



Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics

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While covering cultural, organizational and personal sources of movements' power, the book emphasizes the rise and fall of social movements as part of political struggle and as the outcome of changes in political opportunity structure.

Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics Details

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From Reader Review Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics for online ebook

Sasha says

This book has one of my favorite lit reviews of all time. A classic of social movement theory.

Wessel says

Was okayish.

Drick says

This book looks at the phenomena of "contentious politics" including social movements, revolutions, political parties and even terrorism. Scanning history for examples and drawing on the insights of numerous other social movement theorists (like Tarrow) to identify common practices and theoretical models. As such the book is highly academic and not only requires a working knowledge of the field, but also of historical examples from world history. As such the book is not as accessible to the non-academic social justice practitioner. I found many good insights but did not always understand the context in which he was talking

Sam says

I love this book and its historiography more than I thought I would.

Keith Akers says

I read this book because I wanted to know some of the nuts and bolts of how to change the world, and figured that social movements might be a way to do that. This book certainly provided considerable insight. It gave a good overview of social movements and how they operate, but less insight into why they succeed or (more usually) fail.

This inability to predict the success of a movement appears to be a limitation of the subject matter, not the author; it's just a very complex problem. I recall that the Tiananmen Square protests seemed unstoppable at first, yet they failed. The very same movement in response to roughly the same stimuli can result in completely different outcomes. Tarrow doesn't discuss this, but the example of the Arab Spring came to mind. Compare the results in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria, where from very similar beginnings in roughly the same cultural context, the end result was revolution, repression, or a horribly destructive civil war.

The author does seem to have a pretty good idea of how social movements operate internally and also how they at least get to first base. We have some clues, but there are no ironclad laws that dictate the success or

failure of a social movement.

The book was academic but clearly written. I am not a specialist in this area, but from my own experience in social movements (mostly veganism and animal rights) there were many times when what Tarrow said rang true — when I would find myself saying, “yep, I’ve seen that, all right.”

There are three parts to the book. I understood parts I and II without a whole lot of trouble, but part III was a bit more complex and I’ve have to go back and re-read it before I could say I understood it.

Part I discusses the history of the modern social movement, starting with the French Revolution and the development of basic repertoires of protest like demonstrations and the use of barricades.

Part II was the most useful to me. He discusses the four powers in social movements: (1) The forms of contention (from violence to peaceful and legal, and everything in between); (2) the organizational elements that get a social movement going; (3) how movements make meanings, by constructing identities, mobilizing emotions, and developing collective action “frames”; and (4) the opportunities and threats that create cycles of contention.

Part III has to do with the dynamics of contention, how these different moving parts are involved in actual cycles of contention. Part III was clearly written and very relevant if you want to be able to know whether a movement will succeed. I understood individual sentences and paragraphs, but there were just a lot of moving parts, and it was just a bit too complex for me to fully grasp — I’d have to go back and re-read it.

There were several interesting conclusions. One, that Tarrow doesn’t spend very much time on, was that the internet hasn’t really affected the structure of social protest all that much (p. 137–138). Digitization has made things a bit easier for social movements (think “meetup” groups), but it has made things easier for their opponents as well, so the net is sort of a wash. Two, which he devotes quite a bit of time developing in a complex way, is that social movements usually don’t succeed, at least not in the way that their founders imagine. The exact effect of social movements on the world is not clearly understood and is not always obvious, even when the social movements make a great impact in the news. Often, what happens is that social movements become institutionalized — the authorities grant this or that aspect of their program, based on their own analysis of the situation.

This was an interesting and useful book which I would recommend to general readers on the subject of social change and social movements.

Vanya says

All about political process theory but served neatly in a book format instead of a published article. The pros: Tarrow draws on various historical examples to prove simple points and add flavor to his arguments, his language is very convincing and the emphasis on power structure serves as one of the foundations of PPT. The cons: I am still a Gurr fan, love the theory on relative deprivation, and wanted to see more of it in there. Also, too much structuralism is on board and culture's impact is reduced.

Alex says

Plan on reading this book twice. If you're new to social movements theory, then everything Tarrow says at first won't make sense. But if you're already familiar and dedicated to what makes social movements work, then Tarrow has brilliant insights on opportunity structure, sustaining movements, and the role of leadership.

Rojitas Oliva says

presupposes the impossibility of thinking outside of the state, so all movements become constituent powers with predictably depressing results: "at its height, the power of movement is electric and seems irresistible; but by the end, it is integrated by the political process." comforted by bakunin's re. science is the thought of reality not reality itself.

Dominique Ankoné says

Good overview of contentious politics/social movement theory.

Benjamin says

Although the subtitle says "Social Movements," the subject of this book is much broader including revolutions, elections and everything in-between. Divided in three parts, the book begins with "The Birth of the Modern Social Movement," a very readable and at times exciting opener. The second part, though, "Powers in Movement," was rather dry: The author spends a lot of time defining academic terms for things that already have names in real-people language, and the "neutral" and "objective" academic stance made me wonder sometimes if the book wasn't ultimately in support of the status quo... but all that stuffy university talk was worth it for the last third, "Dynamics of Contention" which was very rewarding. Together with the conclusion, this last bit takes the raw material of the first two thirds and offers interesting models to use when thinking about political and social struggles and also suggests some areas where "the next generation" of researchers could make their mark. I had been meaning to read this for a while, but I am glad I waited because this most recent edition incorporates Al Qaeda and other examples that belie the arguments made in past editions that soon all social movements will be easily integrated into legal frameworks and "transgressive" direct action would fade away. Still, a little more insider information and less of the 'subject-object feeling' would have lent this book more blood and sympathy.

Mai Bui says

This book provides some useful basic conceptualizations in social movement studies - Tarrow is a big name. But caveat: this is a strictly Europe experience of contentious politics and collective action, in which he traced back the origin of social movements to 16th century Europe. A lot of the concepts don't translate very neatly to the rest of the world - like the Islamic resistance or South Asian peasant resistance. Would have enjoyed further exploration in people power mobilization in nondemocracies.

Highly recommended - as long as readers keep in mind there are alternative models to Tarrow's conceptualization of contentious politics.

Anna says

Tarrow is all about structure. His frameworks for understanding social movements are helpful, but sometimes I found myself disagreeing with him over what could be a social movement in his definition and what could not. Much of the book is largely theoretical, and in some parts he really goes into depth about his categorization and terminology (opportunities, threats, repertoires, etc.). I really appreciated, though, the way that he uses examples from all historical periods to illustrate these categories and terms – everything from peasant bread riots to the French Revolution to Tiananmen Square. Also, did you know that the term "boycott" came out of the Irish Land War and was taken from the name of a British land agent, Captain Boycott?

Eli says

Excellent follow on read to Skocpol for introductory comparative politics students...

Colin says

This is the first book I've read on social movement theory as a distinct discipline. It was frequently cited as a reference in "Mobilizing Islam", which is one of the best books I've read so far this year, but I went into this book somewhat skeptical that social movement theory would really offer a useful framework for analysis, and was not particularly convinced by the book's presentation.

Part of the problem is that the book does not actually offer a particularly clear explanation for just what a "social movement" is as distinct from "institutions", "organizations", "interest groups" or "social networks". I haven't read widely enough to be able to precisely trace the intellectual pedigree of this particular school of thought, but generally speaking I think the book suffers from being overly enamored by the subjects of its study and the need to hold them up as something new and "of the people", in contrast to other established political organizations. (I'd say the contemporary analogue in the policy world is the love for the "civil society organization".) The focus here is overwhelmingly European / American, and it's a very late 90s in terms of its perspective on globalization and transnational movements.

Social movements are "those sequences of contentious politics that are based on underlying social networks and resonant collective action frames", according to one definition offered by the author. I'd say "contentious politics" is really redundant, and all political organizations draw on underlying social networks, so what we're left with here is a lot of discussion about how movements try to mobilize supporters with particular messaging or protest techniques. The discussion of how various protest movements usually draw on, and occasionally innovate on, a "repertoire" of protest tactics was interesting if not always especially clear. (The focus seemed much more on the history and tactics themselves than from the perspective of organizational strategic choice or technological evolution.) I glazed over most of the theoretical discussion about movement use of symbols and "frames", but the points about how movements seek to socialize members were useful (Han does this better, though). The section on how expanding access to literature and

communications created new opportunities for mobilization was quite good, as well. I would have liked more on the political system's "opportunity structure" and how new challenger organizations interact with elites and provide signals to other challengers of regime weakness (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith do this better).

There's lot of interesting things to be said about how less hierarchical, more loosely bounded, or less formalized political organizations are created, seek to sustain themselves (in terms of resources and mobilizing activist members), and interact with other organizations in the political system in an attempt to advance their claims. This book touches on many of these aspects, but not in a systematic enough way for me to get much out of it; instead, it seems primarily dedicated to special pleading for "social movements" as a particular privileged category, rather than trying to fit them into a more generalizable political framework. I'll keep checking out titles in this field, but this one at least was more useful for its parts than the whole.

Daan0306gmail.com says

2,5
