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State-Mobilized Movements: A Research Agenda

Grzegorz Ekiert and Elizabeth J. Perry

1.1 INTRODUCTION

On April 10, 2016, an agitated crowd gathered in the center of Warsaw. The demonstration, dubbed the "million people march," followed the customary Polish protest repertoire. The usual sea of Polish national flags and emblems of the Solidarity movement were on display. The march began with a mass in the Warsaw Cathedral before the crowd moved across the old town to the Presidential Palace. Heavily equipped police secured the perimeter of the demonstration, and small groups of counterprotesters were separated from the main gathering. Yet, there was something odd about this "protest" event. The angry demonstrators did not make any claims against the government in power. There were no specific demands or claims against the ruling party. Moreover, the main organizer of the demonstration – the Law and Justice party – was in power in Poland. The PiS enjoyed a majority in parliament and exercised full control of the government. The Polish president was also a PiS member. The public television and other media were in ruling party hands, and the powerful Polish Catholic Church hierarchy supported its policies. The protesters did not deliver fiery speeches against the government. Instead, they listened to fiery speeches by the president, the head of the ruling party, and other top government officials condemning the previous government and those who supported it as traitors and enemies of Poland.

The demonstration was organized to mark the sixth anniversary of the plane crash in Smolensk that had killed Poland's president and scores of top officials of the government, parliament, and armed forces on their way to participate in an event commemorating the slaughter of thousands of Polish prisoners of war by the Soviet regime in 1940. The marchers in Warsaw carried placards stating "We remember Katyn and Smolensk" and images of the deceased president and his wife. But this was not simply a commemorative event. It was also a contentious gathering that formed part of a cycle of protests organized by

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the current Polish ruling party on a monthly basis since the plane crash. The unrest was fueled by a conspiracy theory alleging that the former government, in collusion with the Russians, had assassinated the president. Participants in the current round of protests were not only fully supported by the government, the ruling party, and various organizations allied with it: they were also actively mobilized and funded by the party. The Polish parliament even changed the law on public gatherings in order to privilege demonstrations organized by supporters of the government and to prevent counterdemonstrations by groups allied with the political opposition. In short, the entire institutional machinery of the Polish state was arrayed behind these protest events.

This case takes us to the heart of questions to be explored in this volume. Why had the crowd gathered in Warsaw? What were the people protesting? Who were the protest participants and what had motivated them to join the protest? How were they organized and mobilized? What were their grievances and demands? Who were their adversaries? And, most critically, why were organs of the state acting as facilitators rather than as targets or repressors of a protest movement?

For almost two decades, the field of social movements and contentious politics has been in "a post-paradigm phase" (Goodwin and Jasper, 2004). Most of the recent debates have focused on the relative utility of various theoretical perspectives, pitting advocates of structural approaches against adherents of cultural interpretations, constructivism, and psychological explanations of collective action. As illuminating as these theoretical debates have been, the present volume proposes a different approach. Following a pioneering effort of Aminzade et al. (2001), we seek to chart an understudied empirical domain of social movements: the state's active role in mobilizing social actors and in shaping contentious politics.

The chapters to follow examine a wide range of such state-mobilized movements (SMMs), asking what states seek to achieve by sending citizens into the streets and how successful these efforts are. Does the state's deployment of existing or newly invented organizations and movements stimulate public support and contribute to everyday governance? What kinds of meanings, identities, and social cleavages are strengthened or constructed in the course of SMMs? Who joins SMMs, and what motivates these participants? What types of states in what situations are likely to use such mobilization technologies? And what are the short- and long-term consequences of inciting popular protests for purposes of regime legitimacy and stability?

The research agenda suggested by these questions departs significantly from that of classic social movement and contentious politics theories, which focus on the threat of challenges from seemingly autonomous societal actors against those in power. A stereotypic scene in the literature on contentious politics pictures a herd of angry protesters marching against a surprised yet much stronger ruling elite and the state apparatus under its control. Contentious politics, we are told, is by nature a claims-making process in which societal

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challengers deploy various "weapons of the weak" to press demands upon the mighty state – a modern institutional machine equipped with advanced surveillance technology, coercive forces complete with armored trucks and state-of-the-art anti-riot gear, and a penal system poised to punish any transgression of state regulations and public order. States, governments, ruling parties, and political leaders are conventionally conceptualized as the principal targets of protest actions. The authorities, in turn, accept, ignore or reject protesters' demands, responding with a range of accommodative or repressive tactics.

But this expected scenario is clearly not applicable to the 2016 Warsaw demonstration, which was organized by the ruling elites themselves and supported by the Polish state to advance a specific political agenda of those in power. Crowds on the streets were mobilized from above to present the appearance of popular spontaneity and enthusiasm and to intimidate the opposition. In the Warsaw protest, contention was not a desperate weapon of the weak but a carefully selected and scripted tactic of the state to exercise power and promote its own objectives. Rather than posing an unexpected and unwelcome challenge to state rule, the "million people march" was a case of the state *ruling by other means*.

The Polish event was not an unusual exception in the wider universe of social movements and protest events. Major demonstrations and sustained movement activities around the world are frequently state-initiated, state-sponsored, and state-subsidized. Government involvement in sparking and sustaining social movements is sometimes open and obvious; yet, more often, it is covert and circuitous. Movements and civil society organizations may appear as the genuine expression of autonomous social interests, grievances, and emotions, when in fact they are largely constructed and manipulated by state agents. This was the case with consequential historical events such as the pogrom of the Kristallnacht in Germany in 1938 and the Rwandan Genocide of 1994, as well as more recent protests directed against opposition or foreign organizations and powers in China, Russia, Turkey, Venezuela, and Poland (not to mention their forerunners under communist and other authoritarian regimes). Similar phenomena can be found in many other countries and under a wide range of political regimes, including even well-established democracies. The roots of both domestic and transnational social activism – mediated by ostensibly "autonomous" NGOs and other civic associations – are often traceable to state agents.[1] Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election, which included setting up movement organizations, opening fake websites, and organizing both rallies and counter-rallies, provides a poignant contemporary example of clandestine transnational involvement by a foreign state in the social movement domain. As Moises Naim (2009, p. 96) notes, this is "an important

[1] See, for example, Vojtiskova et al. (2016).

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and growing global trend that deserves more scrutiny: Governments are funding and controlling nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), often stealthily."

Existing theories of social movements generally assume that protest is the expression of grievances, interests, and identities embedded in society at large and that popular protests arise to articulate such grievances, to represent disadvantaged and oppressed groups, and to confront and contest the state and power holders. Charles Tilly's (1978) influential conceptualization of movements as claims-making outsiders challenging members of the polity has constituted the foundation for theory and research on protest movements for the past four decades.[2] Similarly, research and theorizing on civil society assumes that civil society organizations are basically separate and autonomous from the state, able to counterbalance state power, make demands on the state, and hold government officials accountable.[3] In short, from the perspective of the dominant literature on contention the state is fundamentally passive or reactive, rather than proactive. As the most prominent scholars in the field put it, "*Contentious* politics … is episodic rather than continuous, occurs in public, involves interaction between makers of claims and others, is recognized by those others as bearing on their interests, and bringing in *government as mediator, target or claimant*."[4]

The classic social movement agenda (and the study of contentious politics in general) has focused on the societal side of the state–society equation, operating under three basic assumptions: a confrontational dichotomy between state and society; a reactive state that is the principal protest target; and social actors whose agency is circumscribed yet autonomous in their campaign against state power. Moreover, the state has often been conceptualized "as a unitary actor – a 'structure' – rather than as a complex web of agencies and authorities, thoroughly saturated with culture, emotions and strategic interactions."[5] Such theories, while recognizing that the state may be "brought in" to the protest arena, do not usually emphasize the premeditated and proactive agency of the state in deciding the agenda and forms of movement politics. Historical and contemporary evidence shows, however, that not only do social movements emerge to challenge other movements (in a movement–counter movement dynamic) but modern states themselves organize citizens to act collectively in order to promote specific state goals and interests.

Students of civil society are well aware of the GONGOs (government-organized non-governmental organizations) and their role in shaping the organizational landscape of civil society and advancing state interests. The

[2] According to Tilly (1984, p. 306), "A social movement is a sustained series of interactions between powerholders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation, in the course of which these persons make publicly visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power, and back these demands with public demonstrations of support."

[3] See Keane (1988); Diamond (1999).

[4] McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001, p. 5; italics added.

[5] Goodwin and Jasper, 2004, p. viii.

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existence of such organizations is not confined to authoritarian regimes; GONGOs are common in democracies as well.[6] Moreover, as the recent civil war in Ukraine graphically illustrates, states may establish and sponsor movement-like organizations beyond their own national borders. Walerij Gierasimow, Russia's top military official, noted in 2013 that "widespread disinformation combined with the potential to mobilize people for protests is the key weapon of the twenty-first century."[7] Such a strategy was employed in Russian military intervention in Ukraine in 2014. Three years later, Russian interference in the US election, which included not only the spread of "fake news" via social media but also the surreptitious mobilization of protests and counterprotests in American cities, offered ample evidence of the power of transnational SMMs. Although there is growing awareness in the social movement literature that the boundaries between institutionalized and non-institutionalized politics are "fuzzy and permeable,"[8] the dynamic and determinative role of the state in movement politics – both domestically and cross-nationally – has not been fully appreciated, investigated, or analyzed.

In short, in contentious politics the causal arrow goes from the state to the social movement domain (and back) as often as the other way around. We find moreover that movement politics consists not only of two arenas (institutionalized and non-institutionalized) but of multiple overlapping arenas positioned along a continuum in terms of the degree of institutionalization: infrapolitics (forms of everyday resistance),[9] grassroots politics (weakly institutionalized domain of social movements), civil society politics and transnational activism, and the formal political domain of parties, elections, and parliamentary politics. Accordingly, we must investigate not one but many boundaries, all of which are fuzzy and permeable. Once we acknowledge that agency resides in both state and society with their multiple actors and overlapping political domains, the picture becomes richer and more realistic. This volume is an initial effort to encourage just such a research agenda.

The subject of the volume is what we refer to as *state-mobilized movements* (SMMs), an umbrella concept that encompasses an array of collective social and political actions instigated or encouraged by state agents for the purpose of advancing state interests. Such actions may be conducted via peaceful marches as well as rowdy rallies and undertaken by idealistic young volunteers as well as hardened thugs and vigilantes. Although SMMs can be observed (in different forms and with differing degrees of frequency) under a variety of political regimes throughout recorded history, they have assumed particular political importance in the contemporary era due to the modern state's reliance upon citizen support to legitimize its claim to a right to rule. We may think of the full set of SMMs as reflecting a broad spectrum of state–society relations; in some

[6] See Naim (2009), p. 95. [7] Quoted in Kokot (2017). [8] Goldstone (2003), p. 2.
[9] See Scott (1985); (1990).

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cases, these movements are essentially top-down and evident creations of state actors, whereas in other instances they reflect considerable social agency and ingenuity and are only gently prodded by state agents. Not included within this definition, however, are the extremes on either end of the state mobilization–social movement spectrum: state-conscripted warfare or coerced expressions of loyalty, on the one hand, and spontaneous social protests and demonstrations in support of state policies or leaders on the other. Yet in this latter case, as Anderson and Cammett argue in Chapter 11 of this volume, it is often difficult to distinguish between SMMs and autonomous displays of popular support for the state. Our main interest lies in phenomena that are located in between these two poles and for that reason demand serious attention to both the societal and state sides of the relationship. Although SMMs may occur under all types of regimes, they are especially common in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian contexts. Whereas democratic regimes derive legitimacy from free and fair elections and a universal franchise, nondemocratic regimes typically stake their claim to legitimacy by manipulating elections and demonstrating popular support in other ways. Exploring this phenomenon, empirically and theoretically, promises not only to expand our analysis of social movements but also to enlarge our understanding of the social bases of authoritarian rule, past and present.

We are not the first to notice that SMMs point to a significant blind spot in the contemporary social movement literature. Throughout modern history, social movements and mass contentious gatherings have been instruments of state governance as much as means of articulating societal grievances. In a seminal work, Eric Hobsbawm (1959) identified a specific form of resistance in peasant society that he termed "social banditry." While Hobsbawm viewed social banditry as a cry for social justice by the weak and oppressed, his critics[10] pointed to the frequent use of bandits by state authorities to protect and expand their power. More recently, other scholars have noted the role of the state and powerful elites in generating protest movements. According to Radnitz (2010, pp. 15–16), for example, "protest is not a tool of the weak alone … Historically, governments used their vast means to coerce and cajole people to participate in mass collective endeavors, where protest serves a counterintuitive purpose – to display (purported) popular support for the regime." Similarly, Jackie Smith (2004, p. 315) notes, "There is a tendency within social movement research to conceptualize movement actors as opponents of the state. But a comparative and global perspective demands that we abandon this a priori assumption and conceptualize the state as one of several actors within a field, and there are times when the state (or elements thereof) will be allies of social movements in their struggles against other actors in the broader political field." As Jack Goldstone (2015, p. 227) observes, "there are no clear lines separating the roles of challenger (protestors or social movement activists), incumbents

[10] See, for example, Blok (1972); O'Malley (1979).

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(those engaged in routine acceptance and membership of the polity defined by a policy field), and governance units (agents or institutions of the state)." Our task involves illuminating and explicating these state–society interconnections.

Modern states depend upon supportive, and often orchestrated, displays of citizen activism for both propagandistic and pragmatic purposes. Indeed, in many countries the domain of civil society itself has become a major arena of state–society cooperation and contestation. Just as "primitive rebels" were often tools of state power, so sophisticated "modern rebels" may enjoy cozier relations with states than is sometimes assumed. Savvy authoritarian regimes encourage and incorporate social movements as a key instrument of rule with considerable symbolic and political benefits. An argument along these lines has been put forward for the case of China.[11] As far as we are aware, however, this volume is the first effort to explore these relationships both cross-nationally and historically. We are under no illusion that this collection will provide the last word on this complex and opaque issue. The cases discussed in the chapters to follow by no means exhaust the full range of SMMs. They are meant to be illustrative rather than comprehensive. Our aim is not to present a parsimonious theory but rather to indicate the rich lode of research possibilities to be found within this relatively unexplored yet highly consequential terrain. We believe that the exercise holds considerable promise for enlarging the empirical foundations and the analytical horizons of social movement and civil society research, as well as expanding our understanding of the bases of authoritarian rule, by encouraging debate and stimulating new research on this critical domain of state–society relations. The case studies which follow, drawn from very different historical periods and regional contexts, focus on four general questions: Why and when do states seek to mobilize social movements? What are the technologies of state mobilization (symbolic, materialistic, and coercive), and how do they evolve over time? What are the dynamics of state–society interaction to be found in these movements? And, finally, what are the consequences – for state and society alike – of relying on SMMs as a mechanism of governance?

1.2 WHY AND WHEN STATES SEEK TO ACTIVATE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

In observing that all modern states actively seek to mobilize non-state collective actors in order to promote specific goals and secure vital state interests, we certainly do not mean that states are unitary actors. The state is a complex entity shaped by its historical development, regime type, specific institutional design, governing capacity, and leadership. In order to understand its active role in the domain of social movements and civil society organizations, a careful

[11] See Perry (2002).

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distinction among differently situated state agents is crucial. Not only do different state actors often facilitate different types of mobilizing efforts and support different societal forces; social mobilization may be a dimension of intra-state conflict as well. The capacity to mobilize various publics can be a signal of strength among contenders for power within the state (see Kruszewska and Ekiert's Chapter 2 in this volume). Hegemonic or ruling parties may assume the role of mobilizing agency, or, alternatively, we may see a complex matrix of conflict and competition across the state–society divide.

The extent of state intrusion into the social domain has traditionally been linked to regime type, with mass mobilization techniques seen as a hallmark of fascist and communist regimes[12] as well as certain populist authoritarian regimes.[13] In democratic regimes, mobilization is usually depicted as the domain of political parties and civil society organizations, especially in times of elections.[14] History suggests that nondemocratic states have indeed been more frequent and skillful mobilizers of social movements than democratic states. In general, this has been understood as an effort to compensate for the deficit of infrastructural power that despotic states often face.[15] But, as our case studies illuminate, other motivations – from shoring up legitimacy to implementing policy priorities – may also prompt the deployment of SMMs by authoritarian and democratic regimes alike.

As recent Hindu nationalist demonstrations in India make clear, democracies are not immune to SMMs. Yet the different roles played by courts, legislatures, parties, and police under democratic and autocratic regimes generate differences in the protest arena as well.[16] Historically we find SMMs to be more common in authoritarian contexts. In this volume we focus on a range of authoritarian and semi-authoritarian examples. Our cases include classic communist regimes (1968 Poland and the People's Republic of China), classic authoritarian regimes (Taiwan in the 1950s–1970s), contemporary post-communist regimes (Russia, Ukraine, and Croatia), and an assortment of hard-to-categorize quasi-democratic regimes (the American South under Jim Crow, Bolivarian Venezuela, Mubarak's Egypt, and the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong). We discover, however, that neither the motives nor the modes of SMMs are easily explained by regime type. All sorts of regimes (as Mark Beissinger's Chapter 6 points out, going at least as far back as the English, American, and French Revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) have sought to forestall revolutionary challenges by sponsoring counterrevolutionary contention.

A simple typology of state motivations covers the various cases examined in this volume. The first type is a *defensive or reactive mobilization* which occurs

[12] See Linz and Stepan (1996). [13] See, for example, Brennan (1998); Finchelstein (2017).
[14] See Rosenstone and Hansen (1995).
[15] For the distinction between infrastructural and despotic power, see Mann (1984).
[16] See Goldstone (2015).

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when the state responds to a threat posed by genuine protest movements and opposition forces. Many of our cases, from the party-state response to student protests in 1968 Poland studied by Kruszewska and Ekiert in Chapter 2 to the recent Occupy Central movement in Hong Kong described by Lee in Chapter 12 and pro-state mobilizations in Egypt analyzed by Anderson and Cammett in Chapter 11, are of this sort. In these instances, SMMs are intended to combat challengers and slow down or stop the threatening mobilization process. Mobilizing counter-movements is a strategy to maintain the appearance of popular legitimacy and social support. Enlisting societal actors in defense of the state carries more symbolic and ideological weight than simply deploying the state's coercive resources. In Perry and Yan's discussion in Chapter 3 of Cultural Revolution China, we see the importance of both charismatic authority (with Mao Zedong's personal intervention) and ideological authority (with the deployment of the "politically correct" proletariat to defuse student unrest). The second type is a *spoiler or proactive mobilization* in which the state mobilizes societal actors to intimidate opposition forces and to preempt potential challenges by opposition movements. It is often used to undermine the diffusion of contention across national borders, as was the case with the Russian state's response to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. Hemment's analysis of the Nashi youth movement illustrates this pattern. The third type is one in which states mobilize societal actors to enhance control over local or regional authorities or as a tool of factional *intra-state conflict* and struggle. In Handlin's case of Bolivarian Venezuela in Chapter 9 and Dolenec and Širinić's example of Croatian veterans' organizations in Chapter 10 we observe party-led mobilization for both electoral and interest group ends. The fourth type uses mobilization and contention as a *signaling device* to show displeasure at actions originating from other countries or taking place beyond the borders of the (local or national) state. In federalist or decentralized political systems, local governments may engage in this type of activity to indicate their opposition to political developments occurring elsewhere in the country. The case of Civil Rights–era Mississippi, analyzed by Cunningham and Owens in Chapter 5, signaled the intention of local authorities to resist the Civil Rights reforms being promoted in other parts of the United States. The fifth type is the use of mobilization techniques for *infrastructural development* to accomplish tasks that are not easy to carry out by routine bureaucratic policy implementation strategies. Looney's discussion in Chapter 4 of rural development programs in authoritarian-era Taiwan illustrates the value of campaign methods in effecting faced-paced change. In the case of contemporary China, Palmer and Ning in Chapter 13 show how state-sponsored volunteerism delivers social services while at the same time depoliticizing the younger generation. Finally, states may seek to mobilize collective actors *across national borders* in order to support territorial claims, destabilize international adversaries, or otherwise advance geostrategic interests. We can find this in Greene and Robertson's discussion in Chapter 8

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of the Novorossiya movement, in which large numbers of sympathizers supported Russian military action in Ukraine.

Although regime type per se does not predict the precise modes of mobilization adopted by various states, our cases do suggest that some states use particular mobilization technologies more often and to greater effect than others. What accounts for variation in the routinization of certain mobilization techniques over time? Should we seek the reasons in a historical legacy of state-building through ideological diffusion and revolutionary mass mobilization, or should we investigate instead the institutional configuration of the state itself, regardless of its origins? Are weak or strong states more prone to the use of mobilization techniques? Are communist or populist authoritarian regimes especially likely to rely on mobilization as a method of governing? Is regime type a factor in explaining the success of state-led mobilization, with certain kinds of authoritarian states better able to reach their objectives through mobilization technologies than others?

Alternatively, to what extent are the frequency and effectiveness of state mobilization dependent upon the characteristics of society rather than of the state itself? Do dense civil society networks and robust movement sectors limit the state's capacity to penetrate and organize society for its own ends? Do these connections enable social actors to thwart or redirect state mobilization efforts for purposes quite different from those intended by state officials? Or, conversely, does a high degree of societal connectivity actually ease states' ability to channel social activism in directions favorable to their own designs?

In illustrating the broad contours of SMMs through a range of assorted twentieth- and twenty-first-century examples, drawn from a variety of regions and regime types, we do not mean to suggest that all our cases are best understood as fundamentally the same. Rather, our goal is to understand distinctions reflecting different political, cultural, and temporal circumstances. As has been frequently noted, the third wave of democratization gave birth to new forms of authoritarianism. These "hybrid" or "competitive authoritarian" regimes are distinct from classic communist and authoritarian-bureaucratic regimes and personalistic dictatorships.[17] The end of the Cold War also altered the ways in which surviving authoritarian regimes function. Some authoritarian regimes have incorporated the entire universe of representative institutions and relatively autonomous political space, including multiparty elections, legal political opposition, independent civil society organizations with transnational ties, and some independent media. Many have also embraced open borders and free trade and accepted international investment, travel, and information flows. A number have abandoned hard coercion in favor of more "friendly" or "vegetarian" forms of repression.[18] Some have

[17] See Schedler (2002); Schedler (2010); Carothers (2002); Levitsky and Way (2010); Brownlee (2007); and Krastev (2011).
[18] See Krastev (2011).

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