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The Political Consequences of Social Movements

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collective benefits, states, influence, political mediation, case studies

Abstract

Research on the political consequences of social movements has recently accelerated. We take stock of this research with a focus on movements in democratic polities and the United States in comparative and historical perspective. Although most studies demonstrate the influence of the largest movements, this research has not addressed how much movements matter. As for the conditions under which movements matter, scholars have been revising their initial hypotheses that the strategies, organizational forms, and political contexts that aid mobilization also aid in gaining and exerting political influence. Scholars are exploring alternative arguments about the productivity of different actions and characteristics of movements and movement organizations in the varied political contexts and institutional settings they face. Researchers are also employing more innovative research designs to appraise these more complex arguments. Scholarship will advance best if scholars continue to think through the interactions between strategies, organizations, and contexts; address movement influences on processes in institutional politics beyond the agenda-setting stage; situate case studies in comparative and historical perspective; and make more comparisons across movements and issues.

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INTRODUCTION

The political consequences of social movements have drawn extensive scholarly attention in the first decade of this century. The years 2001 through 2009 alone have seen an acceleration of publications, including 45 articles, 38 in the top four general sociology journals—the *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *Social Forces*, and *Social Problems*—and 7 in *Mobilization*, the top movement specialty journal. This outpouring includes several monographs and edited volumes from prestigious scholarly presses. This review takes stock of this research—its questions, conceptual and theoretical developments, and research strategies—which was last reviewed more than a decade ago (Giugni 1998). We address social movements' attempts to influence policymaking, the main subject of research, but also movement influences on democratic rights, electoral processes, legal decisions, political parties, and state bureaucracies. In this review, we focus on the political impact of movements in largely democratized polities and especially in the U.S. polity in comparative and historical perspective.

We define political social movements as actors and organizations seeking to alter power deficits and to effect social transformations through the state by mobilizing regular citizens for sustained political action (see Tilly 1999, Amenta et al. 2009). The definition focuses on social movement organizations (SMOs) (McCarthy & Zald 1977) or "challengers" (Gamson 1990) that can be combined into social movement industries or families. We include all the political collective action of movements: not only extrainstitutional action such as protest marches and civil disobedience, but also lobbying, lawsuits, and press conferences.[1] The definition does not include public opinion (cf. McCarthy & Zald 1977), which we see as analytically separate from movements and may have a direct impact on political outcomes (Giugni 2004, Brooks & Manza 2006, Agnone 2007). Using a similar definition, Amenta et al. (2009) identify 34 major social movement families by surveying all national and political U.S. SMOs that appeared in *The New York Times* in the twentieth century. The most covered movements were those of labor, African American civil rights, veterans, feminists, nativists, and environmentalists.

A central issue in the literature is whether social movements have had any major political consequences or can be routinely expected to have them. Unlike mobilizing constituents, creating collective identities, increasing individual and organizational capacities, or altering the career trajectories of movement participants, political consequences are external to and not under the direct control of SMOs. The proximate actors in key political decisions are political executives, legislators, administrators, and judges, each subject to myriad influences. The disagreement on this basic issue is wide. Some scholars (Baumgartner & Mahoney 2005, Piven 2006) hold that social movements are generally effective and account for most important political change. Others (Skocpol 2003, Burstein & Sausner 2005, Giugni 2007) argue that social movements are rarely influential and overall not significantly so compared with other political actors, institutions, and processes. The extant research—mainly case studies of the largest movements—typically concludes that these movements are politically influential for the specific outcomes analyzed, but it does not settle the larger questions of whether movements are generally effective or how influential they are.

Most scholars studying the political influence of movements seek to identify the

[1]Our definition includes established SMOs and movement actors, such as the National Organization for Women. Our definition excludes politically active interest groups based on business and professional actors, such as the Chamber of Commerce and American Medical Association, whose constituents are not facing political power deficits and are seen as members of the polity (Tilly 1999) and also excludes service, recreational, and fraternal organizations and actors, such as the March of Dimes, the American Bowling Congress, and the Knights of Columbus, as they are not mainly politically focused. Nor do we include all international nongovernmental organizations, given their frequent service orientation.

conditions under which social movements are likely to be influential and see the impact of social movements on states as a recursive process (Soule et al. 1999, Amenta et al. 2002, Meyer 2005, Amenta 2006, Olzak & Soule 2009). The structure and activities of states influence lines of organization and action among movements, and social movements seek to influence states by mobilizing people, resources, and claims around lines of action. Partly because of its late start, research on the political consequences of movements began by hypothesizing that political influence would be produced by the movement literature's three main determinants of mobilization: resource mobilization and organizational forms or "mobilizing structures" (McCarthy & Zald 2002, McVeigh et al. 2003, Andrews 2004, King et al. 2005), framing strategies (Cress & Snow 2000, McCright & Dunlap 2003, McVeigh et al. 2004, McCammon et al. 2008, McCammon 2009), and political opportunities and contexts (Giugni 2004, Meyer & Minkoff 2004, Soule 2004, Meyer 2005, McVeigh et al. 2006). The idea was that the circumstances that helped challengers mobilize would also aid them in their bids to effect political change. Recent research has suggested that high mobilization is necessary for a movement to gain political influence and that certain mobilizing structures and political circumstances boost the productivity of movement efforts, but also that conditions and activities that spur mobilization often present problems for challengers beyond the attention-getting phase of politics. Sorting this out has been a focus of recent research.

In our review, we address a series of issues specific to the political consequences of movements. First, we specify what influence means for politically oriented challengers. Next, we address the question of whether movements have been generally influential. We then review hypothesized pathways to influence for challengers, going beyond the standard determinants of mobilization to address theoretical approaches that confront specific aspects of political actors, structures, and processes and incorporate them in multicausal arguments. From there we address the distinctive methodological issues that arise in attempting to appraise theoretical claims about the political consequences of movements (Tilly 1999, Earl 2000, Giugni 2004, McVeigh et al. 2006, Tilly & Tarrow 2006). We conclude with suggestions for future thinking and lines of empirical inquiry.

HOW MIGHT MOVEMENTS MATTER IN POLITICS?

The question of how movements might matter is about the nature of the outcome or dependent variable. Scholars of the political impacts of movements have moved away from addressing whether movements or organizations are successful in gaining new benefits or acceptance (Gamson 1990) and have turned to examining the causal influence of movements on political outcomes and processes drawn from political sociology literature (Andrews 2004, Amenta & Caren 2004). The main potential political consequences of movements at the structural level are the extension of democratic rights and practices and the formation of new political parties. At a more intermediate level are changes in policy, which can provide consistent benefits to a movement's constituency as well as enforce collective identities and aid challengers in struggles against targets not mainly state oriented. Scholars have found it valuable to divide the policymaking process into its component parts. Scholars of political outcomes have deemphasized Gamson's (1990) "acceptance" but have argued that challengers can gain political leverage of a similar kind through connections with political parties and through electoral activity as well as through what Gamson calls "inclusion," or challengers occupying state positions.

Beyond Success

Scholars of the political impact of movements have dropped or modified Gamson's (1990) types of success—new advantages and acceptance—largely because these outcomes and the idea of success generally do not

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correspond well to the degree of potential influence over states and political processes. For Gamson, success in new advantages means that an SMO's goals were mainly realized, and this criterion works well when a movement has one important political goal, such as gaining suffrage (Banaszak 1996, McCammon et al. 2001) or banning alcohol (Szymanski 2003). But the success standard limits the consideration of many possible political impacts. Challengers may fail to achieve their stated program—and thus be deemed a failure—but still win substantial new advantages for their constituents, a situation likely for challengers with far-reaching goals (Amenta et al. 2005). There may be beneficial unintended consequences (Tilly 1999). Challengers can do worse than fail; they can induce backlashes, such as repression or increased policing (Piven & Cloward 1977; Fording 2001; Snow & Soule 2009, chapter 6). Challengers' constituencies may gain political results that challengers do not cause (Skrentny 2006b).

To address some of these issues, other scholars start with an alternative based on the concept of collective goods or on group-wise advantages or disadvantages from which nonparticipants cannot be easily excluded, and these scholars focus explicitly on states and political processes (Amenta & Young 1999). Political collective goods can be material, such as categorical social spending programs, but can also be less tangible, such as new ways to refer to a group. SMOs almost invariably claim to represent a group extending beyond the organization's adherents and make demands that would provide collective benefits to that larger group (Tilly 1999). The collective benefit standard takes into account that a challenger can have considerable impact even when it fails to achieve its goals and that successful challengers could have negligible consequences (Amenta & Young 1999, Andrews 2004, Agnone 2007).

These ideas regarding new benefits and collective goods have been connected to political sociological concepts (see Amenta et al. 2002). From this perspective, the greatest sort of impact is the one that provides a group with continuing leverage over political processes and increases the political returns to the collective action of a challenger. These gains are usually at a structural or systemic level of state processes and constitute a kind of meta-collective benefit. Gains in the democratization of state processes, such as winning the right to vote by a nonfranchised group, increase the productivity of future state-directed collective action by such groups. Many of the most prominent social movements have sought this basic goal, including movements of workers, women, and, in the United States, the civil rights movement (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992, Banaszak 1996, McAdam 1999, McCammon et al. 2001). The formation by movements of established political parties is also a structural political change (Schwartz 2000 and more below), if one step removed from transformations in states.

Collective Goods through Policy

Most collective action, however, is aimed at an intermediate level: benefits that will continue to flow from states to groups unless some countervailing action is taken. These generally involve major legislative changes in state policy and the bureaucratic enforcement and implementation of that policy. State policies are institutionalized benefits that provide collective goods in a routine fashion to all those meeting specified requirements. For example, once enacted and enforced with bureaucratic means, categorical social spending programs provide benefits in such a manner (Amenta 1998). The beneficiaries gain rights of entitlement to the benefits, and bureaucratic enforcement helps to ensure the routine maintenance of such collective benefits. The issue and group are privileged in politics. Regulatory bureaucracies may advance mandates in the absence of new legislation, as with state labor commissions (Amenta 1998) or affirmative action (Bonastia 2000). However, policies vary widely in their implications. Challengers may win something minor for their constituency, such as a one-time symbolic benefit designed mainly to reassure an audience of voters or other bystanders (Santoro 2002).

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Through their policies, states can ratify or attempt to undermine emerging collective identities or help to create new ones, sometimes on purpose, though often inadvertently. Insofar as a challenger constructs a new collective identity that extends to a beneficiary group and provides psychological rewards, winning a political affirmation of this identity is a potentially important accomplishment (Polletta & Jasper 2001). States provide authoritative communications that can greatly influence identities and are often in the vanguard of recognizing new identity claims through changes in policy (Amenta & Young 1999). These results can range from a challenger's constituency gaining more respectful labels in official governmental representations, to having the group formally recognized in state policies and regulations (Skrentny 2002, 2006b), to defining racial categories (Nobles 2000).

Movements and organizations that are not primarily state oriented may also target the state for policies that aid them in struggles against other targets (Tarrow 1998), thus increasing the probability of influencing these targets. For example, labor movements focus on states to ensure rights to organize and engage in collective bargaining. Also, civil rights movements have had an advantage in fighting discrimination by corporations through equal employment opportunity (EEO) laws (Skrentny 2002). By outlawing a set of practices and providing legal remedies, EEO laws create another channel for collective action. Furthermore, by creating a bureau, the EEOC, these laws have provided additional resources and legitimation for the movement. Thus, challengers can demand state regulations on industries (Schneiberg & Bartley 2001). States may also become a fulcrum in transnational protest (Paxton et al. 2006). Challengers blocked in one state may appeal to sympathetic SMOs in other states to apply pressure to their governments to alter the policies of the original state.

Scholars can better assess the impact of challengers by dividing the process of creating new laws that contain collective benefits into the processes of (*a*) agenda setting, (*b*) legislative content, (*c*) passage, and (*d*) implementation (Amenta & Young 1999, Andrews & Edwards 2004). If a challenger places its issue onto the political agenda, it has increased its probability of winning some collective benefits for its larger constituency. Influencing the political agenda matters for achieving legislative gains (Baumgartner & Mahoney 2005), and movement protest is most influential at this early stage of the policy process (King et al. 2005, 2007; Soule & King 2006; Johnson 2008; Olzak & Soule 2009). A challenger can also work to increase the value of collective benefits included in any bill that makes it onto the legislative agenda (Bernstein 2001, Amenta 2006). Once the content has been specified, moreover, challengers can influence individual legislators to vote for the bill and thus influence the probability of gaining specified collective benefits (Amenta et al. 2005). Then the program must be implemented, and the more secure the implementation the greater the probability of collective benefits over the long run (Andrews & Edwards 2004). Winning a new interpretation of a law can be a collective benefit, too, and litigation has been an increasingly important process for movements, especially regarding the enforcement of existing laws (McCann 2006, Skrentny 2006a).

Beyond Acceptance

Democratic states generally recognize challenging organizations, and so scholars in this area do not frequently address Gamson's (1990) "acceptance." More useful is a modified version of Gamson's (1990) "inclusion," or challengers who gain state positions through election or appointment, which can lead to collective benefits (Banaszak 2005, Amenta 2006, Paxton et al. 2006). Important intermediate influence can come through elections and political parties, as the willingness of officials to aid the constituents of social movements often turns on electoral considerations (Goldstone 2003, Amenta 2006). The connections can be direct and tight, as when movements form their own political parties (Schwartz 2000), which

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can take office (usually in coalitions) and act on their platforms, as with some left-libertarian and green parties in Europe (Rucht 1999). In polities with direct democratic devices, movements may win or influence policy changes through referendums (Kriesi 2004).

In the U.S. polity, creating an enduring movement party has not been possible, and direct democratic devices are restricted to some states (Amenta 2006). More influential in U.S. settings are challengers' bids to forge enduring electoral connections with one of the main political parties, as through influencing the party platforms of presidential nominees. Historically, this has been done, for example, between labor and civil rights movements and the national Democratic party (Amenta 1998) and, more recently, between Christian Right and antiabortion movements and the Republican party (Micklethwait & Wooldridge 2005, Fetner 2008). U.S. national legislative candidates are not bound by party platforms, however. Movements have sought to influence individual candidates and elections, often aiding friends or combating enemies as determined by voting records or campaign promises, and have avoided strict alignments with parties to maximize membership (Clemens 1997, Amenta 2006, McVeigh 2009). As for inclusion proper, U.S. challenging organizations' representatives are far more likely to be appointed to state positions, such as to regular governmental bureaucracies or to commissions addressing a specific issue (Amenta 2006), than to win office through elections; care is needed, however, to distinguish between inclusion of actual participants in challenges and inclusion of members of the challenger's target constituency.

DO MOVEMENTS MATTER IN POLITICS, AND IF SO, HOW MUCH?

The question of if and how much movements matter in politics is important because one key motivation for studying movements is that they effect political and social change. Some scholars view social movements other than labor as relatively lacking in political influence compared with other political actors and institutions (Skocpol 2003, Burstein & Sausner 2005). Others tend to evaluate movements as highly influential (see Berry 1999, Baumgartner & Mahoney 2005, Piven 2006). Abundant research indicates that various individual movements and their activities have influenced specific policies, but researchers often find that movement influence is contingent on favorable political or other circumstances (see **Table 1**). The more global questions of whether most movements have mattered and how much they have mattered in comparison with other determinants of political outcomes have not been conclusively addressed.

Some scholarship employs research designs that provide leverage on the global questions. Notably, researchers have compared influence across a random sample of U.S. movement organizations (Gamson 1990); across the 58 largest civic membership organizations (Skocpol 2003), about half of which are SMOs; and across a selection of major political issues (Baumgartner & Mahoney 2005). Other studies examine similar movements across countries (Kriesi et al. 1995; Giugni 2004, 2007; Linders 2004; Halfmann 2010). Yet others analyze individual movements and all key legislation enacted during the period of contention (Viterna & Fallon 1998, Werum & Winders 2001, Amenta 2006, Agnone 2007, Johnson 2008, Santoro 2008, Olzak & Soule 2009), such as relating to old age, LGBT rights, or the environment. These studies find that SMOs and other civic organizations have been influential. Gamson (1990) finds that most of his challenging organizations gained some form of success, although success is often contingent on goals, activities, and forms of organization. Skocpol (2003) finds influence among civic organizations with active membership affiliates across the country. Others also find that movement influence depends in part on the circumstances under which movements contend (Amenta 2006, Santoro 2008, Halfmann 2010) or is confined to the

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Table 1 Movement influence as a topic addressed in articles[a] in the top four sociology journals and *Mobilization*, 2001–2009, by movement family and prominence, outcome type analyzed, size and direction of effect, and direct or mediated influence

Movement family (prominence)[b]	Movements examined[c]	Influence of Movements					Mediation and Type			
		Strong	Modest	Weak	None	Negative	Unmediated	Mediated	Partisan Context	Legislative Stage
Labor (1)	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Civil rights, black (2)	11	3	6	1	1	0	1	10	4	1
Feminism/women's rights (4)	11	7	3	1	0	0	1	10	4	2
Nativist/supremacist (5)	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Environment (6)	6	1	2	3	0	0	1	5	1	0
Antiwar (9)	2	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0
Civil rights, other (19)	5	0	1	3	1	0	0	5	4	0
Christian Right (21)	2	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
Lesbian and gay (24)	3	0	1	2	0	0	0	3	0	1
Other/non-U.S.	11	5	5	1	0	0	0	11	5	1
Outcome type										
Structural	3	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	0	1
Policy, multiple	10	3	5	2	0	0	1	9	1	2
Policy, single	40	14	14	9	3	0	4	36	17	3
Election/inclusion	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Total	54	18	20	12	3	1	7	47	18	6

[a]The 45 articles categorized in this table: Agnone 2007; Almeida 2008; Amenta et al. 2005; Andrews 2001; Chen 2007; Cornwall et al. 2007; Davis & Rosan 2004; Dixon 2008; Evans & Kay 2009; Giugni 2007; Howard-Hassmann 2005; Ingram & Rao 2004; Isaac et al. 2006; Jacobs & Helms 2001; Jacobs & Kent 2007; Johnson 2008; Kane 2003, 2007; King et al. 2005, 2007; Lee 2007; McAdam & Su 2002; McCammon 2009; McCammon et al. 2001, 2007, 2008; McCright & Dunlap 2003; McVeigh et al. 2003, 2004, 2006; Noy 2009; Olzak & Ryo 2007; Olzak & Soule 2009; Pedriana 2004, 2006; Santoro 2002, 2008; Skrentny 2006a; Soule 2004; Soule & King 2006; Soule & Olzak 2004; Stearns & Almeida 2004; Tsutsui & Shin 2008; Viterna & Fallon 1998; Werum & Winders 2001.

[b]The prominence of a movement family (shown in parentheses) refers to its ranking in *The New York Times* citations, 1900–1999 (see Amenta et al. 2009).

[c]Number of movements in each category examined. For articles that examined more than one movement family or organization within that family, each case is coded separately.

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agenda-setting phase of the policy process (Baumgartner & Mahoney 2005, Olzak & Soule 2009).

Recent high-profile articles also indicate that movements have been significantly influential. **Table 1** considers all 45 articles, encompassing the analysis of 54 movements or movement organizations, published in the top four sociology journals and *Mobilization* between 2001 and 2009 that examined state-related outcomes of movements; all but 4 of the 54 found at least one positive relationship between these outcomes and a movement measure. These measures included the number of protest events, membership size, and organizational density. In 33 instances, these relationships were established through regression analyses controlling for many other potential determinants of the outcomes. In 12 others, comparative and historical analysts selected cases to control for other potential determinants of the outcomes, meaning that about 83% of the movements examined were deemed significantly influential beyond controls.

Yet, for several reasons, these studies do not conclusively answer the general question of whether movements are typically influential and how influential they have been in comparison to other potential causes. Almost all the research is on policy, with only three instances of movements seeking structural influence. Yet only in 10 cases do researchers address all legislation or multiple pieces of legislation related to a movement's main issue. And even these studies only sometimes separate out the most key legislation in terms of benefits it may provide (Amenta et al. 2005, Olzak & Soule 2009). Almost three-fourths of the movement relationships analyzed (40 out of 54) addressed specific policy outcomes of interest to movements at particular points in time. Only one article addressed an issue relating to acceptance, in this instance a movement's influence on electoral results, which was negative (McVeigh et al. 2004). As for the degree of influence, using the scholars' evaluations plus our own when these are not supplied, we find that 18 of these findings indicate a strong (and positive) movement influence and another 20 indicate moderate influence. Thus, about 70% of the relationships show reasonably high movement influence. However, this means that 30% of the findings show negligible positive influence of movements: 12, or 22%, exhibit weak influence, 3 find no influence, and 1 exhibits negative influence. Moreover, the impact of a movement is typically found to be contingent on other circumstances, such as mobilization occurring during a favorable political alignment. In 47 of the 50 instances in which there was a significantly positive movement effect, the influence was mediated—an issue to which we return below.

Finally, this scholarship disproportionately examines the largest U.S. movements; of the 54 movements examined in the articles, 31 involved U.S. labor, African American civil rights, feminism, nativism, and environmentalism, five of the six most-covered movement families in the twentieth century (Amenta et al. 2009), with 22 for the civil rights and feminist movements alone. The larger movements have been found to be more influential. Of the three most-covered movements (labor, African American civil rights, and feminism) appearing in research, only 3 of 24 analyses, or 12.5%, found the movement to have either weak or no influence; among the rest of the movement categories, 13 of 30 analyses, or 43%, found weak, no, or negative influence.

It is worth discussing why so often research finds that movements exhibit little or no influence. For example, McVeigh et al. (2004) find that the framing that aided the mobilization of the Ku Klux Klan dampened its electoral influence. Cornwall et al. (2007) find that the women's suffrage movement had no effect in the states where the movement was mobilized, arguing that the contexts were ripe for mobilization but not for exerting influence. Skrentny (2006b) finds that although Asian Americans, Latinos, and American Indians benefited from Labor Department affirmative action regulations, the organizations representing these groups exerted little effort to gain the benefits; by contrast, white ethnic groups sought to

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gain these benefits but failed because of the perceptions of policy makers. Giugni (2007) finds no influence of the antiwar movement on military spending and argues that the high-profile foreign policy domain limits the viability of their claims. McAdam & Su (2002) argue that the marginal influence of anti–Vietnam War protest was due to the movement's inability to be simultaneously threatening to elites and persuasive to the public. If antiwar movements face higher hurdles, however, they have achieved some influence (Marullo & Meyer 2004), and it is worth identifying the conditions under which that is possible. More generally, scholars of social movements have also found that certain issues and policies may be very difficult for movements to influence, including policies (*a*) closely tied to the national cleavage structure, (*b*) for which high levels of political or material resources are at stake, (*c*) regarding military matters, or (*d*) on which public opinion is very strong (Kriesi et al. 1995, Giugni 2004, Burstein & Sausner 2005). In these policy areas, there are more likely to be powerful state and nonstate actors working in opposition to the movement. Similarly, in structurally unfavorable political contexts in which a group's democratic rights are greatly restricted (Amenta 2006), influence over policy is extremely difficult to achieve.

Given the magnitude of the task, the global questions have not been addressed systematically by either quantitative or comparative historical research. This is largely due to the high data barriers and the general trade-off between the size of the question and the ability of scholars conclusively to answer it. Ascertaining the degree to which movements have mattered politically would require analyses over long time periods and across many different movements, issue areas, and countries. Scholars would need to demonstrate that movements were at least as causally influential as various political institutions, conditions, and actors previously found to affect policy (Amenta 2003). This sort of study has not been undertaken in part because the movements are difficult to study cross-nationally and over long stretches of time. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development does not collect data on social movements across capitalist democracies the way it does on economics, demographics, and party representation; measures of movement scope or activity, aside from those regarding labor collected by the International Labor Organization, are typically gained only through labor-intensive archival research. Comparative and historical analyses of movement influence would pose even greater logistical difficulties given their steep knowledge requirements.

In short, there is conclusive evidence from well-crafted studies that the largest movements have had political impacts on some issues of concern to them. Scholars who ignore movements in analyses of political issues over which large movements are contending do so at their peril. All the same, it remains difficult to pinpoint how much even the larger movements have mattered in comparison to other actors and structures in relation to specific outcomes of interest. Also, some types of issues and situations seem relatively impervious to movement influence. We discuss at the end of this review some strategies to make more progress on these questions.

UNDER WHICH CONDITIONS DO MOVEMENTS MATTER IN POLITICS?

The question addressed by most scholarship focused on movements is the conditions under which movements matter politically. The initial hypotheses about the political impacts of movements were the same as the hypothesized determinants of mobilization. Scholars focused on a movement's mobilizing structures, framing and other strategies, and political contexts favorable to mobilization (McAdam et al. 1996). These arguments hold that what promotes challengers' mobilization will also promote their political influence; in short, specific forms of challenger organization, strategies (including framing strategies and protest types), and political opportunities will result in both mobilization and political influence and

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benefits for mobilized challengers. Although scholars still address the roles of mobilizing structures, strategies, and political contexts, results indicate that the conditions that produce mobilization sometimes make it difficult to achieve influence at stages in the policy process beyond agenda setting. Finally, political mediation arguments reject the search for magic bullets: There are no specific organizational forms, strategies, or political contexts that will always help challengers. Instead, scholars should be looking for specific forms of organization and strategies that are more productive in some political contexts than in others.

Mobilization

The simplest argument has been that mobilization in itself is likely to be influential, a throwback to rational choice accounts in which once a collective action problem (say, gaining contributions for pizza) is solved, a collective benefit (pizza) is automatically provided. The ability to mobilize different sorts of resources is key for the impact of movements, and mobilization of resources and membership does provide some political influence (Rucht 1999, McCarthy & Zald 2002). Because the possibility of having influence is predicated on SMOs' survival, some scholars focus on the organizational characteristics that promote it (Gamson 1990, McCarthy & Zald 2002). Yet, as we note above, political influence is not something SMOs can simply provide, pizza-like, for themselves.

Initial debates also addressed which forms of organization or mobilizing structures (McAdam et al. 1996) were likely to produce political gains. Gamson (1990) found that bureaucratic SMOs were more likely to gain new advantages (cf. Piven & Cloward 1977). SMOs with greater strategic resources are deemed likely to prevail over others in the field (Ganz 2000), and resourceful movement infrastructures, including diverse leaders, complex leadership structures, multiple organizations, informal ties, and resources coming substantially from members, brought gains in policy implementation for the civil rights movement in the South (Andrews 2004). Yet organizations designed to mobilize people and resources behind a cause may not be best suited to engage in the tasks of political influence, persuasion, or litigation. For example, the Townsend Plan, an organization highly successful in mobilizing the elderly, saw its leaders who were in charge of mobilizing supporters often at odds with its Washington lobbyists and electoral strategists, who were relatively understaffed. The organization gained almost a million members very quickly in 1934, but it could not present coherent testimony in Congress (Amenta 2006). This problem may be alleviated at the movement level; a large number of tactically diverse organizations are associated with political influence for the civil rights movement (Olzak & Ryo 2007). In individual SMOs, diverse leaders and complex leadership structures may reduce the potential conflict between these two sorts of leaders and missions (Andrews 2004).

Strategies: Framing, Protest, and Electoral Activity

The second line of thinking that addresses the potential influence of mobilized challengers focuses on their strategies, singling out for special attention claims-making and framing (for a review, see Polletta & Ho 2004). Cress & Snow (2000) argue that for a challenger to have a policy impact it must employ resonant prognostic and diagnostic frames—to identify problems and pose credible solutions to them. McCammon (2009) finds that women's jury rights mobilizations across states that led to favorable outcomes were those that defined a problem as serious and broad in scope, provided a clear rationale, and offered concrete evidence to support the proposed policy (cf. Burstein & Hirsh 2007).

Other problems remain, however, with using framing to explain political outcomes. Only rarely is the influence of frames addressed in multivariate contexts (cf. Cress & Snow 2000, Burstein & Hirsh 2007, McCammon 2009). For movements to be influential, their frames need to be minimally plausible and culturally

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resonant (Taylor & Van Dyke 2004), but their value likely varies by setting. Amenta (2006) finds that the Townsend Plan's frames did not change much, but its influence varied greatly over time. More important, frames that help mobilize supporters may be counterproductive in trying to influence policy makers (Lipsky 1968, Mansbridge 1986). McVeigh et al. (2004) find that the frames that helped the Ku Klux Klan mobilize constituents, using an us/them boundary, impeded its ability to influence elections. Amenta (2006) finds that the Townsend Plan's call for generous $200 monthly pensions, designed to mobilize elderly supporters, was used by opponents to reduce public support for its sponsored legislation, which provided more modest stipends. Pedriana (2006) finds that rights frames work best in legal settings regardless of how well they work for mobilization or political campaigns (see review in McCann 2006). More generally, SMO leaders must find ways to alter their mobilization frames in addressing political decision makers or courts, or they must cede control over these processes to other SMOs or like-minded policy makers. Scholars need to address simultaneously the frames used to mobilize movement support and to exert influence in political settings (Evans 1997).

Working from the hypothesis that specific strategies will work differently at individual phases of the policy cycle, recent scholarship has focused on the impact of protest for threat, protest for persuasion (Andrews & Edwards 2004), and institutional protest, as well as on the political agenda-setting stage of the policy process. Protest for threat is characterized by withholding compliance with political and other institutions, whereas protest for persuasion is meant to influence politicians by winning over bystanders through large-scale demonstrations of support, such as peaceful marches. Olzak & Soule (2009) find that institutional environmental protest events influenced congressional hearings, which are associated with policy action (Baumgartner & Mahoney 2005). Protest of all types, however, works through what Andrews (2004) calls the action/reaction model, for which the response of political authorities to collective action is expected to be rapid.

There has not been nearly as much work, however, on the strategies that work through slow-moving processes. This is a major gap, as this includes most movement collective action addressing political institutions and electoral politics, as well as legal challenges. Although scholars tend to view movement action addressing institutional politics as assimilative and likely to be less influential than protest, electoral strategies, such as supporting favored candidates and opposing disfavored ones, are often far more assertive and influential in politics (Clemens 1997, Amenta et al. 2005). Political actors seek to gain reelection and to act on party principles and personal values and are typically much less afraid of movements threatening, say, to occupy their offices than to drive them out of office. The finding that movements are less influential in later parts of the policy process may mean that the forms of organization, frames, and strategies applicable to mobilization are unhelpful at best in later stages of the policy process, or that protest has great limits as a movement strategy.

Beyond protest, social movements seek to have influence over politics through electoral activity (Goldstone 2003, Banaszak 2005, Earl & Schussman 2004, Koopmans 2004, Meyer 2005), seeking sustained leverage and not simply a quick reaction. Yet there is little research on movement influence over elections and the political influence gained through such electoral support. Fetner (2008) finds that the Christian Right influenced the Republican platform on gay rights issues, and Micklethwait & Wooldridge (2005) argue that George W. Bush's campaigns relied on foot soldiers from the Christian Right, gun rights, and antiabortion movements. However, Green et al. (2001) find that support for the Christian Right accounted less for electoral outcomes across states than did the accessibility of the political party nomination processes to the movement (see also Kellstedt et al. 1994). Andrews (2004) finds that African American candidates elected to office across Mississippi counties depended

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significantly on the strength of the local civil rights movement. Amenta et al. (1992) find that Townsend Plan mobilization positively influenced whether its endorsed representatives were elected. Amenta et al. (2005) also found that endorsed legislators in office significantly increased spending on old-age programs, and senators' willingness to vote for a key old-age pension bill depended in part on electoral action.

Political Context

A third argument is that once a challenger is mobilized the main thing influencing its impact is the political context or opportunity structure. Early claims that in open states with strong administrative capacities challengers will achieve policy gains (Kitschelt 1986, Kriesi et al. 1995; see Kriesi 2004) have been criticized on the grounds that, within any country, movement influence has varied over time (Amenta et al. 2002) and that a state's bureaucratic capacities vary by issue (Giugni 2004). Others rely on more fine-grained conceptual developments in political sociology (see Amenta et al. 2002, Banaszak et al. 2003), arguing that long-standing characteristics of states and political institutions—the polity structure, the democratization of state institutions, electoral rules and procedures, and existing state policies—influence the prospects of challenges. The centralization and division of power between each branch of government mean both multiple points of access and veto. The level of democratization influences mobilization (Tilly 1999), and the bases for exclusion from democratic processes increase the likelihood that groups will mobilize along these lines, such as African American civil rights in the U.S. context (McAdam 1999) and workers in the European one (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992). Electoral rules such as winner-take-all systems discourage the formation of new political parties (Schwartz 2000). The relative representation of U.S. Democrats has been shown to amplify the impact of nonconservative movements (Meyer & Minkoff 2004). Equally important, however, the political contexts that promote mobilization, especially those in which a movement's constituency is threatened, do not always increase the productivity of collective action by challengers (Meyer & Minkoff 2004, Soule & King 2006, Cornwall et al. 2007).

Political Mediation Models

Finally, many scholars have developed different political mediation accounts of social movement consequences (Piven & Cloward 1977, Amenta et al. 1992, Skocpol 1992, Amenta 2006). According to political mediation models, in a democratic political system mobilizing relatively large numbers of committed people and making plausible claims are necessary for movements to achieve political influence. Yet a challenger's action is more likely to produce results when institutional political actors see benefit in aiding the group the challenger represents (Almeida & Stearns 1998, Jacobs & Helms 2001, Kane 2003). To secure new benefits, challengers will typically need help or complementary action from like-minded state actors. This requires engaging in collective action that changes the calculations of institutional political actors, such as elected officials and state bureaucrats, and adopting organizational forms and strategic action that fit political circumstances. For a movement to be influential, state actors need to see it as potentially facilitating or disrupting their own goals—augmenting or cementing new electoral coalitions, gaining in public opinion, increasing the support for the missions of governmental bureaus.

Political mediation arguments can rely on action/reaction models of influence, such as Piven & Cloward's (1977) argument that disruptive collective action by poor people in times of electoral instability induces public spending (see also Fording 2001). But most political mediation arguments work through slow-moving processes. For instance, Skocpol (2003) argues that mass-based interest organizations have to fit the U.S. political context to be influential over the long term, which means gaining a wide geographical presence to cover

a district-based Congress; recent advocacy organizations with Washington bases and paper memberships often fail to do so. Other scholars argue that particular strategies work best in the U.S. political context (Bernstein 2001, Szymanski 2003). Recent work makes and tests claims about the influence of different strategies at different points in the political process (McAdam & Su 2002, Cornwall et al. 2007, Olzak & Soule 2009) or in different political contexts (Kriesi et al. 1995, Cress & Snow 2000, Ingram & Rao 2004, Linders 2004, Soule & Olzak 2004, McCammon et al. 2008).

More generally, the political mediation argument holds that challengers need to alter strategies and forms to address specific political contexts, such as the level of democratization in the polity, the partisan regime in power, and the development of bureaucratic authority surrounding the issue at hand (Amenta et al. 2005, Amenta 2006). The standard distinction between disruptive and assimilative strategies is dropped in favor of addressing assertiveness, i.e., increasingly strong sanctions beyond protest. If the political regime is supportive and the domestic bureaucrats are professionalized and supportive, limited or symbolic protest is likely to be sufficient to provide influence. By contrast, achieving collective benefits through public policy is likely to be more difficult without a supportive regime or an administrative authority, and more assertive collective action is required. The sanctions in assertive institutional collective action threaten to increase or decrease the likelihood of gaining or keeping something valuable to political actors—often their positions. The institutional collective action of challengers works largely by mobilizing many people behind a course of activity and thus demonstrates that a large segment of the electorate cares strongly about an issue. These theoretical claims have the advantage of specifying political conditions and making links between systemic political contexts and more short-term ones. Consistent with these claims are research findings that diverse tactics or organizational types at the movement level produce political gains (Olzak & Ryo 2007, Johnson 2008).

Political mediation arguments also hold that many simultaneous circumstances, some movement related and some not, are required to effect extensive change (McAdam & Su 2002, Amenta et al. 2005, Amenta 2006, Giugni 2007). In the U.S. setting, where controlling the government through a party is rarely an option, a national challenger with far-reaching goals is likely to need (*a*) a favorable partisan context, (*b*) its issue already on the agenda, (*c*) high challenger organization and mobilization, (*d*) credible claims-making directed at elites and the general public, and (*e*) plausible assertive action such as electoral strategies that seek to punish policy opponents and aid friends (Amenta et al. 2005, Amenta 2006). The same is likely to be true for bids to transform the structural position of groups, such as through voting or civil rights. Giugni (2007) similarly argues that a movement must also have public opinion in its favor to effect major change (see also Olzak & Soule 2009; cf. Amenta et al. 2005, Agnone 2007).

The explanatory value of political mediation arguments is underlined by recent literature on social movements. Of the 50 positive relationships found, 47, or 94%, found that the size of the effect of the movement activity or size indicator varied by other factors interacting with it. Of these other factors, the most frequently noted was the partisan political context, involving 18 movements; another 6 addressed the stage in the legislative process (see **Table 1**). Another set of interactions of note included 11 involving different sorts of tactics. Only 5 examinations of movements did not attempt to model any sort of interaction. Two articles (Soule & Olzak 2004, Giugni 2007) reported examining interaction effects, but they did not find any significant ones.

In short, research on the political influence of movements has advanced beyond deploying the hypotheses initially used to explain mobilization. Scholars have developed more complex theoretical ideas about the conditions under which influence occurs, specifying interactions between aspects of movements and their actions and other political actors and political

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contexts, often deploying concepts from political science and political sociology. These arguments and findings regarding the conditions under which movements might be influential bear on the question of how influential movements have been and can possibly be. If in these causal recipes for major political change such as alterations in democratization, major domestic policy gains, or withdrawal from participation in war, mobilization is a minor ingredient for which substitutes are available, then movements are likely rarely to matter greatly. If mobilization and specific lines of assertive action are necessary ingredients, the role of movements in such major changes is much greater. The results suggest that less dramatic changes such as reaching the policy agenda stage or augmenting existing policies seem to require few conditions.

HOW TO TELL IF MOVEMENTS MATTER?

Analyzing the state-related consequences of social movements poses a series of methodological hurdles for empirical appraisals of theoretical claims. Establishing a challenger's impact on states means to demonstrate that state-related collective goods would not have appeared in the absence of the movement or specific actions taken by it. Determining whether a movement had any consequences and, if so, which ones is not an easy task (Amenta & Young 1999, Tilly 1999, Earl 2000). Usually there are many sets of actors in areas of concern to social movements, and these actors and other conditions may influence outcomes of interest to challengers. These other potential determinants thus have to be taken into account in assessing the impact of challengers. Further difficulties arise from the fact that recent theoretical claims often specify the mediation of the influence of challengers and their activity through some other set of determinants. Some additional methodological problems are due to the fact that so many researchers are engaged in case studies of large movements. Research on large movements may have few implications for small ones, and scholars do not typically address how the case analyzed compares to or contrasts with other cases. Here we briefly address the ways scholars have sought to clear these methodological hurdles and suggest some additional ways over.

The recent wave of research has tested the potential impact of challengers while addressing alternative arguments mainly traditionally, by gathering data on many ecological units. This scholarship has gained information on a movement's or SMO's presence and activities, other potential determinants of political outcomes, and the outcomes themselves. Employing inferential statistical methods on these units facilitates the assessment of the impact of a challenger relative to those of other relevant conditions and the examination of limited numbers of interactions. Some of these analyses have taken cross-sectional form, comparing movement influence across countries (Paxton et al. 2006) or across subnational units such as states, provinces (Banaszak 1996, McCammon et al. 2001, Ingram & Rao 2004, Amenta et al. 2005), or counties (Andrews 2001, McVeigh et al. 2006). Recently, quantitative analyses have addressed temporality by examining movements over time (McAdam & Su 2002, Giugni 2004, Olzak & Soule 2009). Models can employ lags as appropriate and accommodate time-varying covariates in the analyses. Researchers use (*a*) time-series analysis for individual cases (McAdam & Su 2002); (*b*) hazard-rate models in multiple-case data when the outcome is dichotomous, such as state ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (Soule & Olzak 2004); and (*c*) generalized linear regression models when the outcome is continuous (Amenta et al. 2005, Brooks & Manza 2006). These studies sometimes pool time series and cross sections across subunits such as states (Soule & Olzak 2004, Amenta et al. 2005).

These quantitative case studies usefully could be augmented by historical analyses of the political process in the development of legislation. Historical analyses are the best way to examine the influences of movements that go beyond a quick response. Also, most arguments about the impact of collective action specify

theoretical mechanisms, indicating linkages between various causes and effects, and scholars can trace historical processes to address whether hypothesized theoretical mechanisms occur (Tilly 1999, Andrews 2004, George & Bennett 2005). To make a convincing claim of movement influence, historical analyses need to demonstrate that the challenger changed the plans and agendas of political leaders; the content of the proposals devised by executives, legislators, or administrators; the votes of representatives key to the passage of legislation; or the speed or nature of implementation (Amenta 2006), typically by relying on primary documents including contemporary testimony and news accounts and memoirs.

Historical analyses can be buttressed in several ways. One way is through small-*N* historical comparisons across two or more countries (Banaszak 1996, Linders 2004, Halfmann 2010) or other units (Amenta 2006, Dixon 2008), or across collective action campaigns (Amenta 2006, Dixon 2008, Halfmann 2010). Mediation arguments can be examined by comparisons across challengers with different levels of mobilization and strategic approaches at a given place and time (Clemens 1997), or across places in which one challenger is mobilized in different ways (Dixon 2008) or employing different strategies (Amenta 2006), while holding constant key alternative causal claims. Combining historical analyses with large-*N* quantitative or formal qualitative analyses can have synergistic effects on knowledge accumulation. The detailed information necessary to engage in historical studies makes it easier to pinpoint key legislative or other political changes, to delineate historical cutoff points for time-series analyses, and to devise valid indicators of concepts (Amenta et al. 2005, Amenta 2006, Chen 2007). Small-*N* analyses can also be usefully combined with quantitative analyses (Banaszak 1996, Giugni 2004).

Another way to take advantage of ecological data sets and to employ detailed historical knowledge is to use fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA). FsQCA can address the more complex theoretical arguments presented by political mediation models, as it is designed to address combinational and multiple causation (Ragin 2008). FsQCA has been employed in studies of political consequences of social movements across U.S. states (Amenta et al. 2005, McCammon et al. 2008), cities (Cress & Snow 2000), and counties (McVeigh et al. 2006). FsQCA can select on high values of the dependent measure (Ragin 2008), making it well suited to identifying pathways to unusual, but theoretically and substantively interesting outcomes—such as movements having a major impact—and provides significance tests and can address temporality (Caren & Panofsky 2005).

CONCLUSION

In the past decade there has been extensive research on the political consequences of movements. The biggest and best-studied movements have been shown to be politically influential in various ways, and movement protest is especially influential in helping to set policy agendas. Also, scholars have been advancing beyond initial one-factor hypotheses derived mainly from analyses of mobilization and have been theorizing about the politically mediated effects of movements. These ideas take into account nonmovement factors influential in politics and posit interactive effects among movements, their strategies, and political contextual conditions. Because of the complexity of theoretical arguments and data limitations on movements and their activities, scholars typically employ case or small-*N* studies, but they have done so in increasingly sophisticated ways, analyzing overtime or subnational units for multivariate analyses, occasionally across countries, and sometimes deploying formal qualitative techniques.

Yet much work remains to be done. Scholars need to address theoretically the potential problems that the organizational forms, framing and other strategies, and political contexts that promote mobilization pose for achieving political influence beyond protest. Similarly, more thought is needed regarding the political process beyond agenda

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setting and the impact of movement action aside from protest. Scholars need to explore further movement action aimed at electoral politics, which has often been claimed to be politically influential but has rarely been shown to be influential (Amenta et al. 2005, Amenta 2006).

In the quantitative case studies prominent in recent research, scholars should prioritize the policies most consequential to challengers and try to pinpoint how much movements have mattered in comparison with other determinants of outcomes. Structural changes such as winning democratic rights and major policy transformations should be at the top of the list. Quantitative case studies can also exploit the advantages of fsQCA, which can address both the interactions specified by political mediation arguments and the more unusual situation of major changes induced by movements. Also, instead of theorizing about their cases as if they were typical—expecting that broad explanatory claims and findings should apply to all movements (cf. McAdam & Su 2002, Giugni 2004)—scholars should think more about what sort of case their case is (Ragin & Becker 1992) and make relevant comparisons with findings regarding other movements. Also, it would be valuable to address less prominent cases, as most recent research has been about the African American civil rights, feminist, and environmental movements. It is also important to address the fact that movements are not always attempting to create new policies, but rather sometimes are fighting to alter or replace entrenched unfavorable policies or defend favorable ones (Baumgartner & Mahoney 2005). Similarly, scholars have paid only scant attention to bids for influence through the courts (Skrentny 2006a) or indirectly through elections (Andrews 2004).

Less prominent in case studies have been deep historical analyses to address major institutional changes and to appraise the mechanisms and time-order aspects of theoretical arguments. These analyses can more easily address the impact of movements on electoral politics and from there move on to policies and other political outcomes. Qualitative studies can address the big questions about major structural shifts in politics related to movements: Did the African American civil rights movement bring about civil and voting rights? Did the women's suffrage movement cause women to gain suffrage? Is the labor movement responsible for legislation regarding worker organization? Although there is the standard trade-off between the size of the question and the ability of research to provide conclusive answers, current research has tilted toward the more easily answered questions. More generally, scholars may want to train their attention on the main political outcomes of interest to movements, such as civil and voting rights for the African American civil rights movement (McAdam 1999), old-age pensions for the old-age pension movement (Amenta 2006), or abortion policy for the abortion rights and antiabortion movements (Halfmann 2010). In these analyses, scholars can address whether, how much, and for what reasons movements mattered in key episodes of political change.

To address the degree to which movements have mattered and to test complex arguments about the mediation of influence will, however, require research designs that compare across several movements and over long stretches of time. Without scholarship comparing across movements, the demonstrated influence of individual movements over specific outcomes is difficult to place in perspective. One way to do so is to compare a small number of historically similar movements with greatly different results in political influence. Moreover, social movement measures should be devised and included in standard cross-national quantitative analyses of major social policy outcomes such as those regarding social spending, as has been done regarding public opinion (Brooks & Manza 2006). Recent work (Amenta et al. 2009) suggests that there have been about 34 major movements over the last century in the United States, and these might be compared comprehensively for their influence in the manner of Gamson's (1990) study of movement organizations. Comparative and historical studies that examine the

population of movements over time in one country, or an entire movement across many countries, taking into account other potential influences on outcomes, would go far in answering the big questions about overall movement influence and in testing hypothesized interactions among movement form, strategies, and political contexts.

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