

## Street Citizens

What are protest politics and social movement activism today? What are their main features? To what extent can street citizens be seen as a force driving social and political change? Through analyses of original survey data on activists themselves, Marco Giugni and Maria T. Grasso explain the character of contemporary protest politics that we see today; the diverse motivations, social characteristics, values and networks that draw activists to engage politically to tackle the pressing social problems of our time. The study 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.

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(continued after index)

## Street Citizens

### *Protest Politics and Social Movement Activism in the Age of Globalization*

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## Foreword

Between 2009 and 2012 the three of us were leading the CCC project (“Caught in the Act of Protest: Contextualizing Contention”). Together with colleagues in six countries (later in fourteen countries), and on a quite massive scale, we surveyed participants in numerous demonstrations dealing with various issues. Marco Giugni and Maria Grasso were part of the initial CCC team and co-designed and co-fielded the study in respectively Switzerland and the UK. CCC was successful in that it produced, as far as we can tell, the largest database on individual protest demonstrators available till today. As we speak, the entire CCC catalogue now encompasses answers from more than 22,000 individual demonstrators participating in 109 distinct events in 14 countries. Most of these data are freely obtainable for any researcher interested in studying protest participants. *Street Citizens* draws on this database, and on the efforts of all country teams involved in this endeavor.

*Street Citizens* is exactly what we hoped the CCC project would lead to: a book-length and in-depth treatment of the intriguing phenomenon of people taking the streets to vent their discontent. The book makes full use of the strengths of CCC. While conceiving the project, we discussed for hours and hours about the exact questions we were going to ask, we had endless discussions about how to sample protesters and demonstrations, and in meeting after meeting we debated the numerous contextual data that we thought might be interesting. The main motivation for this long – and to be honest, often tedious – process was our quest for standardization. We wanted to devise an instrument and a method that allows comparing across protesters, demonstrations, and nations. After all, social science *is* comparison. We are truly happy that (finally) a book exploits the comparative strengths of CCC. Our painful discussions about a common approach paid off.

Of course, there have been numerous earlier CCC publications. CCC members have published papers in various journals, some of them leading in their discipline. Two special issues in journals formed another notable spin-off from CCC. A collective volume consisting of CCC chapters saw the light. But until

*Street Citizens* there was no integrated monograph about the protesters we so closely surveyed over the years. Previous outputs all dealt with specific and limited research questions, and often only a small part of the data was mobilized. This book uses the full breadth of the data and sketches an integrated picture of protesting at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

As godmother and godfathers we are also proud this book puts CCC's key aim center stage: to analyze, in a comparative fashion, who the people are who protest, why they do so, and how they have been brought to the streets. We always believed that protest and protesters can only be sensibly studied *in context*. Naturally, some things we know about protest participants seem to apply to all protests, irrespective of the context in which they happen or the issues they tackle. But the differences across protest events and across nations are substantial. The heterogeneity of a practice that Charles Tilly described a long time ago as a repertoire or a display following certain rules, is striking. Anti-austerity protesters in Italy are different from LGBTQ+ march participants in Sweden. They may employ basically the same ritual to express themselves, but who they are, what drives them, and how they are recruited varies. This book pays homage to this unity in diversity of protest.

*Street Citizens* is a well-conceived and strong contribution to social movement and protest scholarship. The authors show convincingly that protest and protesters vary across issues and nations and, most importantly, that these variations are not random but patterned. Differences can be explained by existing and novel accounts of protest incidence and participation. Protests on economic and cultural issues, for example, are populated by different population segments. They have a lot in common as well but, still, the analyses show that there are significant differences with regard to all the variables – cultural, structural, and cognitive – Giugni and Grasso look at. The question is whether the borders between these two distinct types of protest are becoming increasingly blurred; the authors suggest that this could be the case but we have to wait for further longitudinal evidence to be sure. The book also nicely testifies to how the deep crisis hit Southern Europe in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Italy and Spain stand out as countries with distinct protest potentials, and with protesters who differ markedly from those in the North European countries in the sample. At least on the streets, there seems to be a divided Europe with very different street contentions in North and South.

Apart from highlighting challenging differences across nations and issues, *Street Citizens* also shows that some persisting myths about protest should now be discarded. The fable of the alienated and anti-political protester, for example, does not hold up. Protesters are highly interested in politics; they identify with political parties, think they can influence politics, and take part as well, in a complementary fashion, in conventional forms of participation. Protesters are not political outsiders: they are insiders; although that also varies across issues and countries. Further, the myth of the new social media fundamentally changing mobilization and recruitment and many other things in

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the field of protest, is debunked. Most protesters, as before, are members of organizations and are recruited through formal or informal networks. Finally, also the idea that the economic crisis led to a renewal of the class base of protest and made the precarious protest can be discarded based on the evidence presented in *Street Citizens*. Socially, culturally, and financially stronger groups still overwhelmingly dominate the streets.

In sum, *Street Citizens* innovates with its comparative approach and deepens our insight into protest and protest participation. At the same time, it presents strong evidence to help settle a series of long-standing debates in the field.

Bert Klandermans  
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*Amsterdam & Beauvechain*  
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In addition to the funding agencies, a number of people need to be acknowledged, starting with Bert Klandermans, who acted as convener of the ESF collaborative project. Jacquelin van Stekelenburg and Stefaan Walgrave have also had a leading role in the collaborative project. We thank all three of them as well as their collaborators in the “Ground Control” and “Data Handling” teams for their organizing and managing the research during several years.

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Last but not least, we are indebted mostly to the thousands of demonstrators in the seven countries covered by our study who responded to our survey and sent the questionnaire back. Without them, this book obviously would not have been written. We thank them not only for their contribution to our research, but above all for reinvigorating democracy through their political engagement. Democracy is not simply a matter of rights and duties; it is also made of people actively participating in politics, not only through voting, but also in non-electoral political activities such as demonstrations. It is to those street citizens that this book is ultimately dedicated.