal networks coupled with corruption that permeates Russian society, and state manipulation of narratives as a tool to quell the emergence of opposition movements. Nonetheless, using various data sources about Russian politics, Orlova patiently builds an argument that carefully constructed anti-corruption discourses, joined with relatively small-scale campaigns, and protest actions that concentrate on political corruption instead of on the Putin regime specifically, has potential to coalesce and eventually develop into a more overt political challenge in Russia.

The third and final section of the volume, "Activist Start-up and Withdrawal," is comprised of two research projects that bookend critical issues associated with the beginning point and the ending point of movement participation by an individual activist.

The first chapter, "Volunteer Retention, Burnout and Dropout in Online Voluntary Organizations: Stress, Conflict and Retirement of Wikipedians," by Piotr Konieczny, focuses on the dynamics of burn-out and drop-out by volunteer Wikipedia editors who were heretofore comparatively active editors. The research is based on the results from a survey of contributor motivations sent to 300 (with a response rate of 41%) of the most highly active Wikipedia English editors (the largest of the Wikipedia projects) who have decreased their activity or stopped contributing altogether as editors. Konieczny's findings show that the experience of recurring interpersonal conflict during the volunteer editing is a salient factor. Insofar as Wikipedia is the largest voluntary organizations in the world, this study furthers our understandings about the sometimes complicated dynamics of volunteerism and its intersections with conflict. Moreover, as volunteerism is something which greases the wheels of most social movements and even their formal organizations, this study's findings will serve well future research on the broader question of how a non-profit organization maintains a volunteer workforce, particularly in an increasingly digitized age.

We close the volume with a close look into the other end of participation, asking why do some people become active in social movement protest for the first-time in mid-life, so-called late bloomers. Winston Tripp and Danielle Gage's chapter, "Late Bloomers: Differential Participation among First-time, Mid-life Protesters," runs counter to the long-held yet faulty presumption that most first-time protestors are young, and by extension, idealistic. Based on survey data, this time from the Youth Parent Socialization Survey, a panel study that surveyed individuals four times over a 33-year period, the chapter's findings build on and contribute to an emerging body of work that examines those

factors that contribute to the trajectory of individual participation over time, including why protest participation begins when it does for mid-life late bloomers, and what these activists may hold in common.

Now, if you might allow me a more personal note ... I took on the series editorship of *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* almost 20 years ago, in 1999. The first volume I personally edited was Volume 22, which appeared in 2000. During my tenure, the RSMCC series and I have been fortunate to have had eight volumes guest-edited; all of those colleagues were a joy to work with and they each produced an important collection that moved data-driven research scholarship in the tripartite foci reflected in the series' title forward in significant ways. This book, Volume 42, is now the 11th volume of the *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* series that I have personally edited, and it will be my last.

The next volume of the series, Volume 43, will be thematic in focus and will be guest-edited by Lisa Leitz and Eitan Alimi. Titled "Bringing Down Divides" it will be dedicated to the principles that animated the scholarship of Gregory Maney, a peace and conflict and social movements scholar whose work has inspired many of us, and who passed on last year, far too early.

I could not be more pleased to announce that the new series editor of *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* is Dr. Lisa Leitz, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Peace Studies at Chapman University in the U.S. A new chapter in the august history of this 41-year old series, originally founded by Louis Kriesberg, will soon commence under Lisa's capable direction. Lisa's deep knowledge of the social movements and peace and conflict studies literatures, and her critical consciousness complimented by a warm and compassionate collegial spirit will ensure that the series will not only continue to prosper but grow in new and exciting directions as well.

It has been my honor and indeed privilege to work with so many researchers doing ground-breaking research, and with so many good-hearted reviewers who have selflessly provided constructive commentary, and with so many helpful editors and publishers at JAI Press, Elsevier, and now Emerald Group Publishing. I offer my sincere thanks to all.