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Protest Politics and Social Movement Activism in the Age of Globalization

This book is about citizens, and it is about protest. It is about citizens – in the broader meaning – protesting in the streets against policies enacted or proposed by governments as well as against or in favor of certain issues: street citizens. This chapter introduces the main issues addressed in the book, presents its main argument, and describes the data and methods used in the analyses. *Street Citizens* explains the character of contemporary protest politics by analyzing through original survey data on activists themselves the diverse motivations, social characteristics, and values that draw them to engage politically to tackle the pressing social problems of our times such as economic fairness and climate change. We ask what are protest politics and social movement activism today, what are their main features, and to what extent can street citizens be seen as a force driving social and political change. In the age of globalization, characterized by a crisis of political responsibility and widespread disaffection from institutional politics, including nationalist and populist parties gaining popularity across the globe, it seems that left-libertarian protest politics faces great challenges in actualizing its potential for wider political change and social transformation. Caught between the dominance of financial markets, the forces of globalization, and the rise of right-wing populism, the Left today is confined to a minority position and increasingly at pains to become the driver of social and political change. This is in turn reflected in the features of protest politics as it is practiced in the streets and in the values of its key protagonists today. In this context, the book analyzes left-wing protest culture as well as the characteristics of protest politics, from the motivations of street citizens to how they become engaged in demonstrations to the causes they defend and the issues they promote, from their mobilizing structures to their political attitudes and values, as well as other key aspects such as their sense of identity within social movements, their perceived effectiveness, and the role of emotions for protest participation.

STREET DEMONSTRATIONS: A MODULAR AND
 NORMALIZED FORM OF CONTENTIOUS POLITICS

Citizens have at their disposal various instruments to express their discontent in the context of liberal democracies today: from voting in elections to directly contacting public officials, from signing petitions to refusing to buy certain products for political reasons, from engaging in community action groups to participating in street demonstrations, and so forth. This “repertoire of contention” has evolved in the course of the past centuries. As Tilly (1986, 1995) has masterfully shown, the two large-scale processes consisting in the emergence of capitalism and state formation – the industrial revolution and the national revolution, to use Rokkan’s (1970) terminology – have led to a major transformation of the repertoires of contention. A local (territorially and politically), patronized (by local elites), and reactive (aiming to preserve existing rights and privileges) repertoire was replaced by a national, autonomous, and proactive repertoire. Social movements, in this perspective, were born out of this transformation and the street demonstration became part and parcel of the new repertoire, along with the strike, the public rally, and the election (Tilly 1986).

Tarrow (1998: 30) has aptly summarized this idea as follows: “In the 1780s, people knew how to seize shipments of grain, attack tax gatherers, burn tax registers, and take revenge on wrongdoers and people who had violated community norms. But they were not yet familiar with acts like the mass demonstration, the strike, or urban insurrection on behalf of common goals. By the end of the 1848 revolution, the petition, the public meeting, the demonstration, and the barricade were well-known routines, employed for a variety of purposes and by different combinations of social actors.” This excerpt also stresses a key feature of this form of mobilization today: the street demonstration, along with the petition and the internet call-to-action, have become today “modular performances,” or “generic forms that can be adapted to a variety of local and social circumstances” (Tilly and Tarrow 2015: 17). No longer attached to a specific objective and group – like it was for example for anti-tax riots, revolts against conscription, subsistence riots, and grain seizures in the old repertoire of contention – demonstrations are used by different actors, on different issues, and for different purposes. As such, they also reflect Tilly’s (1994: 7) definition of the social movement as “a sustained challenge to powerholders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those powerholders by means of repeated public displays of that population’s numbers, commitment, unity, and worthiness.” And what better means are there for showing numbers, commitment, unity, and worthiness than taking to the streets with other people to protest?

While Tilly’s argument about changing repertoires of contention refers to long-term changes over centuries, the role of protest – and, more specifically, of the demonstration – has also changed in the shorter run. In this regard, scholarship has shown that, in spite of ebbs and flows, the number of demonstrations

as well as the number of people taking part in them has increased considerably in recent decades, with new postmaterialistic concerns developing alongside older socioeconomic issues leading to a general increase in issues generating protest (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001). This growing importance of peaceful protests was paralleled by an increased legitimacy accorded to such actions by both citizens and the state, which has led to a normalization of protest behavior (Dalton 2008; Fuchs 1991; Marsh and Kaase 1979; Topf 1995; Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001) and demonstrations have become one of the major channels of public voice and participation in representative democracies (Norris et al. 2005).

Some have argued that, to some extent, this normalization of protest has also led to a normalization of protesters, as a broader spectrum of protesters coming to reflect more closely the features of average citizens (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001). The normalization of protest, the most common and widespread form of participation beyond voting and beyond certain other forms, suggests that it is no longer confined to union militants, progressive intellectuals, and committed students so that “on the street we are all equal” (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001). The rise of “emotional mobilizations” is further seen to contribute to normalization. Having become so central in contemporary politics, street demonstrations are an appropriate object of study particularly if one wishes to examine who participates in protest activities, for what reason, and how they are mobilized. Demonstrations are the most typical form of contentious politics, they are used by different types of people to protest on a variety of issues, and they have become increasingly popular among different social strata.

Yet, not everybody takes part in demonstrations. First of all, as Van Aelst and Walgrave (2001) noted, the less well educated, the socially vulnerable, and the needy remain less likely to take to the streets, showing once again the powerful mobilizing impact of education for political participation (Berinsky and Lenz 2011). Additionally, regardless of the level of education, the propensity to take to the street and engage in protest politics is not the same on the left and on the right of the political spectrum. While leftists assign a greater importance to protesting in the streets, rightists tend to privilege more institutional channels (Kriesi 1999). These different attitudes vis-à-vis protest politics reflect a cultural difference between the Left and the Right. People on the Left usually belong to the “civil rights coalition,” stressing direct action as well as bottom-up and participatory forms of democracy, whereas people on the Right are more akin to the “law and order coalition,” prioritizing top-down intervention and representative democracy (della Porta 1996). It should therefore come as no surprise that most of the demonstrations we observe in a given context – including those analyzed in this book – are left-leaning, whether they address moral and cultural or social and economic issues. We will further discuss this distinction later on, but now it is time to set the stage for the analysis presented in this book by discussing some important changes occurring in the

recent past which might have influenced the ways in which people engage in street demonstrations.

PROTESTING IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

Van Aelst and Walgrave's (2001) argument about the normalization of protesters (see further Norris et al. 2005) – in addition to the widely accepted thesis of a normalization of protest, in terms of both frequent usage and public acceptance – is a general one, but the ground upon which the authors draw the empirical evidence supporting it is situated both in space and in time. While showing selectively also data from other countries, their analysis nevertheless draws mainly on information about protests and demonstrations in Belgium. This country, as the authors maintain, may reflect a tradition of street protest which is largely consistent with that of most other Western European countries. Yet, generalizing their conclusions to the latter can only be speculative. Furthermore, their study covers a period prior to the year 2000. This means that they miss two important large-scale waves of contention of the recent past, namely those carried by the global justice and the anti-austerity movements (Ancelovici et al. 2016; della Porta 2007a, 2015; della Porta and Mattoni 2014; Flesher Fominaya and Cox 2013; Giugni and Grasso 2015). Furthermore, and in relation to the latter, they also miss one of the deepest economic crises ever faced by Europe, starting from 2008. We believe that these developments are key for understanding contemporary social protest and its features. Let us briefly sketch why.

The global justice movement – also variously known as the no-global movement, anti-globalization movement, alter-globalization movement, or movement for a globalization from below, just to mention the most common labels – broke into the world scene in the late 1990s and arguably formed the major wave of contention of the past decades. Although its seeds go back to a few years earlier, the public breakthrough of the movement is commonly equated with what is often referred to as the “battle of Seattle,” when a series of protests were staged against the World Trade Organization conference held in November 1999. This event was followed by a series of contentious gatherings and campaigns taking basically two forms: protests – often violent, in particular when the so-called “black bloc” of radical young protesters was part of them – against G7/8 summits and similar governmental meetings, on the one hand, and countermeetings represented by the social forums – most notably the World and European Social Forums – on the other.

Reflecting a common definition of social movements, the global justice movement was defined as a “loose network of organizations (with varying degrees of formality and even including political parties) and other actors engaged in collective action of various kinds, on the basis of shared goals of advancing the cause of justice (economic, social, political, and environmental) among and between peoples across the globe” (della Porta 2007b: 6). The important point

for our present purpose is that this is an encompassing movement bringing together a broad range of actors, networks, and coalitions, from traditional “old” ones such as parties at the “left of the left,” trade unions and labor organizations, to “new” kinds of actors such as environmental, peace and solidarity organizations, but also students’ associations, radical youth groups, and still many others. This may be seen as blurring the boundaries between traditional movements and new social movements, leading, at least to some extent, to a homogenization of the movements of the Left in terms of the social composition and values orientations of the constituencies mobilized (Eggert and Giugni 2012). In other words, the global justice movement brought together, under the common “master frame” (Benford 2013b; Snow and Benford 1992; Tarrow 1992) of the fight against neoliberalism as well as social and economic injustice on the global scale, different strands of “single-issue” movements that previously had tended to mobilize on their own, hence contributing to a rapprochement of “old” and “new” issues and movements.

Then, from 2008 onward, came the Great Recession, one of the deepest economic crises Europe had faced so far. The crisis brought with it a wave of anti-austerity protests and movements in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Epitomized by large-scale and mediatic events such as the 15M demonstration held by the *Indignados* movement in Madrid in May 2011 or the Occupy Wall Street protest that took place in New York in September of the same year, anti-austerity protests grew rapidly soon after the start of the crisis in 2008, peaking between 2011 and 2012 (Cinalli and Giugni 2016a). These protests and movements were a direct response to the economic crisis, but even more so to the austerity policies – basically consisting in severe cuts in budgets, most notably spending in the social sector – enacted by many European states and supported by the so-called “Troika” of the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

While the political reactions to the Great Recession were probably associated less with the economic crisis itself and more with government initiatives to cope with its negative repercussions (Bermeo and Bartels 2014: 4), tough economic conditions can be seen as having generated grievances which people, under certain conditions, may seek to redress through protest. This may open up the political space for new social groups and constituencies to get involved in protest activities in order to improve their own situation or to fight against what are perceived to be unjust patterns of wealth distribution in advanced capitalist democracies and to draw attention to the fact that not all sectors of society bear the costs of economic crisis evenly (Grasso and Giugni 2016a). In this regard, scholars have emphasized the importance of the “precariat” as the new agents of protest in times of austerity (della Porta 2015; Martin 2015), hence stressing the progressive potential of new cleavages brought about by globalization – such as the division between winners and losers of globalization (Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008, 2012) – as opposed to the reactionary potential for xenophobic and anti-immigrant claims.

Related to the mobilization of a new constituency, the economic crisis and the anti-austerity protests spurred by government measures to tackle it have also brought about new grievances. Even more so, they revamped old grievances and issues that have been somewhat sidelined by new social movements focusing on lifestyle, especially in countries where the pacification of the traditional class cleavage provided a larger space for such issues to become a basis for political mobilization (Kriesi et al. 1995). These relate to questions of inequality and the distribution of resources in advanced industrial societies (della Porta 2015). Thus, anti-austerity protests appear to have shifted the focus from wider, moral and cultural issues, back to more bread-and-butter, redistributive concerns (della Porta 2015). In this sense, participants in anti-austerity demonstrations share more characteristics with old issue demonstrators (Grasso and Giugni 2016b). They are less well-educated and middle class than new issue demonstrators. They are also more resource-poor than the usual suspects attending protests around new issues. At the same time, they are less organizationally embedded than those at old issue protests. They are also more likely to be drawn from younger generations, and to be students. Furthermore, just like the global justice movement, anti-austerity movements have displayed innovative forms of organizing and mobilizing, such as an extensive use of online social networks (Anduiza et al. 2014) and experiencing various forms of deliberative-participative democracy (della Porta and Rucht 2013). As such, participants in these movements may be expected to be less institutionalized and embedded in organizational networks, and have fewer experiences of previous extra-institutional participation.

More broadly, this book rests on the assumption that the contours of protest participation – and, more specifically, participation in street demonstrations – have changed as a result of large-scale processes and structural changes brought about by globalization and, more recently, catalyzed by the economic crisis as well as by the politicization of such processes and changes by recent social movements. In this perspective, the global justice movement has contributed to creating the space for a broader participation of citizens in demonstrations as well as to bringing together “old” bread-and-butter and redistributive issues with “new” lifestyle, moral and cultural issues. The recent deep economic crisis has brought back to the fore inequality and the class cleavage as a basis for political mobilization on traditional issues. Relatedly, anti-austerity protests have further contributed to repoliticizing and remobilizing that cleavage and have brought those issues to the fore.

To be sure, our aim is not to prove that this diagnosis is correct. We aim to show that there is a very strong rationale for analyzing participation in demonstrations cross-nationally and with empirical data in the current juncture. Moreover, this allows us to develop a compass that will guide our analysis throughout the chapters in this book. In this regard, we would like to suggest that these processes and changes bring with them the seeds of potential transformations in the landscape of protest politics in the age of

globalization and – at least potentially – have created the conditions for a different sort of participation – whether permanently or only temporarily. More specifically, these developments may have had manifold effects on participation in street demonstrations: they may have brought back capitalism and the class cleavage into protest politics; they may have altered the relationship between protest politics and electoral politics as well as that between different forms of participation; they may have brought to the fore new channels of mobilization, including online social networks, downplaying the role of more traditional channels and networks; they may have led to new attitudes and predispositions towards political actors and objects, in both their cognitive and affective dimensions; and they may mean a renewed emphasis on grievances, interests, values, identities, and motivations underpinning protest participation. Our endeavor in this book will be to detect and describe such effects through a micro-analysis of participation in street demonstrations.

A MICRO-LEVEL ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATION IN STREET DEMONSTRATIONS

The literature on social movements and contentious politics has flourished in the past 50 years or so. At least since the wave of protests in both Europe and the United States in 1967–68, scholars have inquired into the origins, development, and outcomes of social movements. While students of social movements have been mostly interested in the collective dimension of protest, that is, in movements as collective actors, research has also focused on the micro or individual level of analysis in an attempt to understand who participates in protest activities, for what reason, and how they are mobilized. This is also the aim of the present volume: we will focus on individual participants in demonstrations and examine a number of aspects allowing us to better understand who they are, why they participate, and through which channels and mechanisms they do so. To this end, we draw from a variety of research traditions and literatures: from scholarship on social movements to the literature on political participation in political science, from structural to social psychological accounts of protest participation, from cultural to rational choice approaches to contentious politics, and still others.

We provide an analysis of the social and attitudinal profile of demonstrators, their mobilizing structures, their motives, as well as variations thereof, making sense of which factors differentiate novel and more experienced protesters and how this varies across countries as well as across protest issues. In this respect, our account follows a logic according to which the who, why, and how people take part in street demonstrations are influenced by a number of interrelated factors pertaining to the mobilizing context of participation as well as microstructural and social psychological dynamics. Figure 1.1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the book graphically, also indicating which chapter addresses each specific aspect.

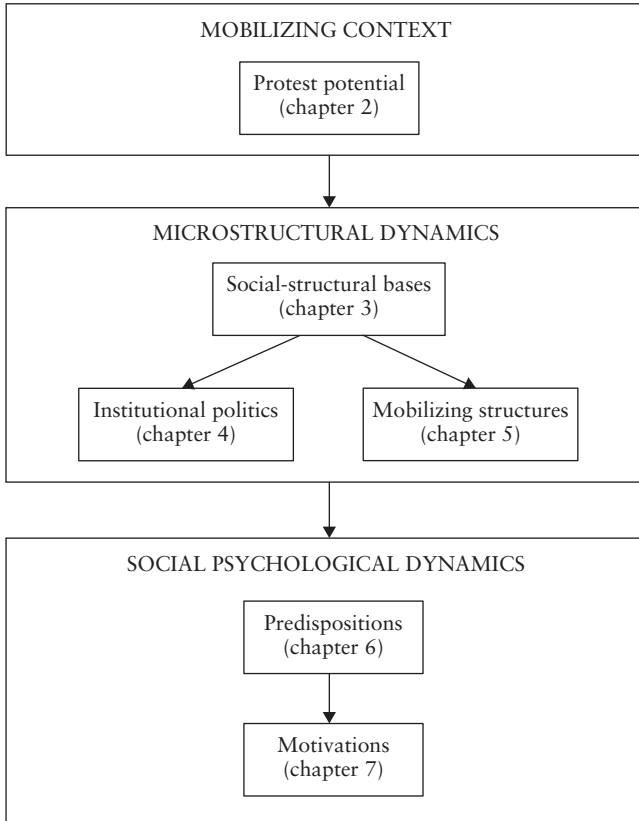


FIGURE 1.1. *Conceptual framework of the book with reference to chapters*

We conceive of the dynamics of participation in demonstrations as three interrelated layers of factors. The first layer refers to the mobilizing context of participation in street demonstrations. The mobilizing context can be described in terms of demand, supply, and mobilization (Klandermans 2004). The demand side refers to the potential of protesters in a given society; the supply side refers to the characteristics of the social movement sector in that society; and mobilization refers to the techniques and mechanisms that link demand and supply (Klandermans 2004). Here we focus more specifically on the protest potential. A demand for protest begins with levels of grievances in a society (Klandermans 1997). The protest potential reflects such grievances and consists in the readiness of citizens to protest. This can be seen in the propensity of citizens to engage in different kinds of political activities, most notably in protest activities. Such a propensity is likely to vary across countries as well as over time, yielding a measure of the protest potential – and, more

specifically, of the potential to participate in demonstrations – in a given country at a given time.

While our aim is not to explain participation in demonstrations, we consider the mobilizing context as channeling the microstructural and social psychological dynamics of participation in demonstrations. In turn, we suggest that the microstructural dynamics precede the social psychological dynamics as they are part of the micromobilization context of protest participation. Finally, the microstructural dynamics contribute to shape the motivations one has to take part in demonstrations.

A long-standing tradition in social movement research stresses the importance of the structural dimension of movement participation. Accordingly, the second layer of factors discussed in this book pertains to the microstructural dynamics of participation in demonstrations. Here we pay special attention to three aspects. The first aspect refers to social class and, more generally, to the social bases of protest. While this is a key concept in sociology and political science in general, it is somewhat of a neglected aspect in the social movements literature (but see Eidlin and Kerrissey 2018). Yet, scholars have examined the role of social class for movement participation (Eder 1993, 2013; Grasso and Giugni 2015; Hylmö and Wennerhag 2015; Kriesi 1989; Maheu 1995). New social movement theory, in particular, has stressed the fact that the new issues and movements that arose in the 1970s and 1980s were the sign of the mobilization of “middle class radicals” (Parkin 1968). More recently, protests in the context of the economic crisis and against austerity measures have led scholars to reconsider the role of class, arguing that the latter plays an increasingly important role in social movements and protest behavior (della Porta 2015). This leads us to take into account the role of class for participation in demonstrations today and whether the ideology and values of demonstrators still rest on class-based cleavages or whether class and values are increasingly disconnected from each other.

The second microstructural aspect relates to institutional politics or, better, the relation between protest and institutional politics. Students of social movements have become increasingly aware of the intimate relationship between electoral and non-electoral politics, between institutional and contentious politics, suggesting thus that we should combine the study of political parties and voting with the analysis of social movements and protest (Čisář and Navrátil 2015; della Porta et al. 2017; Goldstone 2003; Heaney 2013; Heaney and Rojas 2015; Hutter et al. 2018; Kriesi 2014; Kriesi et al. 2012; McAdam and Tarrow 2010, 2013; Norris et al. 2015). While the supply of protest usually concerns the characteristics of the social movement sector in a society – such as its strength, diversity, and contentiousness – institutional actors and politics also contribute to provide opportunities for protest (Kriesi 2004). Furthermore, the ways in which citizens relate to institutional politics allow us to unveil how processes of mobilization bring a demand for protest together with a supply of protest opportunities.

One of the most consistent findings of research on micromobilization is that individual participation in social movements rests on people's previous embeddedness in social networks (Corrigan-Brown 2013). Accordingly, a third aspect pertaining to microstructural dynamics deals with what students of social movements have called mobilizing structures. These refer to the collective vehicles through which people mobilize and engage in collective action (McAdam et al. 1996). They include above all social networks and ties that support and facilitate mobilization (Diani 2004). The mobilizing structures lie at the very heart of the study of social movements, at least since resource mobilization theory made clear that protest is more likely when resources and organizations create the conditions for translating grievances into collective action (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Oberschall 1973; Tilly 1978). We therefore examine the extent to which participation in demonstrations is due to such mobilizing structures and through which channels people are recruited to this form of protest.

Just as scholarship has stressed the microstructural dynamics of protest participation, it also paid a great deal of attention to the social psychological factors facilitating or preventing participation (van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013). The third layer of factors therefore refers to the psychological dynamics of participation in demonstrations. This includes a variety of aspects such as identity (Hunt and Benford 2004), ideology (Snow 2004), emotions (Goodwin et al. 2004), motivations (Klandermans 2015), commitment (Erickson Nepstad 2013), and still others. Here we address all these aspects, but we group them along two main lines of inquiry. The first looks at the impact of predispositions. While this concept has a long and authoritative history in the electoral behavior research, it has not made a strong breakthrough in the literature on social movements, at least not explicitly so or, if so, with a rather vague and loose meaning. Traditionally – as proposed in the Columbia or sociological model of voting – political predispositions referred to those variables relating to an individual's socioeconomic, religious and residential status influencing a person's propensity to vote for a given party (Lazarsfeld et al. 1948). The so-called "index of political predisposition" was supposed to allow researchers to capture these aspects in the prediction of vote choice. Here we use the concept of predispositions in a broader meaning, referring to those cognitive and affective predispositions of people towards a given object. This leads us to inquire into the role of political attitudes (cognitive predispositions) and emotions (affective predispositions) for participation in demonstrations. While the former are at the core of standard explanations of political participation (Brady et al. 1995; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1978, 1995), the latter have gained importance in recent years in the study of social movements (Flam and King 2005; Goodwin et al. 2000, 2001; Jasper 1998; see Flam 2014, 2015, Goodwin et al. 2004, and Jasper 2011 for reviews). Following works on both electoral and protest participation, we examine how political attitudes and emotions combine among demonstrators.