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CHAPTER 14

Interest groups

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Chapter contents

Reader's guide

Political scientists should not just compare political institutions, but also assess the role of associations that seek to advance particular socio-economic and political interests. Interest groups play a crucial role in all political systems. But the forms in which interests are articulated depend on the particular context. Accordingly, this chapter begins with a review of different definitions of interest groups that have been used across time and space. Scholars of interest politics have also been inspired by different theoretical paradigms. Hence, the chapter discusses the legacies of competing theoretical traditions in the field, namely republicanism, pluralism, and neocorporatism. The final sections of the chapter assess the role of interest associations in practice, distinguishing different types of action that are available to different interest associations, namely direct lobbying, political exchange, contentious politics, and private interest government.

Introduction

Arthur Bentley captured the focus of interest politics when he argued that it is necessary 'in considering representative government, or democracy, not only past or present, but future as well, to consider it in terms of the various group pressures that form its substance' (Bentley 1908: 452). Therefore we should not just compare political institutions, but also assess the role of associations that seek to advance particular interests in the political process. The term *interest group* is often used interchangeably with 'interest association' or 'pressure group'; but before reviewing different definitions of the term, I will go back to its origins.

It is no coincidence that the study of interest politics can be traced back to the United States of the early twentieth century. The establishment of this academic field is closely related to the socio-economic and political conjunctures of the time. When Bentley published his pioneering *The Process of Government* in 1908, the interventions of ever larger corporations in US politics caused widespread popular alarm. At the same time, the rise of large-scale industrial capitalism triggered counter-reactions, namely industrial conflict and movements that sought to eliminate corruption, improve working conditions, and give citizens more control over the political process. Yet, it would be wrong to associate the origins of comparative interest politics exclusively with the rise of big business. The **behavioural revolution** in the social sciences, which changed the analytical focus from formal institutions to social processes, was equally important (see Introduction to this volume). The consequent broadening of perspectives made it possible to analyse tensions between pluralistic democratic theory and practice.

In post-1945 America, the steady rise of professional lobbyists provided political scientists not only with a new subject area and a new occupational domain for their graduate students, but also with a topic for heated debate (Dahl 1982): can a pluralistic democratic state regulate interest groups without questioning the right of association? The broader analytical focus also enabled scholars to capture alternative types of association–state relations, such as neocorporatism, which did not follow the Anglo-American model.

KEY POINTS

- Comparativists should not only analyse formal political institutions, but should also assess interest group pressures that shape the substance of politics.
- Interest groups play important, but also different, roles in political systems across time and space, even if the rise of interest politics is closely related to the rise of capitalist modes of production.

What are interest groups?

Interest groups are not easy to define. The American pioneers in the field proposed very encompassing definitions: Bentley (1908) and Truman (1971 [1951]) defined interest groups as associations that make claims to other groups in society. But is this definition still useful today? Many contemporary scholars disagree because such a broad definition makes it impossible to distinguish interest associations from political parties (see Chapter 12). Instead, interest groups are usually defined as membership organizations that appeal to government but do not participate in elections (Wilson 1990). However, this definition also raises questions. Whereas parties and interest groups are sharply differentiated in North America, this differentiation is much less evident in other parts of the world where cross-organizational interactions blur the lines between interest groups and political parties. Therefore, Gabriel Almond (1958) did not use formal definitions when he was studying interest groups comparatively. Instead, he focused on the *function of interest representation* because the institutions by means of which interests are articulated would depend on the political and socio-economic context of the particular political system.

Functionalist approaches

Students of interest politics should indeed be cautious of comparisons based on context-free measures. Identical measures, such as the union density rate (i.e. the number of trade union members as a proportion of all workers in employment), mean different things in different countries. Given the high number of workers covered by collective agreements and the capacity of the French unions to instigate strike action, French unions are hardly the least influential labour organizations in the industrialized world (Goetschy and Jobert 2011). However, there is almost no industrialized country in the world where fewer people are union members as a percentage of the entire labour force (see Table 14.1). In turn, China displays one of the highest union densities in Table 14.1, but China's official unions function rather as a transmission belt of the ruling party than as an effective tool of labour representation (Cooke 2011; Kuruvilla *et al.* 2011). Obviously, unions play different roles in different political systems. In most countries, union influence is related to membership levels. However, in some parts of the world other factors are as important, such as close political party–trade union connections (Allern and Bale 2017), co-determination rights of worker representatives enshrined in corporate **governance** (Waddington and Conchon 2015), institutionalized access to policy-making, collective bargaining and trade union laws, and the ability of union activists to inspire **social movements** (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013; Frege and

Table 14.1 Trade union and employer organization density, and collective bargaining coverage[a]

Country	Union density[c] (%)	Employer organization density[b] (%)	Collective bargaining coverage[c] (%)
Brazil	25[e]	–	35
Canada	30	–	32
China	43	–	39[f]
Denmark	69	65[b]	80
France	8	75[b]	90
Germany	18	58	62
Italy	37	56[f]	80
Japan	18	–	16
South Africa	30[f]	–	43
Sweden	67[f]	82[e]	91
UK	26	35[d]	33
US	11	–	13

[a] 2013 except where indicated otherwise. Here we used the UD category in the ICTWSS database.

[b] 2011 except where indicated otherwise.

[c] 2010 except where indicated otherwise. Here we have used OECD data.

[d] 2008; [e] 2011; [f] 2012.

Source: ICTWSS database (Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies 2015); OECD (2012).

Kelly 2013; Stan *et al.* 2015). The same observation also applies to employers' organizations.

For this reason, functionalists argue that studying interest associations comparatively may require using different measures for the same function (e.g. interest representation) in different cases to reflect differences in context across political systems. This approach allows us to broaden the comparative analysis of interest politics beyond the boundaries of Anglo-American systems. However, functionalists also face a tricky analytical problem. Is it accurate to assume a universal interest representation function, as suggested by Almond? Or should we distinguish between different types of interest representation, as suggested by scholars who differentiate between private and public interest associations?

Private vs public interests

Most scholars use all-embracing definitions of interest groups (Cigler, Loomis, and Nownes 2015). These definitions are typically based on formal properties, namely 'voluntary membership, a more or less bureaucratic structure of decision-making, dependence upon material and motivational resources, efforts to change the respective environments into more favourable ones, and so forth' (Offe and Wiesenthal 1985: 175). However, this view has not precluded some scholars from introducing different subcategories. For instance, Jeffrey Berry (1977) proposed distinguishing *public* and *private* interest groups on the basis of whether an association pursues public interests or only sectional interests of its members. Similar distinctions have been used by scholars around the world (Young and Wallace 2000; della Porta and Caiani 2009). But does it make sense to use the same label for associations that seek private profit and associations that advance public good? This question is not only of academic interest. The scope of the definition also predetermines the scope of laws that regulate the rights and obligations of associations.

Yet, however popular this distinction is, it is also analytically problematic, as all interest associations usually present their claims as measures that enhance the public good. For instance, business organizations frequently argue, invoking the theories of neoclassical economists, that the pursuit of private profit serves the public good. Claims that an action is consistent or not within the public interest are certainly influential in political debates. Analytically, however, the phrase 'public interest' is 'meaningless if it is taken to refer to an interest so persuasive that everyone in the system is agreed upon it' (Truman 1971: xiv). Does this mean that there is no way of distinguishing between types of interest associations in an analytically meaningful manner? Not necessarily, as we shall see in the section on interest associations in practice.

KEY POINTS

- Many scholars define interest groups as voluntary organizations that appeal to government but do not participate in elections. In a comparative context, however, this formal definition is problematic as the form of interest representation varies across countries.
- It has also been proposed to distinguish 'public' and 'private interest groups'. Claims that a group's action is in the 'public interest' are politically influential. Analytically, however, the term 'public interest' is problematic because of its contentious nature. Indeed, there is hardly a claim that is so persuasive that everyone can agree upon it.

Interest associations in theory

Republican (unitarist) traditions

Although the radical-democratic Swiss–French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) recognized that every political body includes interest associations, he perceived them as a threat to the rule of the people. He

feared that 'there are no longer as many votes as there are men, but only as many as there are associations ... Lastly, when one of these associations is so great as to prevail over all the rest ... there is no longer a general will, and the opinion which prevails is purely particular'. Therefore, Rousseau argued, 'there should be no partial society in a state and each citizen should express only his own opinion'. Yet, he also proposed a pragmatic solution to the interest group problem: 'But if there are partial societies, it is best to have as many as possible and to prevent them from being unequal' (Rousseau 1973 [1762] Book 2: 204).

Nonetheless, the leaders of the French Revolution clearly adopted a *unitarist* view of democracy, according to which interest associations would undermine the general will of the people. Accordingly, the French constitution of 24 June 1793 succinctly stated in its first sentence: 'The French Republic is one and indivisible'. This sentence still delineates the republican approach to interest groups today, despite the suspension of the constitution on 10 October 1793 because of the state of war.

Whereas the French Revolution established the right to hold popular assemblies and even a constitutional duty to rebel when the government violates the right of the people, the notion of a one and indivisible republic also justified banning associations that were assumed to interfere with the general will of the people. Incidentally, the French revolutionaries not only dissolved the guilds and congregations of the *Ancien Régime*, but also adopted a law that outlawed workers' associations. In 1791, the French constituent assembly adopted the *loi Le Chapelier*, which prohibited trade unions until the law's abrogation in 1884. With this law the assembly responded to reports of alarmed employers: 'The workers, by an absurd parody of the government, regard their work as their property, the building site as a Republic of which they are jointly the citizens, and believe, as a consequence, that it is for them to name their own bosses, their inspectors and at their discretion to share out work amongst themselves'. Thus, the *Le Chapelier* law was designed to 'put an end to such potential industrial anarchy' (Magraw 1992: 24ff).

The fact that employers convinced the constituent assembly to suspend the freedom of association of French workers highlights a contradiction within the unitarist republican tradition of thought. If particular interests aim to become dominant in order to prevail over the rest, as argued by Rousseau, how can one be sure that any restriction of freedom of association 'in the name of the general will of the people' does not simply serve the particular interests of a group that has acquired a dominant position in the political process?

As noted by Robert Dahl (1982), democratic republics face a major dilemma when dealing with interest associations. On the one hand, the larger a democratic political system becomes the more likely interest associations are to play an important role in the political process. On the other hand, as with individuals, so with organizations: the ability to act autonomously also includes the ability to do harm. Whereas republicans try to solve the classical dilemma between control and autonomy in political life through the introduction of the democratic principle of popular **sovereignty**, liberals typically fear a tyranny of the majority and emphasize instead the liberty of individuals to act and to associate freely.

Liberal (pluralist) traditions

Liberal scholars do not perceive interest associations as a potential threat to the sovereignty of the democratic state, but as an essential source of liberty. This view is pertinently outlined by the French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–59). In 1831, Tocqueville was charged by the French monarchy under King Louis-Philippe to examine the penitentiary system in America. Ironically, however, Tocqueville's travels in America also inspired him to write *Democracy in America* (Tocqueville 2006*a* [1835], 2006*b* [1840]), which became a crucial study within the pluralist tradition of interest politics.

Tocqueville, as an offspring of an ancient aristocratic dynasty which narrowly escaped the guillotine during the French Revolution, had very good reasons to be wary of the general will of the people. However, in contrast with many of his aristocratic contemporaries, he was also convinced that democracy was unavoidable. Whereas politics was a privilege of the few in pre-modern times, the changing social conditions caused by the modernization of the economy and society would affect more and more people. The scope of politics would increase, which in turn would also require a new source of legitimacy for politics—namely democracy. For this reason, Tocqueville studied democracy in America in search of social factors that would prevent it from turning into a tyranny of the majority.

Two strands of Tocqueville's analysis relate to this chapter, namely his observations regarding the role of interests and the role of associations in American politics. In relation to the former, Tocqueville found that Americans were fond of explaining almost all their actions by the 'principle of interest rightly understood'. In Europe, however, claims were justified in absolute moral terms, even if the principle of interest played a 'much grosser' role in Europe than in America (Tocqueville 2006*b* [1840]: Chapter VIII). For Tocqueville, the consequences of this distinction were obvious. On the one hand, absolute moral claims represented a danger to liberty, even if they were meant to advance the general will of the people. On the other hand, the mutual acknowledgement of conflicting interests, as observed in the US of the early nineteenth century, enabled the accommodation of conflict within democratic procedures.

With regard to the role of associations in democratic societies, Tocqueville made the following argument: as the rise of the modern state would make individual citizens weaker, they would need to learn to unite with fellow citizens to defend themselves against the despotic influence of the majority or the aggressions of regal power. Therefore, all kinds of associations, even those formed in civil life without reference to political objects, are important because they cultivate the habits and virtues that are necessary for self-rule.

> Nothing, in my opinion, is more deserving of our attention than the intellectual and moral associations of America. ... In democratic countries the science of association is the mother of science; the progress of all the rest depends upon the progress it has made. Amongst the laws which rule human societies there is one which seems to be more precise and clear than all others. If men are to remain civilized, or to become so, the art of associating together must grow and improve in the same ratio in which the equality of conditions is increased. (Tocqueville 2006*b* [1840]: Chapter V)

This quotation highlights Tocqueville's views. Associations represent the lifeblood of civic life. Therefore, the state should guarantee its citizens' rights of association. At the same time, however, it should not interfere with the associative life of its citizens. Nevertheless, contemporary pluralists are not against political regulation of associations. State involvement is especially warranted to guarantee the freedom of association of its citizens (Dahl 1982). This qualification is of particular importance in relation to workers' rights to organize. Until 2015, more than 150 nation states had ratified the two core *International Labour Organization* conventions regarding workers' freedom of association. However, important states, including the US, failed to do so (see Table 14.2), reflecting the rise of a new truncated view of **liberalism** called **neoliberalism**. Following the world economic crisis of 1973, General Pinochet in Chile, UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and US President Ronald Reagan initiated a radical 'neoliberal' policy shift that curtailed workers' freedom of association in order to increase the profitability of enterprises (Harvey 2005; Milne 2004).

Nevertheless, Tocqueville's classical liberal views on interests and associations still influence contemporary beliefs about the role of interest associations in democratic societies, as highlighted by the vast literature that treats interest associations as 'schools of democracy' (Sinyai 2006). Certainly, several contemporary studies also deplore a decline in associative practices in the US, such as Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2000) or Theda Skocpol's *Diminishing Democracy* (2003), but it is equally noteworthy that these critical accounts of American civic and political life did not trigger a fundamental break with

Table 14.2 Ratification of the core ILO conventions on workers' 'freedom of association'

Country	Freedom of Association and Protection of Right to Organise Convention (n. 87)	Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention (no. 98)
Argentina	1960	1956
Australia	1973	1973
Brazil	Not ratified	1952
Canada	1972	Not ratified
Chile	1999	1999
China	Not ratified	Not ratified
France	1951	1951
Germany	1957	1956
India	Not ratified	Not ratified
Indonesia	1998	1957
Italy	1958	1958
Japan	1965	1953
Nigeria	1960	1960
South Africa	1996	1996
South Korea	Not ratified	Not ratified
Spain	1977	1977
Sweden	1949	1950
Turkey	1993	1952
UK	1949	1950
US	Not ratified	Not ratified

Source: NORMLEX Information System (ILO 2016).

the pluralist **paradigm**. Whereas the classical pluralist approach to interest politics has repeatedly been criticized for its implicit assumptions—notably the assumption that all people enjoy the same capacity to associate and the resulting claim that interest associations are equally distributed across the entire political spectrum (Connolly 1969; Barach and Baratz 1969; Lowi 1969*a*, 1969*b*; Lukes 1974; Lindblom 1977, Offe and Wiesenthal 1985)—most students of democracy, explicitly or tacitly, continued to use the pluralist paradigm as a normative yardstick. However, there were exceptions, as shown by the growing interest in neocorporatism that emerged in the late 1970s.

Corporatist traditions

In the 1970s, European social scientists and American scholars of Latin America and Western Europe became increasingly aware of political systems that did not fit into the pluralist Anglo-American model. Some

scholars established the concept of neocorporatism as an alternative to pluralist theory in the area of interest politics (Schmitter 1974; Katzenstein 1984). Others used concepts like **consensus democracy** or *consociational democracy* for political systems in which parties that represent different sections of society share power (Lijphart 2008; Armingeon 2002). Although the finding of a second tier of government composed of a complex system of intermediary associations was nothing new (Rokkan 1966; Gruner 1956), Schmitter's (1974) article 'Still the century of corporatism?' inspired a generation of comparativists. 'All of a sudden, a research field that to many had seemed hopelessly empiricist and American-centred, began to open up exciting perspectives on vast landscapes of democratic theory, political sociology and social theory in general' (Streeck 2006: 10).

Schmitter's concept of neocorporatism not only enabled comparativists to capture the particular role that the organizations of capital and labour play in many countries, but also challenged republican and pluralist notions of interest politics. Like republicans, neocorporatists perceive the political system as a *body politic* (Rousseau 1973 [1762] Book 2: 260) and not as an aggregation of particular interests, as pluralists would argue. Fittingly, the term **corporatism** had been derived from *corpus* (body). However, unlike republicans, neocorporatists argue that the body politic is constituted not only by individual cells, but also by organs that perform different, but complementary, functions. Hence, the life and death of the body politic depends on the *organic solidarity* (Durkheim 1964 [1893]) between its organs as much as on the vitality of its individual cells. As with human bodies, so with the body politic—the uncontrolled growth of individual cells or organs could threaten the functioning of the entire system.

Unlike republicans, neocorporatists argue that interests and interest associations cannot be excluded from the political process. Contrary to pluralists, however, neocorporatists question the notion of free competition between different interests. Free competition would simply lead to the strongest interests prevailing over weaker interests. This would challenge governability, undermine social justice, and hamper the economic performance of modern mass democracies. Therefore the state should not only guarantee freedom of association. **Public policies** should also include measures that guarantee a balance of power between the opposing social interests, notably between the organizations of capital and labour. Only in this case can the outcome of the policy-making process reflect the best arguments, rather than mere power relations between social interests.

The last point is of particular interest in relation to Western Europe, where both the political left and right agreed on the desirability of institutionalizing social interests. On the left, Social Democrats were the direct offspring of the organized **labour movement**. Moreover, labour parties favoured shifting the conflict between employers and employees from the market place to the political arena, where the number of workers tends to be higher than the number of capitalists. This explains why the labour movement fought for centuries for the extension of the franchise. On the right, Christian Democrats were closely related to the Catholic Church, which also doubted the ability of liberal individualism to provide social integration (Pope Leo XIII 2010 [1891]). Similarly, European and Latin American fascist and peronist movements were intrigued by an authoritarian variant of corporatism, namely the pre-modern *Ständestaat* or 'corporative state' (Pitigliani 1933; Manoïlesco 1936 [1934]) where power relied, at least on paper, on functional constituencies (*estates*). Incidentally, Schmitter introduced the term *neocorporatism* in order to distinguish it from the fascist corporative state. Arguably, the post-1945 neocorporatist class compromises have little in common with the authoritarian corporatism of the past. But despite the elective affinity between state traditions, Social Democrats, and Christian Democrats, neocorporatist arrangements have always remained controversial. Whereas Marxists criticized neocorporatist pacts as attempts to contain socialist labour activism (Panitch 1980), capitalists were never enthusiastic about sharing power with trade unions. Therefore it is not surprising that business elites actively supported the shift towards **neoliberalism** from the 1970s onwards (Harvey 2005), which strengthened their power in politics and labour relations.

However, neocorporatism is not only a politically contentious subject; it has also been questioned methodologically. Whereas it is easy to define neocorporatism in theory, neocorporatist scholars have not been able to agree on a set of unambiguous measures of corporatism in practice (Schmitter 1981; Traxler *et al.* 2001). In Germany, for example, effective corporatist arrangements, both formal and informal, have been reached between the employers' associations and unions of a particular sector, whereas the national peak organizations of capital and labour have not signed national social pacts. In contrast, the Maastricht Treaty established the *European Social Dialogue* between the peak organizations of capital and labour as far back as 1993, but the fact that the European social partners can negotiate legally binding agreements has not led to a neocorporatist European Union (Erne 2008, 2015). Likewise, Hong Kong can hardly be described as a neocorporatist political system, even if half of its Legislative Council is composed of interest group representatives selected by functional constituencies, representing, however, predominately business interests (Goodstadt 2005). For this reason, any comparative analysis of interest politics systems, it has to be reiterated, must be

Table 14.3 Evolution of industrial relations systems (1973–2014)

	The varieties of industrial relations systems			
	1973[a]	1996[a]	2008[b]	2014[b]
Norway	Neocorporatism	Lean corporatism	Lean corporatism	Lean corporatism
Denmark	Neocorporatism	Lean corporatism	Lean corporatism	(Lean corporatism)
Germany	Neocorporatism	Lean corporatism	(Lean corporatism)	(Lean corporatism)
Netherlands	Other corporatism	Lean corporatism	Lean corporatism	(Lean corporatism)
Italy	(Other corporatism)	Lean corporatism	Lean corporatism	(Neoliberalism)
Ireland	(Other corporatism)	Lean corporatism	Lean corporatism	(Neoliberalism)
Spain	*Authoritarian corporatism*	(Lean corporatism)	(Lean corporatism)	(Neoliberalism)
Canada	Pluralism	Neoliberalism	Neoliberalism	Neoliberalism
UK	(Pluralism)	Neoliberalism	Neoliberalism	Neoliberalism
US	Pluralism	Neoliberalism	Neoliberalism	Neoliberalism

[a] Traxler *et al.* (2001). Borderline cases in parenthesis. Italicized entry based on Crouch (1993).

[b] My categorization based on Traxler *et al.* (2001) and data on collective bargaining levels and types from the ICTWSS database (Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies, 2015), Eurofound (2014), and Marginson and Welz (2015).

very aware of the particular context of the different interest politics systems in place in different regions of the world.

Nevertheless, the theoretical divide between pluralist and neocorporatist systems of interest articulation has been very productive for **empirical research**, especially in comparisons of Anglo-American and European socio-economic and political systems. During the last two decades, the distinction between different coordinated and liberal **varieties of capitalisms** and industrial relations systems has inspired many studies (Crouch 1999; Hall and Soskice 2001; Traxler *et al.* 2001; Pontusson 2005; Block 2007).

As outlined in Table 14.3, economic **globalization** and Europeanization processes did not lead to the demise of the coordinated industrial relations systems of Scandinavia, the Low Countries, and Germany. Cross-national differences persist. However, there has also been a shared liberalizing trend that led to much leaner forms of **corporatism**. This trend reflects the decentralization of collective bargaining levels, the decline of union density and collective bargaining coverage, and the flexibilization of labour market and social policies (Thelen 2014). In addition, many unions engaged in competitive beggar-thy-neighbour bargaining strategies to sustain and attract investment from multinational capital (Bieler and Erne 2015; Erne 2008). Hence, social inequality increased not only in the US and the UK, in response to the rise of neoliberalism, but also in the former heartlands of neocorporatism (Piketty 2014).

The dominant comparative approaches to interest politics in terms of varieties of capitalism, unionism, and social policy are also questioned by the EU's new economic governance regime (Eurofound 2014, 2016; Erne 2015; Marginson 2015). The more national (labour) politics is shaped by constraining EU interventions, the more the 'methodological nationalism' of classical country-by-country comparisons is producing biased results (Erne 2015). The recent shift to neoliberalism in Italian, Spanish, and Irish industrial relations, for example, must therefore be analysed from a perspective that conceptualizes European integration as a process 'among distinct units indeed but, at the same time, units belonging to one single system' (Caramani 2015: 283). Finally, students of interest politics should also be aware that liberal and corporatist arrangements might also co-exist within the very same country, reflecting different constellations of interest politics across different sectors and policy fields (Erne and Imboden 2015).

KEY POINTS

- Republican theorists, such as Rousseau, see in interest associations a danger for democracy, because the more particular interests prevail, the less politics would represent the general will of the people.
- In contrast, pluralist scholars, such as Tocqueville, perceive interest associations as an essential source of liberty. However, this view relies on two debatable assumptions: (1) all people enjoy the same capacity to associate, and (2) interest associations are equally distributed across the political spectrum.
- Unlike republicans, neocorporatists claim that interest associations cannot be excluded from the political pro-

cess. Contrary to pluralists, neocorporatists fear that free competition between interest groups would lead to stronger prevailing over weaker interests. Therefore neocorporatists favour regulations that ensure a balance of power between opposing social interests, notably between the organizations of capital and labour.

Interest associations in practice

Interest group formation

In 1965, US economist Mancur Olson challenged the pluralist assumption that group formation was equally available to everybody. Assuming that individual action is determined by individual cost–benefit calculations, his book *The Logic of Collective Action* concluded that **selective incentives** motivate rational individuals to join interest groups (Olson 1965). According to the *logic of rational choice*, only associations that provide private benefits will prosper, whereas associations that provide public goods, i.e. general benefits without regard to a person's membership status, will find it almost impossible to attract members.

Why should rational individuals pay union subscriptions when collectively agreed wage increases or improvements in social benefits will be applied to everybody whether they are union members or not? Union organizers might respond by saying that the strength of a union, and therefore its capacity to improve working and living conditions, is directly related to the number of its adherents. But how decisive is this argument? The power of a union does not increase noticeably if its membership increases by one individual. Therefore, from Olson's perspective, it would be more rational for a potential union member to take a free ride, relying on the contributions of the existing union members, than to bear the cost of union membership. Consequently, Olson concluded that the formation of interest associations is biased in favour of those associations that are able to offer special advantages, such as automobile clubs that offer insurance cover to their members.

At first sight, a comparative assessment of trade union membership figures across countries seems to confirm Olson's arguments; in almost all countries, union membership density figures are considerably lower than in Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Belgium (the so-called **Ghent system** countries) where union membership includes unemployment insurance cover (see Table 14.1 and Scruggs (2002); see also Chapters 21 and 22). In turn, however, Olson cannot explain why rational people voluntarily join unions in countries where union membership does not include selective benefits. Olson's (1965) claim to have indentified *the* logic of **collective action** has also been proved wrong by the events of 1968, which triggered an unexpected resurgence of civic activism and social movements across the world (see Chapter 16). Whereas Olson's model can explain why some groups have more members than others, it cannot explain the formation of interest associations generally.

Olson's individualistic logic of the *homo economicus* is not the only logic at play when people decide to join interest associations. Collective experiences and moral concerns can also trigger a feeling of an identity of interests between people, as shown in E. P. Thompson's seminal history *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963). Olson's logic has also been qualified by European social scientists who studied *The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe since 1968* (Crouch and Pizzorno 1978) and by scholars who emphasized the role of external sponsors or organizers (Salisbury 1969) in the formation of interest groups. For instance, Jeffrey Berry emphasized that at least a third of the eighty-three American public interest organizations received at least 50 per cent of their funding from private foundations (Berry 1977: 72). Similarly, Greenwood quoted the 2010 records of the *European Transparency Register*, which indicate that EU grants represented on average 64 per cent of the total income of the EU's major 'citizen interest groups', such as the *European Environmental Bureau* or the *European Anti-Poverty Network* (Greenwood 2011: 139). But even if external support somewhat mitigates the disadvantages of **public interest groups**, a review of Olson's legacy suggested that groups that offer selective incentives to their members still have an advantage. However, the advantage may be declining, as insurance companies have started to undercut groups, such as the British *Automobile Association*, by offering insurance cover at a lower cost (McLean 2000).

The pluralist notion of equality between interest associations has also been losing ground among scholars of interest politics who did not follow Olson's rational choice paradigm. In the 1970s, several studies appeared which suggested that group formation and membership were biased in favour of particular social categories with particular resources, notably wealth and time. And in 1985, Offe and Wiesenthal (1985: 175) even challenged the entire 'interest group stereotype', arguing that it would make little sense to use the same label for business associations and trade unions, given the distinct logics of collective action used in the two cases.

Offe and Wiesenthal's two logics of collective action

In their influential work, Offe and Wiesenthal (1985) assessed the associational practices of labour and capital. They proposed distinguishing between *two logics of collective action* in terms of the individual *or* collective

ability of an interest to affect the policy-making capacity of the political system. Offe and Wiesenthal did not argue that business organizations have an advantage because they tend to spend more money on lobbying than other organizations. Instead, they highlighted the structural dependence of politicians in capitalist societies on the holders of capital. As any *individual* investment decision has an impact on the economic performance of a territory, politicians must consider the views of capitalists whether they are well organized or not. This simplifies the task of business interest representation enormously. Business interests do not face the difficult collective action problems that labour unions and other organizations face. Whereas investment strikes by capital holders do not require collective organization, the withdrawal of labour requires *collective organization* and the willingness of workers to act together despite the availability of individual exit options.

Certainly, at times, business associations also fail, for instance due to competition between different firms for government support, such as government contracts, government bailouts, or privatization bids. Accordingly, Traxler and colleagues have argued that 'it is problematic to translate the pre-associational power asymmetry between businesses and labour into corresponding differentials in terms of associational capacities' (Traxler *et al.* 2001: 37). Even so, the collective action problem facing workers is much more difficult to solve than that facing corporations. Trade unions rely on their members' willingness to act collectively. In contrast, business associations only have to tell policy-makers that individual firms will act in an undesirable way if politicians fail to accommodate their interests. In this vein, even the imminent ruin of an organization can turn out to be an effective political tool, as demonstrated in 2008 when business interests successfully lobbied governments around the world to bail out failing banks (Stiglitz 2010).

A new typology of interest associations

Offe and Wiesenthal's analysis allows us to introduce a new typology of interest associations in action which does not distinguish groups on the basis of their subject matter or the private or public nature of the interests represented. Instead, I propose a two-by-two table based on two analytical distinctions that relate to two dimensions of collective action. First, I distinguish interest groups on the basis of the nature of their members' ability to act: to what degree does the representation of an interest rely on collective action by the members of an interest group beyond the simple payment of membership fees? Second, I distinguish interest groups on the basis of their relation to the political system: to what degree can they shape public policy-making through autonomous action outside the formal democratic policy-making process? In other words, to what degree are interest groups capable of creating facts outside the formal parliamentary system that governments and parliaments cannot ignore? At the outset, this leads us to a typology that enables us to distinguish business interests (which are not obliged to act collectively) from other interest groups, such as trade unions and other organizations which must act collectively in order to have a political impact (Figure 14.1). In addition, our typology also enables us to distinguish both business groups and trade unions from other non-governmental organizations that do not have the power to affect policy-making through autonomous action in the economic sphere. In contrast with these organizations, business interests—especially global firms—are able to determine rules and regulations without having to go through government (Crouch 2010, 2011; Graz and Nölke 2008). In turn, globalization seems to be curbing workers' capacity to exercise political power through industrial action. Nevertheless, even transnational supply and production chains contain weak links which can be exploited by union action (Erne 2008: 36). Therefore unions retain more power compared to other non-governmental organizations that play no role in the economic production process.

Figure 14.1 enables us not only to distinguish business associations, trade unions, and other non-governmental organizations analytically, but also to distinguish different repertoires of action that go beyond the *lobbying* activities that are available to all interest groups. Reflecting contributions to the study of interest politics from cognate disciplines, such as industrial and labour relations and political sociology, our typology also captures alternative action repertoires that are available only to specific types of interest associations.

- The capacity to conclude *political exchanges* with the government (Pizzorno 1978), available to organizations with a high degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the political system (e.g. business associations and trade unions).
- The capacity to engage in *contentious politics* (Tilly and Tarrow 2007), available to organizations with a high capacity to engage in collective action (e.g. trade unions and other social movement organizations).
- The capacity to set up *private interest government* structures (Streeck and Schmitter 1985), available to organizations with a high degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the political system (e.g. business associations).

Direct lobbying

Although the term 'lobbying' was originally used to describe attempts to influence lawmakers in the lobbies of the British Houses of Parliament, the lobbying literature usually refers to all activities that aim to influence any

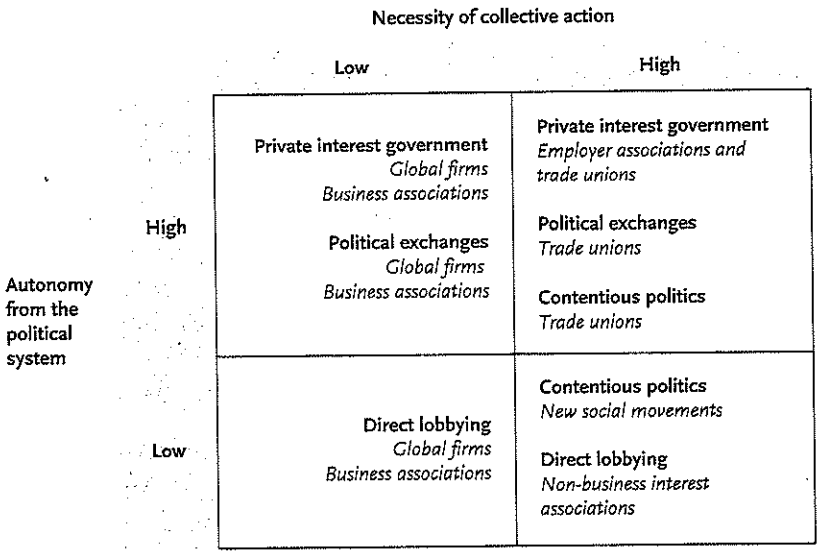

Figure 14.1 Action repertoires of interest groups

branch of government at any level of decision-making. However, in order to distinguish lobbying from other repertoires of action of interest associations, I am reserving this term for activities that are based on personal access to decision-makers in line with the concept of *direct* or *inside lobbying*.

The American lobbying literature, which still influences the agenda of lobbying researchers across the world, has been particularly concerned with practical questions. What factors explain the success of lobbyists? Whom to lobby to be effective? Truman (1971 [1951]) and numerous scholars who came after him described and compared the lobbying strategies of interest groups vis-à-vis the branches of government: the executive, the state bureaucracy, the legislature, and even the courts. Predictably, most scholars concluded that the more an interest group is endowed with resources, such as money, legitimacy, and expertise, the higher is its capacity to influence decision-makers and policy outcomes. Lobbying specialists also came to the conclusion that the accessibility of institutions affects the degree of interest group influence on policy outputs. And, finally, there also seems to be a consensus among lobbying specialists that the nature of an issue influences the efficacy of lobbying.

In addition, growing popular concerns about the impact of interest group money in US elections triggered not only several studies (Currinder *et al.* 2007; Rozell *et al.* 2006) but also political reform. However, these reforms did not aim to balance power inequalities within the interest group system, in line with neocorporatist thought, but rather mirrored a shift from a pluralist to a republican understanding of interest group politics. Fittingly, in 2002 the US Congress passed the bipartisan McCain–Feingold Act which restricted the ability of corporations—but also trade unions—to advertise on behalf of, or in opposition to, a political candidate. However, on 21 January 2010, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that the McCain–Feingold Act violated the Constitution, stating that its free-speech provisions should apply to corporations and unions as well as to individuals. It goes without saying that the ruling, which was determined by the Supreme Court's conservative majority, caused widespread dismay among commentators, who argued that elections should be won—not bought (Streisand 2010).

Be that as it may, a comparative assessment of European state traditions suggests that there are alternative ways to contain the influence of corporate money in the political process. European states do not limit the free-speech rights of interest groups; however, they do balance the power of competing interest associations through public policy measures that strengthen weaker interest associations, namely through financial assistance as well as institutionalized consultation, co-determination, and veto rights. Consequently, it seems implausible to suggest converging perspectives on interest group research in Europe and America, as has been argued by Mahoney and Baumgartner (2008) and Dür (2008).

Perhaps the application of American questions and paradigms in European interest politics research can be justified by the presence of a plethora of professional lobbyists in Brussels (Corporate Europe Observatory 2010; Greenwood 2011) or the EU's mode of multi-level governance, which resembles the federal US system at least to some extent (see Chapter 23). However, interest groups must play a particular lobbying game in Brussels. For example, European business lobbyists do not set up US-style **political action committees** in order to campaign for or against political candidates or legislation (Coen 2010). Given the much more technocratic and

consensual nature of the EU policy-making process, they try instead to establish themselves as trusted actors in EU-level policy networks that 'seek some kind of "negotiated order" out of conflict and uncertainty' (Coen and Richardson 2009: 348). This is leading to a system of interest intermediation called 'elite pluralism' (Coen 1997) in which only those players whose presence is politically welcome gain access to a particular EU policy network. In social policy, however, the automatic participation of employer associations and unions still reflects corporatist rather than pluralist patterns of interest intermediations (Léonard *et al.* 2007), although the unilateral EU labour market and social policy reforms that have been imposed in the EU after 2010 may also suggest a different conclusion (Erne 2015; Marginson 2015). Nevertheless, policy-making processes and the regulatory regimes that govern interest group–government relations vary across countries and different varieties of capitalism to such a degree (Grant 2005; McMenamin 2013) that any analysis that fails to go beyond US paradigms of lobbying must lead to flawed results.

Political exchange

As shown in Figure 14.1, direct lobbying is not the only mechanism through which interest associations influence political power. Associations that operate in the economic sphere, namely business associations and trade unions, are also able to conclude *political exchanges* with political leaders (Pizzorno 1978). Governments have frequently traded goods with unions or employers in exchange for social consent. In such cases, political exchange power is paradoxically linked to the (partial) renunciation of economic power, namely the capacity to withdraw capital or labour from the production process. In addition, political institutions are dependent on expert knowledge which might not be available within an increasingly restricted and residual public service (Crouch 2004: 89). Accordingly, even corporate lobbying can be conceptualized as political exchange, namely as an exchange of information that is crucial in the policy-making process as against access to the policy-making process (Bouwen 2002).

Sometimes, exchange power even takes on a symbolic form, in which neither politicians nor interest groups exchange any material goods but only legitimacy (Crouch 2000). For example, trade unions have shared the burden of legitimizing contested *political* decisions in exchange for more or less favourable public policies, as in the case of past EU referendums (Hyman 2010). Unions have also offered employers their collaboration to persuade workers to use controversial technologies, to respect safety regulations, or to retrain. In addition, unions and employers have made joint submissions in favour of their industries, which political decision-makers usually find very hard to deny.

As capital depends on labour in the production process, and vice versa, the organizations of capital and labour may also decide to enter into tripartite agreements with the government in exchange for economic performance and social peace. In such agreements during the 1970s unions often accepted wage moderation in exchange for legislation that strengthened workplace co-determination rights, and more recently simply to make a country more competitive (Erne 2008). In this context, interest associations can no longer be perceived as a counter-power to the state. Instead, they become actors within a policy network that also assumes governmental functions. However, given the increasing exit options introduced by neoliberal politics and the **internationalization** of capital, even the proponents of neocorporatism had doubts about whether the political exchanges that characterized neocorporatism could be sustained (Streeck and Schmitter 1991).

But, surprisingly, in the 1990s social pacts were concluded even in countries, such as Ireland, Italy, and Spain (Molina and Rhodes 2002), where the structural preconditions of neocorporatism—namely a strong policy coordination and enforcement capacity on the part of the participating 'social partners' and a balance of class forces between capital and labour—were missing (Schmitter and Lehmbruch 1979). Accordingly, Traxler *et al.* (2001) used the term *lean corporatism* with reference to the unexpected reappearance of the 'corporatist Sisyphus' in the 1990s (Schmitter and Grote 1997). But after 2008, social partnership collapsed again in Ireland, Italy, and Spain, whereas the peak associations of capital and labour continue to play a major role in the face of the economic crisis in established neocorporatist countries (see Table 14.3).

The collapse of social pacting in Ireland highlights a particular problem related to 'competitive corporatism' (Rhodes 1998). Workers accepted wage moderation, i.e. a smaller share of the national income, in exchange for an overall higher growth rate that would follow from higher profits of Irish businesses. During the booming Celtic Tiger years, it seemed that capital, labour, and the state had found an arrangement that triggered a spectacular period of economic and employment growth. But when growth rates collapsed, the Irish government and employers' associations abandoned partnership and imposed unilateral wage cuts. Whereas Irish workers accepted a smaller share of the national income when it was growing, they found it very difficult to accept getting a 'smaller slice of a shrinking cake' (Erne 2013). It follows that corporatist deals can be very risky, especially for labour. How can unions be sure that employers do not take advantage of unions' concessions within social pacts in boom years when unions are strong, and then abandon corporatist arrangements in crisis years when unions are weak?

The major difficulty with the exchange power of a union, however, is its dependence on the capacity to threaten social stability (Offe and Wiesenthal 1985). In contrast to the exchange power of capitalists, labour's exchange power depends entirely on its collective mobilization power. Hence, exchange power uses—but does not reproduce—mobilization power (Erne 2008). The use of exchange power might even cause a decline in union membership that would finally undermine the very capacity to conclude exchanges. This explains why unions that univocally support social partnership need to demonstrate occasionally that their consent cannot be taken for granted, as shown by Hyman (2001) with regard to the German case.

Contentious politics

Interest associations also engage at times in *contentious politics* (Tilly and Tarrow 2007; see Chapter 16)—or **outside lobbying** (Schattschneider 1975 [1960]), in the language of the American lobbying literature. Whereas business associations very rarely see the need to engage in contentious collective action (e.g. public demonstrations or lockouts), strike action is often seen as the constitutive power of labour. In contrast with other social movements, unions engage in contentious politics mainly to compel institutions to compromise. In contrast with Rosa Luxemburg (2008 [1906]), most unions understand contentious politics not as a tool to achieve a different society, but rather as an action of last resort to remind corporations and governments of labour's price for cooperation. However, the more the unions' capacity to wage collective action declined, the more difficult it became to defend the achievements of the mid-twentieth-century class compromise that led to the formation of the modern **welfare state** (see Chapter 21).

The growing cross-border mobility of capital provides employers with a wider range of possibilities to counter collective action on the part of labour. Ongoing restructuring processes and threats to delocalize enterprises have considerably weakened union power in industrialized countries, even if capital is not as footloose as is often alleged. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to say that industrial conflict has disappeared in the new world of global capitalism (Silver 2003; van der Velden *et al.* 2007; Bieler *et al.* 2015; Stan *et al.* 2015). Yet, strikes often involve relatively small groups of core workers, especially in the public sector, and fail to include the marginalized peripheral workforce. Although the European peak organizations of employers and workers signed a legally binding *European Social Dialogue* agreement that stated that employees on fixed-term contracts cannot be treated less favourably than permanent staff (European Industrial Relations Dictionary 2010), Hyman (1999) observed a growing polarization between different sections of the working class. This obviously undermines working class solidarity, and thus the capacity of unions to conclude general political exchanges.

Although the contemporary orthodoxy that social class no longer exists can be contested with sociological analysis, the increasing difficulty of subordinate groups to unite as a class entails major consequences for interest politics and democracy alike (Crouch 2004: 53): How is it possible to reconcile democracy and interest politics, if the latter seem to be increasingly dominated by a self-confident global shareholding and business executive class? In the wake of the financial crisis of 2008, Crouch gave a pessimistic answer to this question: whereas democratic politics would continue to play a role in some areas, the democratic state would be vacating its 'former heartland of basic economic strategy'. Instead, economic policy would be shaped by 'the great corporations, particularly those in the financial sector' (Crouch 2009: 398), because of the decline of the manual working class and the failure of new social movements to constitute a new class that stands for a general social interest. Consequently, economic policy would become a private matter of business interests, even if corporations might, at times, be held accountable by public appeals to *corporate social responsibility* (Crouch 2011).

Private interest government

In neocorporatist systems, the state integrates associations into policy networks. In the case of *private interest government*, however, the state goes even further and delegates its authority to make binding decisions to interest groups (Streeck and Schmitter 1985). As far back as the Middle Ages, producer associations established private interest government structures, namely the guilds, in order to police the markets. However, after the French Revolution the regulation of markets became a domain of the nation-state, mainly to suit the needs of modern industry. When the working class entered as a compelling social force in politics, it seemed that the days of self-regulation of economic affairs by business would definitely be numbered. Yet, in a particular economic sector, guild-like patterns of private interest government remained crucially important.

In the agriculture sector, self-governing producer associations continued to police the production and distribution of goods throughout the twentieth century (Streeck and Schmitter 1985; Farago 1985; Traxler and Unger 1994; Stan 2005). Although agriculture policy became an important pillar of the European common market project, states continued to support the self-governing bodies of the sector by public policy and laws. Even in countries with no corporatist traditions, farmers' associations were co-opted into public policy networks that governed agricultural policy (Smith 1993; Muller 1984). However, the more the agricultural sector internationalized, the more evident conflicts between local

farmers and international agribusiness corporations became. In several countries, small farmers left the once all-encompassing farmers' associations and founded autonomous farmers' groups (della Porta and Caiani 2009). In this context, it became increasingly difficult, but not impossible, to sustain private interest governing structures in this sector. Traditional private interest governments such as the *Swiss Cheese Union* collapsed. However, in some cases new self-governing private interest government systems also emerged, for instance around *Appellations d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC) food certification, production control, and marketing regimes (Wagemann 2012). In other sectors, however, powerful interest groups were even able to establish *transnational private governance* structures to regulate, for example, the internet, international accountancy standards, and banking regulation in a way that suited their interests (Graz and Nölke 2008).

The shift in policy-making from partisan politics to autonomous agencies has also been the focus of scholars who studied the rise of *regulatory governance* (Majone 1994). According to Majone, regulatory governance is meant to keep interest groups out of policy-making process by relieving the process of the 'negative consequences' of electoral pressures on the quality of regulation. In other words, advocates of regulatory governance aim to reduce interest group influence by the exclusion of elected politicians from the policy-making process. Policy-making would be better if it was left to independent agencies—for example, to independent central banks in relation to monetary policy, or independent competition authorities in relation to competition policy. However, the exclusion of interests and interest intermediation from the policy-making process is at variance with both pluralist and neocorporatist paradigms of interest politics. To some extent, the theory of regulatory governance comes closest to the unitarist republican paradigm, but without its democratic rhetoric. Like republican theory, however, regulatory governance faces a major problem: how can one be sure that regulatory agencies do not serve the interest that was able to capture a dominant position in the agency's decision-making process? Regulative agencies tend to be shaped by powerful political actors and ideologies, as confirmed by the exclusion of social and labour interests from the frames of references that govern the monetary policy of the European Central Bank and the competition policy of the Directorate General for Competition of the European Commission (Erne 2008). For that reason regulatory governance structure 'often masks ideological choices which are not debated and subject to public scrutiny beyond the immediate interests related to the regulatory management area' (Weiler *et al.* 1995: 33). In this vein, regulatory governance might be more properly understood if it were conceptualized as disguised private interest government.

KEY POINTS

- Selective incentives motivate individuals to join interest groups. But collective experiences and moral concerns can also trigger collective action. Finally, organizers or external sponsors may also play a role in the formation of interest groups.
- Whereas business groups do not need to engage in collective action, as each individual investment decision has a political impact, trade unions and other citizens' organizations must organize collective action to have an impact.
- The power of interest groups depends on their ability to affect the policy-making capacity of a political system. Hence, powerful interest groups not only engage in direct lobbying, but also pressurize the government by other means, notably through actions in the economic sphere (business relocation threats, workers' industrial action, etc.).
- The different action repertoires (direct lobbying, political exchange, contentious politics, and private interest government) are not available to all interest groups to the same extent.
- Government–interest group relations reflect not only the power resources of interest groups but also the institutional context of the particular political and socio-economic system.

Conclusion

Comparativists agree that interest associations play a crucial role in the political process. However, this chapter has also shown that there is no agreement on whether interest groups represent a danger or a 'school for democracy' (Sinyai 2006). Therefore, it is not surprising that government–interest group relations, which preoccupied Rousseau and Tocqueville centuries ago, still engage contemporary scholars. Some analysts note that corporate interests are increasingly determining socio-economic policy (Crouch 2004, 2011), whereas others detect twin processes of popular and elite withdrawal from politics (Mair 2006*c*). To this, Tocqueville might have responded: the weaker individual citizens become, the more they need to learn to combine with fellow citizens to defend themselves against the despotic influence of corporate power. Accordingly, many studies ask what contribution interest associations make to the democratic involvement of citizens in the current era (Jordan and Maloney 2007; Cohen and Rogers 1995). This democracy–interest association nexus is also of particular importance in studies that assess EU politics (Erne 2015; Georgakakis and Rowel 2013; Horn 2012; Kohler-Koch and Quittkat 2011; Balme and Chabanet 2008; Kohler-Koch *et al.* 2008; Smismans 2006).

Comparative studies of interest politics are also crucial in order to explain variations in capitalisms and welfare states across the developed world (Hancké 2009). Why did companies in Germany lay off fewer workers in 2009 than corporations in the US, although the global economic crisis hit both countries equally? Arguably, the difference can be explained by the different systems of interest intermediation that are in place in the two countries.

Given the impact of interest group politics on both democracy and the social and economic well-being of people, it is no exaggeration to claim that the study of politics and society cannot forego the contributions of comparativists in this field. However, there remains one caveat. Students of interest politics should remain sceptical of studies that seek to increase the field's coherence by reducing its scope to the narrowness and parochialism that dominated some sections of the lobbying and pressure group literature in the past.

KEY POINTS

- Interest associations play a crucial role in the political process. But there is no agreement on whether interest associations sustain or undermine democracy, especially in the current context of a growing internationalization of interest politics. For this reason, the relationship between democracy and interest politics is of particular importance in studies that assess the democratic legitimacy of supranational organizations, such as the European Union.
- Interest associations—and the particular rules and regulations that govern them—also affect the socio-economic and political outcomes of a particular country. Therefore, comparative studies of interest politics have been crucial in order to explain variations in capitalisms and welfare states across the world.

Questions

Knowledge based

1. What is an interest group?
2. Why are interest groups so difficult to define in a comparative context?
3. On which assumptions are republican and pluralist paradigms of interest politics based?
4. To what extent do US and EU lobbying activities differ from each other, and why?
5. What repertoires of interest group action are available to trade unions?

Critical thinking

1. Does it make sense to distinguish 'public' and 'private' interest groups?
2. What advantages do neocorporatist systems of interest intermediation offer governments?
3. Why do business interest groups retain a privileged position in capitalist democracies?
4. Are we witnessing a convergence of interest politics across the globe?
5. 'The more national interest politics regimes are shaped by supranational developments, the more the "methodological nationalism" of classical country-by-country comparisons is producing biased results.' Discuss.

Further reading

Bieler, A., *et al.* (eds) (2015) *Labour and Transnational Action in Times of Crisis*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield International. Exploring a range of labour movements, the book provides a conceptual framework for understanding how transnational collective action succeeds and fails.

Cigler, A. J., Loomis, B. A., and Nownes, A.J. (eds) (2015) *Interest Group Politics* (9th edn) (Washington, DC: CQ Press). A contemporary review of US interest politics.

Coen, D., Grant, W., and Wilson, G. (2010) *The Oxford Handbook of Business and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). A fine collection on business–government relations.

Crouch, C. and Streeck, W. (eds) (2006) *The Diversity of Democracy: Corporatism, Social Order and Political Conflict* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar). A lucid reassessment of the neocorporatist argument by major protagonists in the field.

Erne, R. (2008) *European Unions: Labor's Quest for a Transnational Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press). A study of transnational democracy, collective action and bargaining, and governance that is worth revisiting considering the resistance to austerity measures being implemented throughout Europe today.

Greenwood, J. (2011) *Interest Representation in the European Union* (3rd edn) (Basingstoke: Palgrave). A comprehensive textbook on the role of interest associations in the EU.

Harvey, D. (2005) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). A very readable book on the rise of business interests in politics since the 1970s.

McMenamin, I. (2013) *If Money Talks, What Does it Say? Corruption and Business Financing of Political Parties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). An intelligent study of the role of business money across a variety of countries and capitalisms.

Offe, C. (1980) *Disorganized Capitalism: Contemporary Transformations of Work and Politics* (Cambridge: Polity). This book includes Offe and Wiesenthal's seminal chapter on 'Two Logics of Collective Action'.

Web links

http://www.europa.eu/transparency-register/index_en.htm
The European Transparency Register provides information about who is engaged in EU lobbying activities.

http://www.corporateeurope.org/
The Corporate Europe Observatory is a campaign group that challenges privileged access enjoyed by business lobby groups in European policy-making.

http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/industrial-relations-dictionary
The European Industrial Relations Dictionary of *Eurofound*, which is the tripartite EU agency that provides expertise on living and working conditions and industrial relations in Europe.

http://www.oecd.org/gov/ethics/lobbying
The OECD provides guidance on how to promote 'good governance principles in lobbying'.

http://www.labourstart.org/
A comprehensive collection of links to trade union news in 28 languages.

http://www.uva-aias.net/207
ICTWSS Database on Institutional Characteristics of Trade Unions, Wage Setting, State Intervention and Social Pacts in 51 countries between 1960 and 2014.

http://www.businesseurope.eu
European confederation of business and employers' associations.

http://www.etuc.org
European Trade Union Confederation.

http://www.ioe-emp.org
International Organization of Employers.

http://www.ituc-csi.org
International Trade Union Confederation.

online resource centre

For additional material and resources, please visit the Online Resource Centre at:
http://www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/caramani4e/

CHAPTER 16

Social movements

Hanspeter Kriesi

Chapter contents

Reader's guide

This chapter looks at a phenomenon which is not usually part of the core business of comparative political scientists, but deserves to be taken seriously in a world that is increasingly shaped by non-state actors, such as **social movements**. The chapter begins with a discussion of what we mean when we speak of social movements and a conceptualization of key terms. It then moves on with the presentation of three theoretical approaches which have successively shaped the debates of the specialists: the classical model, the **resource mobilization** model, and the political process model. It pays particular attention to the **political process approach**, which is the most promising from the comparativist's point of view. This approach is elaborated in the third section. The final section presents some results about the emergence, the level of **mobilization**, and the success of social movements.

Introduction

On 18 February 2016, about 100 demonstrators, shouting 'we are the people' and anti-immigrant slogans, blocked a bus with refugees arriving in Clausnitz, Saxony. The refugees were part of the enormous wave of people seeking shelter in Germany. They were to be housed in a provisional home in the local community. Videos of the ensuing clash between demonstrators, local police, and crying refugees spread in the social media and made international news. Some German media spoke about the 'disgrace of Clausnitz'. Only a few days later, on 21 February, an arson attack on a refugee's home occurred in close-by Bautzen. These are only two incidents in a series of attacks against refugees in Saxony in particular and Germany more generally. Thus, in 2015, when the wave of refugees arriving in Germany first rose to unprecedented proportions, the police counted no less than 1,000 attacks on refugees' homes across Germany.

On 15 February 2003, two and a half million Italians marched past the Coliseum in Rome in protest at the impending war in Iraq. On the same day in Paris, 250,000 people protested against the war, and half a million people walked past the Brandenburg gate in Berlin. In Madrid, there were a million marchers, in Barcelona 1.3 million, in London, 1.7 million people—the largest demonstration in the city's history. Even in New York, more than 500,000 people assembled on the east side of Manhattan. 'On that day in February, starting from New Zealand and Australia and following the sun around the world, an estimated 16 million people marched, demonstrated, sang songs of peace, and occasionally—despite the strenuous efforts of organizers—clashed with police' (Tarrow 2005: 15).

On 17 September 2011, hundreds of demonstrators took to the streets of Manhattan's financial district under the slogan 'We are the 99 per cent', in a largely peaceful protest against the financial industry. Modelled on the Arab Spring uprisings that swept through Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and other Arab countries earlier in the same year, Occupy Wall Street occupied Zuccotti Park in Manhattan, where some 100–200 protesters camped for several weeks to draw attention to the plight of the large parts of the population that were suffering the consequences of the financial and economic crisis.

These are examples of protest events organized by social movements of various stripes—movements of the extreme right and anti-racist movements in the first example, the transnational peace movement in the second, and the movement aimed against powerful financial interests and orchestrated through Twitter, Facebook, and other social media tools in the third. Traditionally, social movements have not been considered part of comparative politics. The study of social movements has been the preserve of sociologists dealing with collective behaviour such as panics, crazes, fads, or crowds. As we shall see, social movements are specific forms of collective behaviour. They have action repertoires of their own which distinguish them from established political actors, but they cannot be reduced to their particular action repertoires. To the extent that political scientists paid attention to movements at all, they considered them as **public interest groups**, i.e. as interest groups defending the collective interests of the general public, and proceeded to analyse them as if they were nothing more than interest groups. Social movements have organizations which often closely resemble interest groups or, for that matter, political parties, but they cannot be reduced to their organizational component.

Comparativists have disregarded social movements for too long. As pointed out in Chapter 24, the current master process of **globalization**, among other things, widens the resources available to non-state actors, including **social movement organizations**. Local, regional, national, and transnational social movements have become regular participants in the political process at all levels of polities.

According to some scholars (Meyer and Tarrow 1998*b*), our society has become a 'social movement society': social protest has become a perpetual element of modern life, protest behaviour is employed with greater frequency, by more diverse constituencies, and is used to represent a wider range of claims than ever before, and **professionalization** and institutionalization may transform the social movement into an instrument within the realm of 'conventional' politics. Even if somewhat exaggerated, this idea reflects well the current tendencies in the political process of democratic polities.

KEY POINTS

- Social movements constitute an integral part of the contemporary political process in democratic polities.
- Social movements are not simply another type of interest group.
- Social movements have action repertoires of their own that distinguish them from established political actors.

Social movements as regular participants in political processes

Defining social movements

Although everybody seems to have a fairly good idea of what a social movement is, the concept is not easy to define. By a social movement, we often mean a group of people involved in a conflict with clearly identified

opponents, sharing a common identity, a unifying belief, or a common programme, and acting collectively. In other words, the concept of social movement includes at least three component elements: (1) a group of people with a conflictual orientation towards an opponent, (2) a collective identity and a set of common beliefs and goals, and (3) a repertoire of **collective actions**.

The various definitions of social movements (Box: What is a social movement? in the Online Resource Centre provides three examples) all emphasize that *movements are engaged in conflicts with some opponents*, but scholars are not of one mind when it comes to specifying the character of the conflicts involved. Some leave the question open-ended; others narrow the range of opponents primarily to those within the political arena, as reflected in the recent conceptualization of movements as a variant of 'contentious politics' (McAdam *et al.* 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). This narrower view excludes movements within established institutions, such as religious movements within established churches that attempt to reform the church or to block such reforms (e.g. Tarrow 1988), or challengers of cultural authorities. Snow *et al.* (2004) propose a more inclusive, yet not entirely open-ended definition by considering as social movements challengers or defenders of 'existing institutional authority—whether it is located in the political, corporate, religious, or educational realm—or patterns of cultural authority, such as systems of beliefs or practices reflective of those beliefs' (Snow *et al.* 2004: 9).

However, since most conflicts involve some aspect of politics, the narrower view may not be so narrow after all. For example, the women's movement challenges cultural authorities—patriarchal values and beliefs—but it also mobilizes women as women

> to demand equal rights from Fiji to Finland ... to confront authoritarian rule (e.g. Mothers of the Disappeared in Argentina and El Salvador), to demand peace (e.g. Women in Black in Serbia and Israel), to call for handgun control (e.g. the Million Moms March in the US), and to address a variety of social problems across their communities (Ferree and McClurg Mueller 2004: 578).

In any case, in comparative politics we are primarily interested in movements which target the political process in one way or another.

Movements vs organizations

As to the group of people constituting the social movement, the question of how to define its boundaries proves to be particularly difficult (see also Chapter 18). The boundaries of social movements are inherently disputed, unstable, and ultimately dependent on mutual recognition by the members of the group involved. The people participating in a movement must somehow be connected to one another and they must share a common goal. Diani and Bison (2004) propose that we speak of a social movement only in cases of conflictual collective action which is based on dense informal inter-organizational networks. No single actor can claim to represent a movement as a whole. Instead, a social movement is constituted by a network of multiple individual and organized actors who, while keeping their autonomy and independence, engage in a sustained coordinated effort to achieve collective goals.

The most distinctive of the three defining elements of social movement is probably the collective action component. At its most elementary level, collective action consists of any goal-directed activity engaged in jointly by two or more individuals. It entails the pursuit of a common objective through joint action. To identify the specificity of social movements, it is useful to distinguish those collective actions that are institutionalized from those that are not and that fall outside institutional channels (Snow *et al.* 2004: 6). In pursuing their collective political objectives, social movements typically engage in *non-institutionalized* collective action because they do not have regular access to the decision-making arenas in parliament and the state administration. Social movements are often forced to draw attention to their cause by mobilizing in the **public sphere** and addressing themselves to the general public.

In addition, for a social movement to exist, Diani and Bison require that all participants in the dense informal network share a strong common identity. Collective identities take shape on the basis of the informal networks and, in turn, reinforce them. Organizational and individual actors with a common identity no longer merely pursue specific goals, but come to regard themselves as elements of much larger and encompassing processes of change—or resistance to change.

This element distinguishes social movements from coalitions, which are formed for specific campaigns and do not have the sustained character of social movements. We do not speak of social movements in the case of 'episodic' events of protest or single campaigns that do not have certain duration in time. Social movements involve a protracted series of protest events produced by more or less stable networks of organizational actors. Clearly, there is a considerable variability in their careers and trajectories, as some movements do indeed last for a comparatively short time only, as with most neighbourhood NIMBY ('Not In My BackYard') oppositions, while others endure for decades, as with the **labour movement** or the women's movement. However, the kind of changes movements pursue, whatever their degree or level, typically require some measure of sustained organized activity.

Parties (see Chapter 12) and interest groups (see Chapter 14) may be part of the network that constitutes a social movement, but social movements can usually

not be reduced to them. There are parties that emerge from social movements, such as the ecologists, which Kitschelt (2006: 280) calls 'movement parties': i.e. 'coalitions of political activists who emanate from social movements and try to apply the organizational and strategic practices of social movements in the arena of party competition'. There are, however, also social movements which organize in the form of parties in the first place. When it comes to parties as social movement organizations (SMOs), it is crucial to distinguish between movements from the (new) left and movements from the (new) right. While the former may institutionalize in the form of parties (e.g. socialist, communist and ecologist parties) and interest groups (e.g. labour unions or environmental associations), movements from the right tend to take the form of parties from the very outset: by choosing the conventional electoral channel for articulating their challenge, political activists on the right seek to differentiate themselves from the social movement activists whom they associate with the left and from their strategies which they consider as incompatible with their traditional value-orientations (Hutter and Kriesi 2013). Movements on the right either mobilize as parties from the start, as the new populist right in Western Europe (Kriesi and Pappas 2015), or they try to capture already established parties of the right, like the Tea Party in the United States which successfully captured the Republican Party (Skocpol and Williamson 2012).

Social movements and media

Very generally, the public sphere can be defined as the arena where the political communication between decision-makers and citizens takes place (Neidhardt 1994). Although no decisions are taken in the public sphere, the public debate is part and parcel of the political process. The political contest in the public sphere focuses on the attention of the public to specific political issues, on its support for specific political actors, and their issue-specific positions (public opinion).

As Schattschneider argued a long time ago, the 'expansion of conflict' beyond those immediately concerned plays a crucial role in democratic regimes. Conflicts are 'frequently won or lost by the success that the contestants have in getting the audience involved in the fight or in excluding it, as the case may be' (Schattschneider 1988: 4). The **agenda-setting** approach has adopted and developed this basic idea. It considers the struggle for the attention of the public as the central element of democratic representation, and attention shifts as key mechanisms for the development of (political) conflicts. Under contemporary conditions, where the media plays a key role in politics, the struggle for public attention involves all political actors. However, those who do not have regular access to the decision-making arenas—such as social movements—are particularly dependent on it.

In general, social movements use two types of strategy to draw attention to their cause (Keck and Sikkink 1998*b*: 226–30):

- *protest politics*—mobilizing for protest events in the public sphere;
- *information politics*—collecting credible information and deploying it strategically at carefully selected sites.

Protest events sometimes directly challenge the movement's opponent, such as in a strike. More often, however, they address the public more generally. The publicity created by protest events pursues two objectives (Gamson *et al.* 1992: 383): it is intended to create a public debate and to increase the 'standing' and 'legitimacy' of the social movement in the conflict in question. To be able to have some impact on the political process, or on any other decision-makers, social movements must draw the attention and support of the public, i.e. they need to become visible in the media and their ideas have to obtain resonance and legitimacy in the citizen public. The challengers need to gain 'standing', i.e. a voice in the media, and they need to do the right 'framing', i.e. develop central organizing ideas (frames) that some part of the citizen public understands and supports (Ferree *et al.* 2002: 86, 105). However, public debate is not the ultimate goal. In the final analysis, the social movement seeks, via public support, to have an impact on the decision-makers in the conflict in question. Creating controversy is a way of increasing opportunity by opening media access to movement spokespersons and allies (Gamson and Meyer 1996: 288).

While non-institutionalized 'protest politics' have the distinctive characteristics of social movements, they do not engage only in these forms of collective action. They typically combine *protest politics* with *information politics* and the two elements tend to support each other. On the one hand, protest provides the opportunity for 'information politics'; only when a movement has obtained a certain public visibility can it successfully employ an 'information strategy'. As Meyer and Tarrow (1998*a*: 18) point out, the organizational and technical requirements for the 'information strategy' today are less restrictive than they have been in the past, which means that resource-poor organizations can pursue efficient information strategies.

Given the media's fascination with controversy and conflict, providing controversial information about a given issue—in addition to protest politics—often constitutes a promising strategy for social movements. Efficient protests, in turn, often presuppose a credible information policy. For example, Greenpeace—an organization of the environmental movement—before mobilizing does its own research, acquires the necessary expertise, and searches for alternative solutions. In the course of the subsequent campaign, this background information is offered to the public and decision-makers.

However, the action repertoire of social movements is typically skewed in the direction of non-institutional lines of action.

KEY POINTS

- The concept of the social movement includes three constitutive components: (1) a group of people with a conflictual orientation towards an opponent, (2) a collective identity and a set of common beliefs and goals, and (3) a repertory of collective actions.
- The conflicts may be of a cultural or political nature. We are focusing here on movements that target the political process.
- The group of people constituting a social movement are connected by a dense informal inter-organizational network and share a strong common identity.
- They engage in a sustained series of non-institutionalized collective action, since they do not have regular access to the decision-making arenas in parliament and state administration.
- To be able to have some impact on the political process, social movements have to attract the attention and gain the support of the public. They do so by a combination of protest politics and information politics.

Theoretical approaches

The theoretical approaches to social movements have been conveniently divided into three models (McAdam 1982)—the classical model, the resource mobilization model, and the political process model.

Classical model

The classical model, in fact, refers to a *set of theories* with a common denominator: they all start from the notions of 'structural strain' or 'breakdown'. These notions imply a social order whose normal condition is one of integration. If the social order remains sufficiently integrated, strain and breakdown may be avoided and collective behaviour—the classical model speaks of collective behaviour rather than collective action—may not take place. In this logic, as observed by Buechler (2004: 48), 'all roads lead to Durkheim's overriding concern with social integration and the problematic consequences of insufficient integration in modern societies' (Durkheim 1964). Durkheim's analysis of anomie and egoism identified breaches in the social order that could lead to chronic strains or acute breakdown.

Subsequent theories of strain and breakdown as explanations for collective behaviour all presume that structural strain and breakdown of standard routines of everyday life have a disruptive psychological effect on individuals, which triggers some form of collective behaviour (Figure 16.1). The motivation for movement participation is held to be based not so much on the desire to attain political goals as on the need to manage the psychological tensions of a stressful social situation.

The most general of all the classical models is the theory of collective behaviour, which is associated with authors such as Smelser (1962) and Turner and Killian (1987). Other variants include the theory of mass society (Kornhauser 1959) and theories of relative deprivation (Gurr 1970). All variants have in common the belief that collective behaviour is sharply set off from conventional behaviour, with elements of contagion, excitability, spontaneity, and emotionality being prevalent. In some versions of the theory, collective behaviour is seen as irrational, disruptive, dangerous, and excessive.

As McAdam (1982: 11–19) points out, social strain is a necessary, but insufficient, cause of social movements. The classical model is too deterministic and leaves no room for political actors and it does not take into account the larger political context. Moreover, the atomistic focus of this model on the individual is problematic. It ignores the fact that social movements are collective phenomena. It is not isolated individuals who become movement participants; rather, social movements develop within established interaction networks.

Resource mobilization model

In sharp contrast with the classical model, the resource mobilization theory views social movements as normal, rational, political challenges by aggrieved groups. The predecessors of this approach are John Stuart Mill and the utilitarians, Weber and Marx, rather than Durkheim.

The new approach implies a shift from a deterministic to an agency-oriented **paradigm**. Attention turns from the social forces and conditions that produce movements to the question of how movements mobilize and produce their success. Students of social movements are

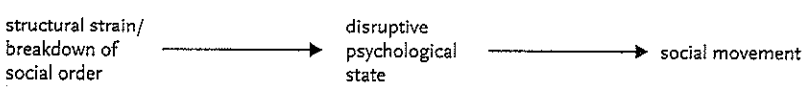

Figure 16.1 Classical model

Source: McAdam (1982: 7).

no longer preoccupied by the question of social order, but adopt the point of view of those engaged in purposeful efforts at social change. This theory claims that discontent is more or less constant over time and thus inadequate as a full explanation of social movements. The entrepreneurial–organizational variant of this approach even allows for the possibility that grievances and discontent may be defined, created, and manipulated by **political entrepreneurs** and organizations. At the most fundamental level, social movements develop not from an aggregate rise in discontent, but from a significant increase in the level of resources available to support collective protest activities. Solidarity and organization, as well as external support, are treated as key resources for social movements and receive central places in the theory—the more organization, the better the prospects for mobilization and success.

Tilly's explanation focuses on *group solidarity* as the key factor accounting for collective action (Tilly *et al.* 1975). He seeks to undermine any sharp distinction between routine political struggle and violence by arguing that the same political dynamics and solidarity processes underlie both. Oberschall (1973), Gamson (1975), McCarthy and Zald (1977), and Tilly (1978: 62–4) all stress the fundamental importance of organization or, more generally, of mobilization structures for the transformation of grievances into successful collective action. In insisting on the importance of organizations, proponents of the resource mobilization model reject the classical theorists' exclusive focus on the movement's mass base in favour of an analysis of the crucial role played by segments of the elite in the generation of the challenge.

Note that organizational resources include not only formal organizations, but also the range of everyday life **social networks** that are not aimed primarily at movement mobilization, where micro-mobilization may take place: friendship networks, voluntary associations, family and work units, and elements of the state structure itself. It is not a particular form of organization that is emphasized by resource mobilization theory, but the overall structure of the discontented group (Figure 16.2).

In addition to organization, the resource mobilization perspective also puts the emphasis on the tactical and standardized action repertoires of social movements. Protest politics can take different forms, but the repertoire at a given moment in a given context proves to be highly standardized. McAdam's (1982) critique of the resource mobilization approach points to the failure of its proponents to adequately differentiate organized change efforts by excluded groups from those of established interest groups. By emphasizing the similarities between conventional action and protest politics, the resource mobilization perspective normalized protest too much. While this was a salutary corrective against the tendency to assimilate protest and deviant behaviour, the distinction between **conventional** and **unconventional** forms of protest was seriously blurred and the role of *organizations* in protest was exaggerated.

McAdam (1982: 29) also criticizes the 'consistent failure by many of its proponents of resource mobilization to acknowledge the political capabilities of the movement's mass base'. In particular, resource mobilization theorists fail to acknowledge the power inherent in the disruptive tactics of the truly powerless. They tend to overlook the crucial importance of the indigenous resources of the aggrieved population and to put the emphasis on the external resources of allies and other external supporters. The importance of spontaneous actions by the aggrieved population has already been stressed by Rosa Luxemburg (against Lenin's 'democratic centralism'), and by Piven and Cloward's (1977) analysis of poor people's movements. More recently, Andrews and Biggs (2006) have shown that the 1960 sit-ins campaign of the blacks in the American South, the campaign that touched off the civil rights movement, had a very important spontaneous component. Only after they had started the sit-ins did the student leaders turn to the organizations of the black community for advice, legal assistance, necessary funds, and assistance to carry on the protest. Finally, the approach has to some extent failed in its own terms, because it has tended to neglect the role of leadership in social movements (Ganz 2000).

Political process model

McAdam (1982) was the first to formulate a third perspective on social movements—the political process model. This model shares the basic assumptions of the resource mobilization approach but it also considers the level of organization within the aggrieved population as a

Figure 16.2 Resource mobilization model

Source: Adapted from Tilly et al. (1975) and Tilly (1978).

crucial element for its mobilization. Therefore, it is often treated as just another variant of the resource mobilization approach. However, it adds two elements to the previous model.

1. First, the political process model puts the group into its *political context* and focuses on the *political opportunities and constraints* structuring the way that it interacts with its adversaries. The political process model is based on the idea that the social processes of the classical model do not directly promote the mobilization of social movements, but do so only indirectly through a restructuring of existing power relations.
2. The second element added by the political process models refers to the *subjective meaning* people attribute to their situation. The emergence of a social movement implies a transformation of consciousness within a significant segment of the aggrieved population. Before collective action becomes possible, people must collectively define their situations as unjust and subject to change through collective action. McAdam (1982: 51) refers to this condition as a *cognitive liberation*, which is facilitated by expanding political opportunities, by the internal solidarity and organization of the aggrieved group, and by strategic attempts by political entrepreneurs.

This model has subsequently been elaborated into a more encompassing 'social movement paradigm' which attempts to integrate the various models. Political opportunities, mobilizing structures, cultural framings, and repertories of contention became integral parts of this more encompassing perspective—the 'social movement paradigm' (McAdam *et al.* 1996).

The political process model and its successor have also met with criticism. Thus the concept of '**political opportunity structure**' has been criticized for its all-inclusive character (Gamson and Meyer 1996). Critics have also pointed out (Goodwin and Jasper 1999: 34) that not all social movements are equally focused on the political process, and therefore are not dependent to the same degree on political opportunities for their mobilization and success. Moreover, it has been suggested that the concept of opportunity often serves as a substitute for breakdown (Buechler 2004: 61). What constitutes opportunities from the perspective of the movement actors represents a *breakdown of social control mechanisms* from the point of view of the established authorities and the defenders of the status quo.

Finally, and most importantly, political opportunity, too, is only a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for social movements to emerge and to succeed. The opening up of 'windows of opportunity' may contribute to the explanation of the timing, growth, and success of social movements, but it is not able to fully account for either of them. In addition to the three classic models, which all rely on exogenous determinants, we need to account for the endogenous dynamics of the mobilization processes of social movements. Threshold models (Granovetter 1978) and signalling models (Lohmann 1994) have attempted to explain such dynamics with the cues provided by the aggregate participation in protest events for potential participants who only join in the campaign when they are convinced that it is not too costly to do so. Positive feedback processes (Biggs 2003) resulting from the interdependence of protest events, from the inspiration protesters draw from the example of other protesters, and from concessions they obtain from the authorities may broaden the movement's campaign, while negative feedback processes resulting from attacks by counter-movements, increasing repression or lack of success may lead to negative spirals (Karapin 2011). McAdam *et al.* (2001) have made an influential attempt to systematize such 'dynamics of contention'.

KEY POINTS

- There are three basic theoretical approaches to social movements: (1) the classical model, (2) the resource mobilization model, and (3) the political process model.
- Classical theories presume that structural strain and breakdown of standard routines of everyday life cause discontent among the individual members of the group to trigger collective behaviour.
- According to the resource mobilization theory, social movements develop not from an aggregate rise in discontent but from a significant increase in the level of resources available to support collective protest activities of the aggrieved group. Solidarity, organization, and external support are key resources for social movements.
- The political process model builds on the resource mobilization approach, but with two additional elements. First, it puts the aggrieved group into its political context and focuses on the political opportunities and constraints structuring the way it interacts with its adversaries. Second, it recognizes that the emergence of a social movement implies a transformation of consciousness within the aggrieved population.
- Although the political process model has, like the other two models, met with serious criticism, it holds out the greatest promise for comparative politics.

The comparative analysis of social movements

For comparative politics, the political process model holds considerable promise. By putting social movements into their political context, it brings the study of social movements into the mainstream of political

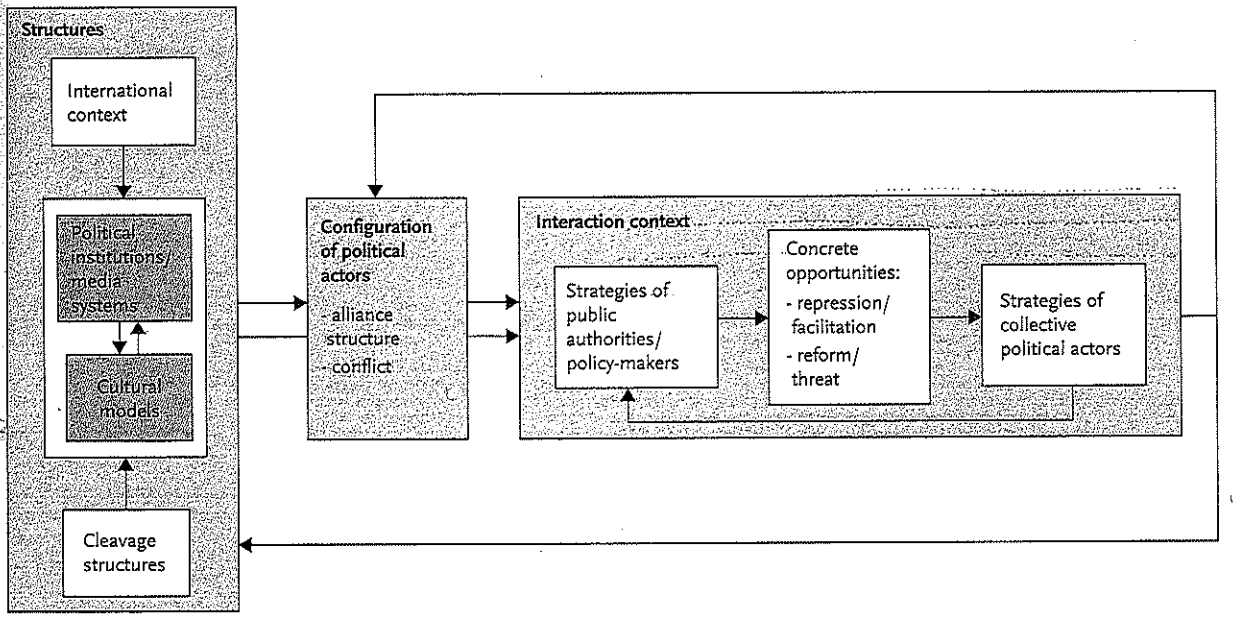

Figure 16.3 A framework for the study of the impact of the political context

Source: Adapted from Kriesi (2004: 70).

science. This section discusses the specific ways that social movements are determined by and interact with their political context. Figure 16.3 provides a framework for the comparative political analysis of social movements. This framework distinguishes between three sets of variables—political opportunity structures, configurations of power, and interaction contexts. Let us look at the different elements of each set.

Political opportunity structure

The political opportunity structure constitutes what we could call the hard core of the political process framework. The basic idea of the framework is that 'political opportunity structures influence the choice of protest strategies and the impact of social movements on their environment' (Kitschelt 1986: 58). Since Eisinger (1973) first introduced the notion of political opportunity structures, students of social movements have distinguished between 'open' and 'closed' structures, i.e. structures which allow for easy access to the political system or which make access more difficult.

The core of the structures, in turn, is made up of formal political institutions. The degree of openness of the political system is, first of all, a function of the regime type. Authoritarian regimes are rather closed to social movements and tend not to tolerate them at all, while democracies are much more open to them. Even in authoritarian regimes, contentious politics is possible, however (see Box 16.1), and social movements play, of course, a key role in the breakdown of such regimes (e.g. the role of ethnonationalist movements in the breakdown of the Soviet Union (Beissinger 2002)). Democracies, in turn, also vary with respect to their openness. Most generally, the relative openness of democracies to social movements is a function of their (territorial) centralization and the degree of the (functional) separation of power ('checks and balances'). Decentralized (federal) systems and systems with a pronounced separation of power between the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary provide a greater diversity of access points ('venues') for social movements. The overall accessibility of the political institutions can be summarized by the usual models in comparative politics (see Section 3 of this volume).

The extent to which social movement actors obtain access to the decision-making arenas depends not only on the formal institutional structure, but also on more informal preconditions, which I propose to call *cultural models*.

A first example of such cultural models refers to the prevailing strategies of the authorities with regard to social movements, i.e. to the procedures typically employed by members of the political system when they are dealing with challengers. We may distinguish between *exclusive* (repressive, confrontational, polarizing) and *integrative* (facilitative, cooperative, assimilative) strategies. These prevailing strategies have a long tradition in a given country and they are related to its institutional structure. Thus, political authorities in consensus democracies are rather more likely to rely on integrative strategies than their colleagues in majoritarian democracies (for the distinction between these two types of democracy see Chapter 5).

BOX 16.1 ZOOM IN Contentious authoritarianism in contemporary China

For students of social movements, China presents a great puzzle. It is a country with an authoritarian regime that, in the Reform Era since 1978 and especially since the embracement of the market economy in the early 1990s, has become a sort of 'movement society'. As Chen (2012: 5) observes, there has been a dramatic rise in, and routinization of, social protest in China. While the regime represses national social movements such as Falungong or the student movement of 1989, to some extent it tolerates local protest. Accordingly, Chen characterizes the Chinese regime as one of 'contentious authoritarianism'—meaning a 'strong authoritarian regime having accommodated or facilitated widespread and routinized popular collective action for a relatively long period of time'. Presenting petitions to upper-level authorities has become the most commonly used mode of action employed by citizens who have conflicts with state authorities in China. In the Reform Era, the traditional 'xinfang system' of Mao's times, which allowed citizens to hand in petitions to the authorities, started to operate quite differently. Chinese petitioners began to appropriate this system to stage collective action with 'troublemaking' tactics, mainly because normal petitioning had little effect, while petitioning associated with 'troublemaking' got preferential treatment due to the government's ambiguous attitude towards 'troublemaking': while not approving of this kind of challenge, public officials nevertheless had an incentive to make concessions to troublemakers given the pressure put on them by their superiors to maintain social stability.

In consensus democracies, the tendency to rely on integrative strategies is the result of a collective learning experience that reaches back to the resolution of the religious conflicts which had torn these countries apart for centuries. The resolution of these conflicts provided the models for dealing with political challenges for centuries to come. Similarly, the tendency to rely on repressive strategies is a result of historical experiences, as is argued by Gallie (1983), who traces the repressive reactions of the French ruling elites to the challenge by labour movement protest after the First World War back to the earlier experience of repressing the Parisian Commune in 1870.

A second major category of cultural models concerns the political–cultural or symbolic opportunities that determine what kind of ideas become visible for the public, resonate with public opinion, and are held to be 'legitimate' by the audience. Koopmans and Statham (1999: 228) proposed the term *discursive opportunity structure* to denote this second type of cultural model. They apply the concept to the mobilization by the extreme right—a social movement that uses an ethnic–cultural model of **citizenship** and national identity to mobilize against immigration in Western Europe. Ethnic–cultural models of national identity assert that people belong to a nation because of their ethnic or cultural (e.g. linguistic or religious) origin. This kind of model contrasts with civic–political models of citizenship, which conceive of the nation as a political community of equal citizens to which everybody who has been born into the community in question belongs. Comparing the differential success of the extreme right in post-war Italy and Germany, Koopmans and Statham (1999: 229) test and confirm the hypothesis that the resonance of the extreme-right frame, and consequently its chances of mobilization and success in a given country, depends on the dominant model of national identity and citizenship. Its mobilization and success turn out to be greater (1) the more the dominant discourse on national identity and citizenship corresponds to and legitimates the ethnic–cultural ideal type of national identity, and (2) the less the dominant conception of the nation is grounded in and legitimized by civic–political elements.

Both institutional structures and cultural models are influenced by even more fundamental structures, which we should include in our conceptualization of the structural political context in the broader sense of the term. Thus, political institutions and cultural models are influenced by the country-specific political cleavage structures and by the country's international context. As discussed in Chapter 13, the specific political cleavage structure of a country, in turn, is rooted in the history of social and cultural conflicts. Traditional social and cultural cleavages constitute the basis of the political cleavage structure even today. To the extent that traditional conflicts are still salient and segment the population into mutually exclusive adversarial groups, there is little manoeuvring space for new types of challenger who attempt to articulate a new kind of social or cultural conflict. A comparison of the mobilization of new social movements (see Box 16.2) in four Western European countries in the 1970s and 1980s shows evidence for the existence of such a 'zero-sum' relationship between traditional and new political cleavages (Kriesi *et al.* 1995).

Moreover, even if the national political context today is still the most significant one for the mobilization of social movements, it is important that we do not lose sight of sub-national as well as international contexts. On the one hand, **nation-states** are subdivided into regional and local levels of governance. The variance of the opportunity structure between regions or member-states is of great importance, above all in **federal states**, but the significance of the variations in local contexts for the mobilization of social movement is highly relevant everywhere. On the other hand, nation-states are increasingly

BOX 16.2 DEFINITION New social movements

The so-called 'new social movements' have been responsible for the bulk of the mobilization that took place in Western Europe from the 1970s up to the 1990s. Most authors would probably agree that this family of movements includes *the ecology movement* (with its anti-nuclear energy branch), the *peace movement, the solidarity movement (solidarity with developing countries), the women's movement, the human rights movement, the anti-racist movement, and the squatters' movement*, as well as various other movements mobilizing for the rights of minorities which are discriminated against (such as the gay movement).

These movements were called 'new' at the time in order to distinguish them from the 'old' labour movement, which had dominated the mobilization for collective action in Western Europe up to the 1960s.

On the one hand, these movements go back to the new left—the new generation of radicals who were the protagonists of the anti-authoritarian revolt of the late 1960s. On the other hand, they are an offspring of the citizens' action committees which had started to articulate more specific grievances of local or regional populations in the early 1970s. These citizens' action committees were much more pragmatic and at the same time much broader in scope than the new left proper. Thanks to their dual political roots, the new social movements have managed to achieve what the new left has never been able to do on its own—namely, the political mobilization of masses of citizens on behalf of their emancipatory goals.

inserted into supra- or international systems of governance that impose constraints and open opportunities for social movement actors. Internationalism offers a wide range of venues for conflict.

According to Tarrow (2005), the unusual character of the contemporary period is not that it has detached individuals from their societies or created transnational citizens, but that it has created what he calls 'rooted cosmopolitans' and 'transnational activists'. This is a stratum of people who are able to combine the resources and opportunities of their own societies into transnational networks, leading to an 'activism beyond borders' (Tarrow 2005: 43). Transnational activism and transnational movement organizations are, as Tarrow shows, a growing phenomenon even if, as I would add, the bulk of social movement campaigns still take place in a national context and address domestic targets. Examples of transnational movements include the resistance to the war in Iraq, which was mentioned at the outset of this chapter, and the global justice movement which mobilizes against the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Economic Forum (WEF), or the G8 meetings and organizes its own yearly Social Forums (originally in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and more recently in different locations across the world).

Configuration of power

The next set of variables refers to the configurations of actors. From the point of view of a mobilizing social movement, this configuration has three major components.

- *Protagonists:* the configuration of allies (policy-makers, public authorities, political parties, interest groups, the media, and related movements).
- *Antagonists:* the configuration of adversaries (public authorities, repressive agents, and counter-movements).
- *Bystanders:* the not directly involved, but nevertheless attentive, audience.

Actor configurations represent what we know of the set of actors at a given point in time—their capabilities, perceptions, and evaluations of the outcomes obtainable (their 'pay-offs' in terms of game theory), and the degree to which their interests are compatible or incompatible with each other. The configuration describes the level of potential conflict, the 'logic of the situation' at that point in time, but it does not specify how the situation is going to evolve, nor does it say how it has been created.

The configuration of political actors at any given point in time is partly determined by the *structures of the political context.* Thus, the new social movements in Western Europe faced a very different alliance structure depending on the configuration of the left, their natural ally (the new social movements were essentially 'movements of the left'; see Box 16.2), which was, in turn, decisively shaped by the *heritage of the prevailing strategies* to deal with challengers in a given country (Kriesi *et al.* 1995).

The heritage of exclusive strategies in a country like France caused the radicalization and eventual split of the labour movement into a moderate social democratic left and a radical communist left. This split in the labour movement, in turn, contributed to the continued salience of the class conflict which, at the time of the emergence of the French new social movements in the latter part of the 1970s, limited the availability of the left for the mobilization of the new social movements. In the French situation, where the left was dominated by the Communist

Party up to the late 1970s, the Socialists could not become unconditional allies of the new social movements. They had to continue to appeal to the working class in traditional class terms to ward off Communist competition, and both the Socialists and the Communists tended to instrumentalize the new social movements—especially the peace movement and the solidarity movement—for their own electoral purposes.

However, the configuration of political actors is less stable than the structural component of the political context. For example, the alliance structure of a given movement may change decisively at any election, depending on whether the political party which constitutes a natural ally for the social movement in question is elected into power or loses its government position. Thus, the social democrats tended to support the new social movements in Western Europe when they were in opposition, but were much less reliable allies when in government. Moreover, it is also much easier for social movements to modify the configuration of political actors than to modify the structural context.

While authors who analyse the mobilization of social movements in a comparative (cross-national, cross-regional, or cross-local) perspective rely heavily on explanations involving structural elements, authors who perform case studies within national contexts tend to put the accent more on configurations of political actors. Most importantly, they tend to adopt a longitudinal perspective involving comparisons across time and important shifts in the configurations of political actors. In their view, it is the shifts in the configurations of political actors—the instability of political alignments—which create the opportunity for successful mobilization (Tarrow 1994: 87–8). Such instability may relate to the changing electoral fortunes of major parties.

The civil rights movement in the US provides a well-known example of the leverage created by electoral realignments; both the decline of their Southern white vote and the movement of African American voters to the Northern cities increased the incentive for the Democrats to seek black support. With its 'razor-thin electoral margin, the Kennedy administration was forced to move from cautious foot-dragging to seizing the initiative for civil rights, a strategy that was extended by the Johnson administration to the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965' (Tarrow 1994: 87).

The instability of political alignments may also refer to a policy-specific situation. In other words, shifting opportunities for mobilization and success may be policy-domain specific. Some exogenous shock, such as changes in socio-economic conditions, natural catastrophes, system-wide governing coalitions, or policy outputs from other subsystems, may destabilize the domain-specific equilibrium. Social and cultural shifts and unpredictable catastrophic events may cause policy failures in the domain in question, system-wide power shifts may cause corresponding domain-specific shifts, and policy outputs of other subsystems may cause disarray in the traditional problem-solving routines in the domain in question.

American nuclear power is an example of the construction and collapse of a policy monopoly. Baumgartner and Jones (1993: 70) maintain that the opponents of nuclear energy in the US won primarily by getting their vision of the issue accepted and altering the nature of the decision-making process by expanding the range of participants involved. When the venue had been expanded by opponents to include licensing, oversight, and rate-making, the industry lost control of the issue and the future was determined. Whatever the ultimate reason for the breakdown of the nuclear power coalition in the US (see next section), the case of US nuclear power illustrates the opportunities that open up for social movements as the hold of dominant coalitions over a policy domain loosens up.

Interaction contexts

The third level of analysis concerns the interaction context. This is the level of the mechanisms linking structures and configurations to agency and action, and it is at this level that the *strategies of the social movements and their opponents* come into view. 'Strategy' is the conceptual link between the context and the choices actors make in specific times and places. Movement actors will make their strategic choices on the basis of their appreciation of the specific chances of reform and threat, and the specific risks of repression and facilitation they face.

A striking illustration of how repression operates and how social movements may use its anticipated effects in their own strategic choices is again provided by the civil rights movement. This movement deliberately chose a strategy of demonstrating in cities in the South of the US, where an unmistakably repressive reaction to peaceful demonstrations could be expected. The violent clashes that followed brought the movement more media attention than it would otherwise have received, and conveyed the movement's message in a most powerful way, which consequently led to increased external support. Although, at least in democratic regimes, repression may not reduce the level of movement mobilization, it can be expected to have a considerable effect on the action repertoire. It will increase the amount of radical mobilization.

As Gamson and Meyer (1996: 283) argue, the definition of opportunity, i.e. the appreciation of the concrete situation, is typically highly contentious within a social movement, and they suggest that 'we focus on the process of defining opportunity and how it works'. The debates within movements typically turn around questions of 'relative opportunity' for different courses of action. Opportunity may shift in favour of some specific part

of the movement (the radicals, for example), and may result in a radicalization of the movement as a whole. However, according to the political process approach, the 'relative opportunities' are to a large extent determined by the configuration of actors and the structural context. In other words, the outcome of the internal debates of the movements is constrained by the larger political context, which the strategically oriented movement actors will not fail to take into account in their deliberations.

Ganz (2000) adds the important notion of *strategic capacity*, i.e. the movement's capability of developing effective strategy, which is a function of *leadership* and *organization*. Box 16.3 provides excerpts from a famous speech by Martin Luther King Jr, which may serve as an illustration of the strategic capacity of this great leader of the American civil rights movement.

Differences in strategic capacity may explain why some new organizations fail while others survive, and they may at the same time account for less adaptive behaviour among older organizations. The Spanish 'Indignados', who burst onto the public scene with their demonstration all over Spain on 15 May 2011, expressing outrage against politicians and bankers and claiming social justice, and more participation, transparency, and accountability, illustrate how a contemporary movement can develop a strategic capacity. Instead of relying on coverage by established media, they innovated by relying mainly on internet-based informal organizations, without formal membership. They mobilized via alternative online media, online social networks, and via personal networks of friends and acquaintances. This allowed them to reach beyond the usual political activists and mobilize the discontented who are not organized by traditional groups such as unions or civic organizations (Anduiza *et al.* 2012).

An array of specific mechanisms links the general structural setting to the mobilization of social movements. They constitute what we could call 'concrete opportunities'. Tilly (1978) introduced the pair of mechanisms 'facilitation and repression', and Koopmans (1992) added 'success chances and reform/threat'. McAdam *et al.* (2001) pursued this line of reasoning further and introduced several additional mechanisms, which allowed the structural context to be linked to the concrete episodes of mobilization (see Box 16.2).

BOX 16.3 ZOOM IN Excerpts from the speech delivered by Martin Luther King Jr on the steps at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC on 28 August 1963

Five score years ago, a great American [Abraham Lincoln], in whose symbolic shadow we stand, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity.

But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. So we have come here today to dramatize an appalling condition.

...

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.

Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.

I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.'

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, whose governor's lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.

KEY POINTS

- The political context for the mobilization of social movements can be broken down into political opportunity structures, configuration of actors, and interaction contexts.
- The formal institutional political structures and the cultural models, such as prevailing strategies, combine to define the overall structural context.
- The configuration of power refers to the shifting configurations of allies, adversaries, and bystanders who exist at the level of authorities and policy-makers in the policy-specific context or in the polity at large, and who constitute the alliance and conflict structures facing the movement.
- The overall context is linked by specific mechanisms to the strategic choices made by the social movements in the interaction context: facilitation vs repression, and success chances vs reform/threat are examples of such mechanisms.

Emergence, mobilization, and success of social movements

Social movement studies intend to explain three aspects of social movements—their emergence, mobilization, and eventual success.

Emergence

The political context has above all been used to account for the emergence of social movements. A famous example of the kind of reasoning involved is Skocpol's book, *States and Social Revolutions* (1979). At the origin of the three social revolutions she studied—the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions—Skocpol finds a conjunction of two key factors: (1) a political crisis and (2) agrarian socio-political structures (i.e. a given form of national cleavage structures) which gave rise to widespread peasant discontent and facilitated insurrections against landlords. The political crisis is brought about by the intensification of international pressure (shifts in the geopolitical context structure) which leads to a military and fiscal crisis of the state (institutional strain and even breakdown), which in turn gives rise to profound divisions in the ruling elites over how to respond to the state's declining effectiveness and fiscal problems (realignments in the configuration of actors). The peasant revolts become uncontrollable at the moment when regime defections become widespread and when the elite loses its cohesion and is no longer capable of exercising its social control (by repressive measures).

Skocpol (1979: 154) claims to have identified the sufficient causes of social revolutionary situations. However, the various elements of the political context define only a set of necessary conditions for the emergence of contention—its 'opportunity set'. The transformation of a potentially explosive situation into the unfolding of events within the interaction context is historically contingent and therefore quite unpredictable. Precipitating factors, exogenous shocks, contingent or catalysing events, and suddenly imposed grievances play a crucial role in such a transformation. In addition to the 'opportunity set', the unfolding of events crucially depends on the choices made by actors on the basis of their preferences. Thus, the events leading up to the French Revolution were set in motion in 1788, when the king, after two long years of unsuccessful stratagems, was forced to call a meeting of the Estates General, a body made up of elected representatives of the three estates of the realm. When the Estates General finally met in May, the delegates of the Third Estate refused to organize themselves as the traditional lower body of a three-part legislature, and, on 17 June they took the radical step of declaring themselves to be the 'National Assembly', i.e. the sole legitimate representative of the French people. As a result, a revolutionary situation had developed in France with two distinct political apparatuses, the monarchy and the National Assembly, claiming to hold legitimate power. Against this background, on 13 July, the people of Paris broke into the Invalides and appropriated 40,000 muskets. The next day, 14 July, they took the Bastille, in order to get the powder which was stored there, to be able to use the muskets. The impact of this event was sensational: the king's troops pulled back from Paris (which they had encircled previously). Recognizing that the troops could not be trusted to operate against Parisians, the king gave up his effort to intimidate the National Assembly. The latter emerged triumphant, thanks to the actions of the Parisian people. The members of the National Assembly, however, did not immediately realize what had happened. As Sewell (1996) explains, they originally viewed the taking of the Bastille as a disaster. The implications of the event only gradually became clear to them. It took some two weeks for them to realize that the people of Paris had assured them a great victory and that this was a turning point in the French Revolution.

The contingency of the precipitating event may vary from one occasion to another. As McAdam *et al.* (2001) observe, the catalytic event is often neither accidental nor the primordial starting point of the episode, but the culmination of a long-standing conflict. To the extent that the build-up of a political conflict systematically increases the opportunity for mobilization, we are more likely to be able to account for the unfolding of subsequent contentious episodes.

Mobilization

The political opportunity structures are ideally suited to the explanation of the volume and form of a movement's mobilization. In a cross-national study of four Western European countries, we have shown that the level and form of collective action vary quite closely as a function of the openness of the political system of the respective countries (Kriesi *et al.* 1995). We found that the openness of the Swiss system facilitates the mobilization for collective action. The existence of direct democracy institutions, in particular, invites citizens to mobilize collectively. At the same time, the openness of the system and the availability of conventional channels of protest, such as the direct democratic channels, have a strong moderating effect on the strategic choices of the Swiss movement actors. They have learned to use the available direct democracy instruments, and they continue to use them even if they are not very successful in doing so. In contrast, the relative closure of the French system provides little facilitation for mobilization by collective actors, which not only dampens the level of mobilization, but also contributes to the radicalization of the movement's action repertoires. These results are presented in Table 16.1.

The example of the Arab Spring in 2011 illustrates the importance of the media for the level of mobilization of social movements today. Many observers have attributed an important role to the media in explaining the sudden mobilization of long-standing grievances of the Arab public in early 2011. On the one hand, cross-national political communications (such as the influence of Al-Jazeera) are likely to have undermined the control of domestic media by authoritarian regimes. The Qatar-based satellite channel Al-Jazeera continued to air reports on Egypt and Tunisia despite the pleas of these regimes to the Qatari government to stop it (Dalacoura 2012: 68). On the other hand, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and of course mobile phones, were widely used to organize the revolts and link the protesters to each other and the outside world. Perhaps even more crucially, the media played a role in preparing for the rebellions over a number of years, and even decades, by facilitating the circulation of ideas in national and global spaces and challenging state monopolies of information.

Overall, a preliminary analysis by Wilson and Dunn (2011: 1269) suggests that, while digital media use was not dominant in Egyptian protest activity, 'digital media use—and social media especially—were nevertheless an integral and driving component in the media landscape'. This is particularly obvious in the role that Twitter played in actively and successfully engaging an international audience in the Egyptian revolution. But note that authoritarian regimes have found ways to control the social media, too. In their recent study of censorship of social media by the Chinese state, King *et al.* are able to show the remarkable efficiency of Chinese censors. They observe that the vast majority of censorship activity occurs within 24 hours of the original posting, which they describe as 'a remarkable organizational accomplishment, requiring large scale military-like precision' (p. 330). Their key finding is that, 'contrary to much research and commentary, the purpose of the censorship program is not to suppress criticism of the state or the Communist Party', but 'to reduce the probability of collective action by clipping social ties whenever any collective movements are in evidence or expected' (King *et al.* 2013: 330, 326).

Success

Social movements do not only intend to mobilize successfully. Ultimately, they want to have an impact on political decision-making or on society at large. In comparative politics, where we primarily deal with instrumental movements that seek to influence politics, their impact on policy decisions is of key importance. Outcomes are still studied less often than the emergence

Table 16.1 Action repertory of social movements per country (% of total number of protest events)

Action form	Switzerland	Netherlands	Germany	France
Direct democracy	8.1	–	–	–
Petitions	8.1	2.8	2.7	1.2
Festivals	5.5	1.4	2.2	1.4
Demonstrations	52.5	49.7	60.6	41.7
Confrontations	13.4	35.0	19.3	24.5
Light violence	7.7	5.1	6.2	5.8
Heavy violence	4.7	6.0	9.0	25.4
All	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	1,322	1,319	2,343	2,132

Source: Kriesi *et al.* (1995: 50).

and mobilization of social movements. However, the field is not as empty as many observers have claimed (Giugni 1998).

There is one movement in particular whose success has been the object of several studies with a comparative political process perspective—the anti-nuclear movement. It provides an excellent illustration of how the different aspects of the political context have been used to explain a movement's outcomes. Kitschelt's (1986) influential analysis put the accent on the structural element and compared the movement's impact in four countries with quite distinct political opportunity structures: Germany, France, Sweden, and the US. He made the general point that there is *no one-to-one correspondence between the level of mobilization and the success of social movements*: strong mobilization does not necessarily lead to profound impact if the political opportunity structures are not conducive to change. Conversely, weak mobilization may have a disproportionate impact owing to properties of the political opportunity structure.

More specifically, Kitschelt argued that in Germany, Sweden, and the US, where political opportunity structures were conducive to popular participation, greater responsiveness to the anti-nuclear opposition invariably led to extremely tight and often changing safety regulations. Once formulated, these new safety standards allowed opponents to intervene and insist that they be complied with. Construction delays were the result, especially in the US and Germany—the two countries with fragmented implementation structures. Much shorter delays were typical in France and Sweden, where tight implementation procedures offered few opportunities for outside intervention in the construction process. In Sweden, nuclear policy was also ultimately changed, not by disrupting the policy implementation process, but by the shifting electoral fortunes of major parties and changes in government. In the open Swedish system, the anti-nuclear movement finally prevailed because it was largely supported by the institutional structure, the prevailing cultural models, and the configuration of power in the Swedish system.

KEY POINTS

- The emergence of a social movement or radical transformations such as revolutions can be explained by the combination of structural preconditions and contingent events (precipitating factors, suddenly imposed grievances, exogenous shocks).
- The volume and form of social movement mobilization is heavily conditioned by the relative openness of the political context and by the congruence between media frames and movement frames, which in turn is conditioned by the political context in which it is embedded.
- There is no one-to-one correspondence between the level of mobilization and the success of social movements. Strong mobilization does not necessarily lead to profound impact if the political opportunity structures are not conducive to change. Conversely, weak mobilization may have a disproportionate impact owing to properties of the political opportunity structure.

Conclusion

There are very good reasons not to treat social movements as a distinct set of phenomena to be dealt with by a specific subfield of social sciences. It is fruitful to include them in the comparative analysis of the political process, as they have become regular participants in policy-making in democratic societies.

Among the specialists of social movements, there is currently a tendency to enlarge the perspective beyond social movements to *contentious politics* (or protest politics, as I have called it here) and to focus less on social movements as such and more on the mechanisms and processes through which contentious politics operates (McAdam *et al.* 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2015). In this perspective, social movements are only one version of contentious politics, which ranges from small-scale protest events to large-scale revolutions. This is a promising perspective as long as we do not lose sight of the fact that social movements constitute distinctive social processes in their own right.

The political process approach is of particular interest for the integration of these distinctive processes into the mainstream of comparative politics. A number of mechanisms contribute to integrate contemporary social movements into the political process of liberal democracies, i.e. to institutionalize them (Meyer and Tarrow 1998*a*: 23–4): social movement activists have learned to employ conventional and unconventional collective actions; police practices increasingly encourage the routinization of contention; the tactics used by movement organizations and those used by more institutionalized groups increasingly overlap.

At the same time, such mechanisms contribute to the increasing integration of social movement actors into the policy-making process and to the adoption of social movement strategies by routine participants in policy-making. Moreover, the attention that social movement scholars increasingly pay to the outcomes produced by popular claims-making and contention (Giugni 1998; Giugni *et al.* 1999) also brings them closer to the analysis of public policy-making which, in turn, enhances the usefulness of the political process approach.

Questions

Knowledge based

1. What is a social movement? What is its relation to interest groups, political parties, and the media?
2. What is the difference between a movement challenging political authorities and a movement challenging cultural authorities? Discuss this question on the basis of the feminist movement.
3. Describe the three major models for the analysis of social movements and discuss the weaknesses of each.
4. What are political opportunity structures and cultural models?
5. What are configurations of power and how do they change?

Critical thinking

1. In which countries does the peace movement face favourable context conditions, and in which countries are these context conditions rather unfavourable?
2. Describe some aspects of the interaction context.
3. Under which conditions do movements emerge?
4. What kind of conditions favour the mobilization capacity of social movements and under what kind of conditions do they radicalize?
5. When do social movements have success, i.e. under what conditions are they able to reach their goals?

Further reading

Classical texts on social movements

Della Porta, D. and Rucht, D. (eds) (2013) *Meeting Democracy. Power and Deliberation in Global Justice Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Gamson, W. A. (1975) *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey).

McAdam, D. (1982) *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press).

McAdam, D. and Boudet, H. S. (2012) *Putting Social Movements in Their Place. Explaining Opposition to Energy Projects in the United States, 2000–2005* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Tarrow, S. (2012) *Strangers at the Gates. Movements and States in Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Tarrow, S. (1994) *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Tilly, C. (2008). *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Turner, R. A. and Killian, L. (1987) *Collective Behavior* (3rd edn) (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall).

Useful collections of articles

McAdam, D., McCarthy, J. D., and Zald, M. N. (eds) (1996) *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Snow, D. A., Soule, S. A., and Kriesi, H. (eds) (2004) *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Oxford: Blackwell).

For a more extended bibliography see the works cited throughout this chapter.

In addition, up-to-date reports on social movements can be found in specialized journals such as *Mobilization* (published in the US), *Social Movement Studies* (published in the UK), and *Forschungsjournal Neue Soziale Bewegungen* (published in Germany). Students may also find useful material in the major journals in American sociology: *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *Social Forces*, and *Social Problems*.

Web links

http://www.amnesty.org
Website of Amnesty International, a worldwide campaigning movement that works to promote all the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards.

http://www.wcml.org.uk
Website of the Working Class Movement Library.

http://www.culturalpolitics.net/social_movements
Website of Social Movements and Culture—A Resource Website.

http://www.globaljusticemovement.org
Website of the Global Justice Movement.

http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook
The Citizen's Handbook: 'As far as we know, this is the best quick guide to community organizing on the web' (quoted from website).

http://www.mobilizationjournal.org/
The Mobilization homepage: '*Mobilization* is an international journal of research and theory specializing in social movements, protests and collective behavior. *Mobilization* was created to fill the void that there was no scholarly journal of research and theory with an interdisciplinary and international scope that dealt exclusively with social movements, protest and collective action.'

For additional material and resources, please visit the Online Resource Centre at:
http://www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/caramani4e/