

Acting Contentiously

In the summer of 2008, as the administration of George W. Bush was winding down in the midst of a massive financial crisis, many Americans were outraged at the bank bailouts that Bush's Treasury Secretary, Henry Paulson, was designing. They were upset that a supposedly "small-government" administration was planning to dole out billions to financial institutions whose reckless habits had thrown the economy into a tailspin. The fact that Paulson had come from the bedrock of financial capitalism, Wall Street, made these heartland Americans – some of them older people living on fixed incomes – even angrier.

But the restlessness at the base of American society hit its stride only when the new Democratic administration came to power in January 2009. All through the 2008 campaign, Barack Obama had hammered the Republicans for fiscal irresponsibility, poor economic planning, and getting into bed with the bankers. But only days after his election in November, it was clear that his administration would be climbing into the same bed. By appointing a treasury secretary, Timothy Geithner, who had played a key role in the bank bailout, and an economic advisor, Larry Summers, who had, in the Clinton administration, approved banks' expansion into dangerous derivatives, Obama was signaling to financial markets that government support for banks that were considered "too big to fail" would not end with the Bush administration.

Aiding the banks was one thing; quite another was the new administration's plan for far-reaching healthcare reform. How, these outraged citizens asked, could the government think of expanding healthcare when millions of Americans were out of work, tax receipts were declining, and state governments were teetering on the edge of bankruptcy? Obama argued that healthcare reform, once it kicked in, would have a positive effect on the budget and that the public would gain from expanded access to healthcare and near-universal coverage. But healthcare reform was complicated (the bill that eventually came before the House of Representatives was over 2,000 pages long), and it was soon apparent to the wounded Republicans that it would provide them with a weapon with which to recoup their losses from the last election. Soon public outrage and

Republican calculations congealed in what came to be called “the Tea Party movement.”

THE TEA PARTY

This “movement” did not begin at the grassroots, as its more militant supporters liked to claim. Instead it was triggered on the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, where “an excitable cable-news reporter named Rick Santelli, a former futures trader and Drexel Burnham Lambert vice-president,” sounded the alarm about the new administration’s plan to provide assistance for homeowners facing foreclosure. “‘President Obama, are you listening?’ he shouted, and he added that he’d been thinking of organizing a Chicago Tea Party in July” (McGrath 2010: 42). The agitation attracted the attention of Glenn Beck, Fox News avatar of the populist right, who founded what he called “the 9.12 project.” Beck went well beyond opposing the financial mess and healthcare reform to excavate every shibboleth of the “values” Right: “things like honesty and hope and courage” and more politically tinged principles such as belief in God and hard work and independence. “Government,” Beck proudly declared, “cannot force me to be charitable” (ibid). By the end of the following week, dozens of small protests were occurring simultaneously around the country, “evoking the legacy of early New England colonists in their revolt against King George” (p. 43). By February 2010, when a national Tea Party convention was held in Nashville, more than 500 Web sites had sprung up to oppose the Democrats’ plans for major healthcare reform.

The activists’ main expressions recalled the disruptive politics of the 1960s: At hundreds of town meetings and demonstrations, Tea Partiers followed the advice of Keli Carender (a.k.a. “The Liberty Belle”) from Seattle: “Unlike the melodramatic lefties, I do not want to get arrested,” she wrote. “I do, however, want to take a page from their playbook and be loud, obnoxious, and in their faces” (McGrath, p. 43). By the summer of 2009, when Democratic Party leaders went back to their districts to call for healthcare reform, thousands of Americans exploded at town hall meetings demanding to know why the government was threatening to reform healthcare. In the fall, more than 300,000 protesters gathered outside the Capital to protest both healthcare reform and the bailouts, and to question the loyalty and even the U.S. citizenship of President Barack Obama.¹ At least at the outset, they were not so much Republican as populist – combining outrage at the government’s bailout of the Wall Street bankers with opposition to “socialized medicine,” with a tinge of racism against an African American President, all of it bound together by a thread of the antigovernment libertarianism that has been a staple of opposition

¹ The so-called “birthers’ movement” was made up of people who determinedly insisted that President Obama was not an American citizen, having been, in their view, born in Kenya, and therefore had been unconstitutionally elected. For more information, go to their Web site at www.birthers.org; visited February 7, 2010.

to central governmental power since the opposition to the Federal Constitution (Elkins and McKittrick 1993: Chapter 1; Friedberg 2000). But that was not the end of the Tea Party's string of contentious actions. From haranguing politicians at town meetings to holding public demonstrations to organizing picnics complete with geezers dressed up as George Washington (McGrath, p. 42). Tea Party activists soon turned to the electoral arena.

When, in late 2009, beloved Democratic Senator Ted Kennedy died and his long-safe Democratic seat came up for election, many Tea Party adepts flocked to Massachusetts to campaign for little known but telegenic Republican candidate, Scott Brown. Traveling around the state in his pickup truck and disguising his lack of concrete policy proposals under a blanket pledge to become "the forty-first vote against the Obama health care proposals," Brown swept to victory against the hapless Democratic candidate, then Lieutenant-Governor Martha Coakley. And in the congressional and gubernatorial elections of 2010, Tea-Party-backed candidates pushed their way into electoral contests in Alaska, Delaware, Nevada, New York and elsewhere against mainstream Republicans.

From a disruptive campaign against runaway government spending, the Tea Party had become a player in American politics.² And although a few George Washington look-alikes still wandered the lobbies of its first national convention, fewer outrageous placards were evident, and leaders such as Judson Phillips, the founder of the social networking site that sponsored the convention, was looking forward to the movement's transformation into an electoral political action committee (PAC). "If we just go out and hold signs and protest," he said, "that's not going to win the election" (*New York Times*, February 7, 2010, p. 1).

WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE?

Think of the forms of action that we have encountered in this brief narrative:

- Harassing politicians at local town meetings
- Organizing demonstrations outside of Congress
- Holding picnics and rallies to mobilize support at the grassroots level
- Dressing up in period costumes
- Supporting candidates in elections
- Organizing a national convention
- Setting up a political action committee to support candidates.

² As the 2010 congressional elections approached, Democrats from swing districts in places as far apart as Arkansas, Nevada, and Illinois began to shy away from healthcare reform and from activist government in general. By February, a group calling itself "Tea Party Nation" organized a for-profit National Tea Party Convention, with Republican vice presidential candidate and right-wing media star, Sarah Palin, as its keynote speaker (www.teapartynation.com/, visited February 3, 2010).

In this story, we see the two major properties of how people act contentiously. First, activists can employ a wide variety of forms of action. This flexibility allows them to adapt to changes in their environment, to combine the actions of broad ranges of actors, and to force political leaders to deal with new issues. From petitioning to holding public meetings to mounting demonstrations in public squares, all the way to disruption and outright violence, one of the key features of social movements is their capacity to employ a wide array of performances and combine them in contentious campaigns that navigate the boundaries of the polity while drawing on a broader “repertoire of contention.” That repertoire, its three major variants, and how it intersects with state actors and the forces of order are the first topics of this chapter.

Second, the forms of action change, both over the long term as repertoires evolve in response to changes in states and capitalism, and in the shorter term, in response to changes in political opportunities and constraints. These changes can be either incremental or paradigmatic, as we will see in the final sections of this chapter. They sometimes lead the same actors to move toward different forms of action and sometimes change the meaning of the same actions from transgressive to contained. This takes us to the two key terms developed by Charles Tilly in his work on contentious politics: “performances” and “repertoires.”

PERFORMANCES AND REPERTOIRES

In the traditional repertoire we sketched in Chapter 2, most actions were direct, often violent, and were usually aimed at achieving immediate redress from close-range opponents. Modern forms of contention are aimed at demonstrating a claim, either to objects of the claim, to power holders, or to significant third parties. This makes contentious politics a form of representative politics – however disruptive – and instills in it symbolic and cultural elements, even in the most violent forms such as terrorism, guerilla warfare, and civil war.

Social protest as performance was already becoming evident in the French Revolution, when forms of dress and public display became politicized (see Chapter 7). The nineteenth century – with its development of the political march, the public demonstration, and the turnout – reinforced the trend toward protesting through ritualized public performances. But only in the twentieth century – when public opinion, the media, and national states began to mediate between claim makers and their targets – did contention become a true performance for the benefit of third parties. With the development of mass media and the growing role of states and third parties in determining the outcomes of protest, the performance of political contention became both routine and professional. The very term we use to designate orderly marches through city streets – the “demonstration” – is itself a performative term.

In this new century, electronic communication has made some forms of physical performance less effective, while other forms – such as use of the Internet – have become more so. For example, protests against the stolen Iranian election

of 2009 were organized largely through new means of electronic communication – cell phones, the Internet, Facebook, and Twitter – that had only recently been imported from the West. As we will see later, this provides the possibility for distant mobilization on the part of exiles or Diaspora nationalists, but it also offers repressive regimes the possibility of suppressing protest by jamming the airwaves or closing off Internet access, as the Iranian regime did to impede protests during the celebration of the founding of the Republic in February 2010 (*New York Times*, February 15, 2010), and as the Chinese government does today.

But new forms of “offline” performance have been steadily invented too, such as the “Seattle repertoire” of theatrical tactics, which included wearing costumes such as the giant puppets that first appeared at the anti-World Trade Organization (WTO) protests of 1998 and were diffused around the world (Wood 2004; Graeber 2009, Smith 2001). Since the turn of the century, and especially among “global justice” protesters, a new performative repertoire has been gaining ground. But it is not absent from the new populist right either. We saw this in the popular use of revolutionary costumes and the evocation of the Boston Tea Party around the country in 2009–2010.

What is it about protest performance that makes it appealing to organizers of contentious politics? First, protest performances add amusement or excitement to public politics; second, they help solidarity to grow through the interaction of the “performers” in protest actions. But the most important reason they are appealing is that they disrupt the routines of life in ways that protesters hope will disarm, dismay, and disrupt opponents. Disruption is the common coin of contentious politics and is the source of the innovations that make social movements creative and sometimes dangerous.

The repertoire of contention offers movements three broad types of collective action – disruption, violence, and contained behavior. These actions combine to different degrees the properties of challenge, uncertainty, and solidarity. The most dramatic forms, *violent ones*, are the easiest to initiate, but under normal circumstances, they are limited to small groups with few resources who are willing to exact damage and risk repression. The opposite forms, *contained ones*, offer the advantage of building on routines that people understand and that elites will accept or even facilitate. This is the source of its numeric predominance in the repertoire, but also of its institutionalization and lack of excitement. The third set of forms, *disruptive ones*, break with routine, startle bystanders, and leave elites disoriented, at least for a time (Piven and Cloward 1977). Disruption is the source of much of the innovation in the repertoire and of the power in movement, but it is unstable and easily hardens into violence or becomes routinized into convention.

We can illustrate this variety and flexibility in the modern repertoire of contention through the range of actions I found in a study of the protest movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s in Italy. Between 1967 and the mid-1970s, a vast wave of protests, strikes, and demonstrations and the beginnings of organized violence arose in Italy. In a detailed catalogue of

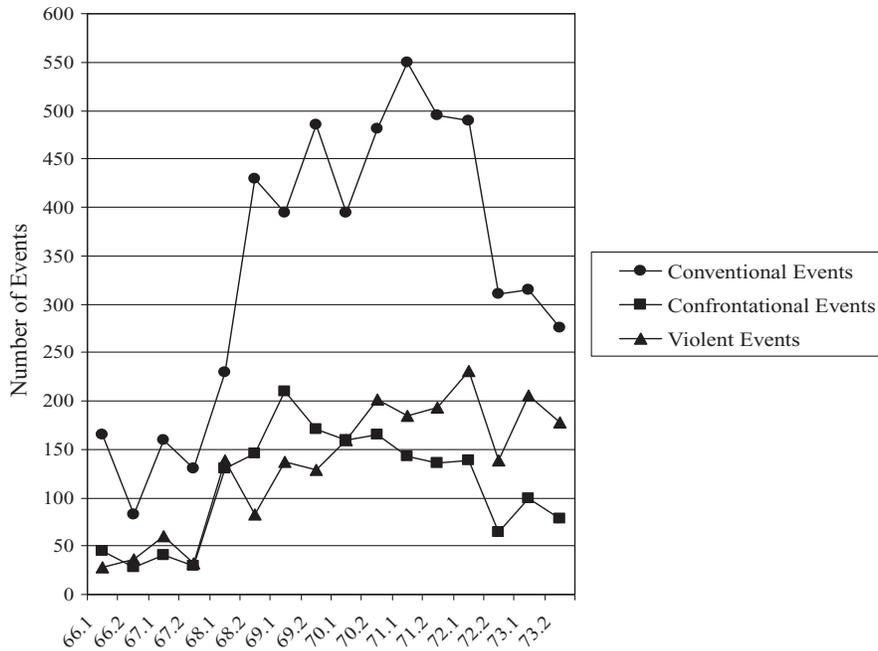


FIGURE 5.1. Italian Contention, 1966–1973. *Source:* Author’s data.

“protest events,” collected from Italy’s major newspaper of record, the *Corriere della Sera*, I tried to track these three main forms of contention across this period. Figure 5.1 summarizes my Italian findings for the period 1966–1973, aggregating the many specific forms of contention found there into disruptive, violent, and routine forms of action.

Other protesters are just as flexible as Italians. When comparing the ecological movement in France and Germany, Dieter Rucht found that, at one time or another, antinuclear protesters in both countries used forms of collective action that were expressive or instrumental, confrontational, violent, or contained, and that came together in campaigns, skirmishes, and battles (1990). Writing of the American Women’s movement, Anne Costain found that “Movement groups changed from working inside the institutions of government . . . to more electorally focused events and rising political protest” (Costain 1992: 126–127). Suzanne Staggenborg found that women’s activities ranged between “teas held at churches to discuss change in the laws and endless trips to the state legislatures” and “counter-hearings” and “speak-outs” (Staggenborg 1991: 29, 44). Although their continent has a well-deserved reputation for political violence, Latin Americans are extremely versatile in how they engage in contentious politics. In a study of 1,318 contentious challenges between 1981 and 1995 in seven countries of the region, James Franklin found 369 demonstrations, 151 strikes and boycotts, 150 violent protests, 79 additional

cases of violent threats, 35 hunger strikes, and 486 “revolutionary actions” (Franklin 2009: 707).³

Of course, overlaps and combinations can be seen among disruption, violence, and routine politics. Disruption easily escalates into violence, but it can also evolve into routine forms of action; violence aims at destruction of people or property, but it also has symbolic elements; and frequent interactions have been reported between routine politics and violence (Auyero 2007). In Part III of this book, we will turn to some of these interactions; for the sake of clarity, in this chapter we will deal separately with disruption, with violence, and finally with contained forms of collective action.

DISRUPTION AND INNOVATION

At the core of contention is the power to disrupt through the invention of innovative ways of performing protest. Disruption has always taken a variety of forms, from the attack on a wrongdoer’s house and the assault on a miller’s grain store in the eighteenth century to the barricades of the nineteenth century to the sit-ins and sit-down strikes of the twentieth century to the disruption of computer networks in our century. In its most direct forms, disruption is no more than the threat of violence: “If you do not produce grain or money,” the challenger seems to be saying “or do not cease to use the machines that are destroying our livelihood, you may suffer physical harm.”

However, in contemporary forms of contention, disruption has a more indirect logic. First, it provides evidence of a movement’s determination. By sitting, standing, or moving together aggressively in public space, demonstrators signal their identity and reinforce their solidarity. Second, disruption obstructs the routine activities of opponents, bystanders, or authorities and forces them to attend to protesters’ demands. Finally, disruption broadens the circle of conflict. By blocking traffic or interrupting public business, protestors inconvenience bystanders, pose a risk to law and order, and draw authorities into what was a private conflict.

Disruption need not threaten public order, but it can profoundly affect social and cultural expectations. In the 1960s and 1970s, the women’s movement taught Americans that political causes can be advanced through personal means (Evans 1980). For example, a primary battlefield for American feminism has been the family – even on the part of nonmilitant women who would never consider themselves feminists. Another recent arena has been the Catholic Church, where “women religious” developed a discursive but highly disruptive critique of hierarchy and patriarchy (Katzenstein 1998: Chapter 6). A third

³ Franklin used full-text news wire reports from wire services indexed on LexisNexis and Keesing’s Record of World Events and Facts on File for Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. This richer and broader source makes his findings only roughly comparable to the findings in Tarrow (1989), which were based only on a daily reading of Italy’s major newspaper of record, *Corriere della Sera*.

was the HIV/AIDS movement, in which groups including the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) used performative techniques, such as the public display of quilts commemorating those who died of AIDS (Gould 2009).

Consider the essentially performative nature of hunger striking. Until the late nineteenth century, only scattered evidence of this form of protest appeared in the historical record, largely from among prisoners who had no other means of self-expression than putting their lives in danger by fasting (Siméant 2009). The practice became more visible among prisoners in Czarist Russia in the period before the Russian Revolution (pp. 14–15). But it was only with the British and American suffragettes at the turn of the twentieth century and Northern Ireland's IRA prison protests in 1914–1918, and again in the 1970s, that hunger striking was widely used (pp. 15–17).⁴ Why do prisoners and others engage in the self-destructive practice of hunger striking? Siméant provides the answer: “The hunger strike is the expression of an indignation which is aimed, through shock, to interrupt the ordinary course of things” – to disrupt normality (pp. 26–27).

Protesters have also invented new forms of direct action, which, instead of demonstrating a claim in public, perform protest by directly attacking the issue at hand. Italians called this “the practice of the objective,” for example, lowering transit costs by getting onto buses without paying their fare. Ecological groups have perfected these forms of direct action. For example, tree sitters in the American Northwest protest clear-cutting by camping out in trees for more-or-less long periods. Gandhi's followers protested the British occupiers' monopoly of textile manufacture by weaving cloth on hand-held looms. This takes us to the issue of nonviolence as disruption.

The Nonviolent Repertoire

Social movement actors innovate to maintain solidarity, attract new supporters, and keep opponents off balance. To the march ending in a demonstration in a public place, the twentieth century added the tools of nonviolent direct action and the sit-in. In places as far apart as pre-independence India, the American South, and Greenham Common, England, nonviolent direct action became a staple of protesters (Chabot 2002, Cortright 2009, Sharp 1973). Although evidence has revealed the use of organized nonviolence farther back in history,⁵ the practice first received formal theorization by Mohandas Gandhi after he and his followers used it against South African discrimination, and then to

⁴ Such performances are not, however, universal; for example, Israel Waismel-Manor finds it almost completely absent in Israel but common in the United States (2005).

⁵ Gene Sharp, in *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, finds nonviolence as far back as the Roman plebeians, who, rather than attack the consuls, withdrew from Rome to a hill later called “the Sacred Mount” (1973: 75). He also finds examples of it in the American Revolution, in Hungarian resistance against Austrian rule in the nineteenth century, and in the general strike and shutdown of governmental functions that defeated the Kapp putsch in Weimar Germany (pp. 76–80).

oppose British colonial rule in India. Although the tactics of this movement were peaceful, Gandhi was quite clear about its disruptive aims. In initiating the 1930–1931 nonviolence campaign in India, he wrote the following to the British Viceroy: “It is not a matter of carrying conviction by argument. The matter resolves itself into one of matching forces” (quoted in Sharp, p. 85).

Although it began as a tool of anticolonial nationalism, nonviolent direct action became modular, spreading to a variety of movements in the 1960s and 1970s as a tool of strategic choice, even when it was not formally theorized (Chabot 2002). It was employed in the American Civil Rights movement, during the Prague spring in 1968, in the student movements of the same year, by European and American peace and environmental movements against nuclear arms and nuclear energy, by opponents of the Marcos regime in the Philippines, by opponents of military rule in Thailand and Burma, and in the overthrow of dictator Slobodan Milosovic in Serbia in 2000.

The innovative nature and the modularity of the nonviolent repertoire were demonstrated dramatically by its use by antiabortion protesters in the United States. Here, a movement that rejected much of the cultural and ideological baggage of the New Left adopted the tactic of blocking the entrances of abortion clinics and resisting nonviolently as its militants were being carried off by the police.⁶ Even in authoritarian systems, where nonviolent protest would be smartly repressed, opposition movements have become skilled at mounting unobtrusive, symbolic, and peaceful forms of disruption that avoid repression while symbolizing contention. Long before state socialism collapsed in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe, opponents of those regimes developed a broad repertoire of symbolic actions, passive resistance, and spray-painting graffiti on walls (Bushnell 1990). The more closed citizens’ access to legitimate participation has become, the more sensitive citizens are to the meanings of symbolic forms of protest. Thus slaves in Portuguese-run Brazil developed forms of dance that appeared to be exotic African-derived amusements but were actually imitations of colonists’ behavior as seen by the slaves.

The Instability of Disruption

But there is a paradox in disruptive forms of contention. Because disruption spreads uncertainty and gives weak actors leverage against powerful opponents, it is the strongest weapon of social movements. But when we analyze modern cycles of collective action, we see that disruptive forms are by no means the most common or the most durable (Tarrow 1989: Chapter 4). Look back

⁶ The movement’s effectiveness was demonstrated by the increasing unwillingness of American doctors or hospitals to perform abortions during the 1980s, and by the shame and guilt induced in women who were forced to go through with unwanted pregnancies. The antiabortion movement is dealt with sensitively by Suzanne Staggenborg in her *The Pro-Choice Movement* (1991: Part 3). Some organizational and tactical aspects are analyzed by John McCarthy in his article, “Pro-Life and Pro-Choice Mobilization” (1987). Also see Kirstin Luker’s *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (1985).

at [Figure 5.1](#): It shows that the forms of contention coded as “disruptive” (e.g., the street or train blockade, the sit-in, the occupation of buildings) reached their height in the exciting days of 1968–1969, when students, workers, and others were in the streets. But by the numeric peak of the cycle, these disruptive forms had declined and contained forms of action (e.g., strikes, marches, meetings) had become more numerous. Not only that, but forms such as the sit-in and the assembly had been routinized, even in the factories, where nonunion-controlled factory councils were formed in the early days of the cycle, and these forms were adopted by the unions and conventionalized (Tarrow 1989: Chapter 6).

Why should the rate of innovation decline in the course of a movement’s development? One reason is that – as we saw in the later stages of the Tea Party movement – the lure of politics draws activists toward more contained forms such as lobbying, publishing, media politics, and elections that will attract less committed supporters. This was what Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward found for the National Welfare Rights Organization that they studied in the 1960s. So determined were its leaders to gain political influences that they turned the movement into a mass membership organization and lost its disruptive power (1977: Chapter 5).

A second reason for the decline in innovation is that disruption depends on maintaining a high level of commitment among participants. This can seldom be sustained for very long, especially when police are determined and elites are united. Each invention of a new tactic is ultimately met by new police tactics (McAdam 1983). Short of violence, organizers run out of new ways to challenge authorities, embolden supporters, and keep the public interested and amused. They themselves soon run out of energy and can eventually “burn out.” In a study of French and German “alter-global” protesters, Ariane Jossin found that three years after her first interviews with them, “the spirit of global activism that was very much alive before, had declined in the lives of the interviewees” (Jossin, in press: ms. p. 56).

Third, faced by determined police and unified governments, the marginal members of social movements – usually in the majority – tend to slip back into private life, leaving the field in the hands of the most militant activists, who are more likely to choose violence than to maintain an uncertain relation with authorities. Disruption splits movements into moderate majorities heading toward institutional politics and militant minorities – often goaded by police and authorities – more likely to descend into violence (della Porta and Tarrow 1986). In Chapter 10, we will return to the bifurcation of disruptive movements through the dual processes of institutionalization and escalation.

Most important, over the medium-long term, what begin as disruptive forms of contention become conventionalized, just as the strike and the demonstration did in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see below). This means that, except at the extremes, we cannot classify a particular form of contention as disruptive or contained; its degree of disruption declines as it becomes more acceptable, more routinized, and more legitimated by law and practice. I will

return to this process of routinization later in this chapter. First, I will distinguish between disruption and violence.

THE CHALLENGES OF VIOLENCE

Violence is the most visible trace of collective action, both in contemporary news coverage and in the historical record. On any recent day, look at a daily newspaper: It may record, among other items, accounts of the civil war in Sudan, guerilla fighting in Afghanistan, suicide bombings in Iraq or Pakistan, brawls between immigrant workers and local thugs in southern Italy, police repression of demonstrators in Iran, violence between soccer fans in Congo, attacks of guerillas on Israeli settlements, and ritualistic killings of young Muslim women in England or the Middle East who have defied their families by wanting to marry outside their faith.

Violence can take so many forms that even the term “collective violence” is an approximation. In addition, violence and nonviolent forms of contention are often found within the same movement, which is another reason to embed the study of violence within a broader framework of contentious politics. For example, in her study of the South African Anti-Apartheid movement, Gay Seidman pointed out that scholars have too readily classified the movement led by Nelson Mandela as “nonviolent.” In actual fact, she writes,

the armed struggle played a key role: it attracted popular support to the anti-apartheid movement, it demonstrated the persistence of resistance to white supremacy despite recession, and it served as a badge of commitment for anti-apartheid activists (Seidman 2001: 111).

In *The Politics of Collective Violence* (2004), Charles Tilly arrayed collective violence into seven major categories according to the degree of coordination among actors and the salience of the short-run damage inflicted. [Figure 5.2](#) places six forms of collective violence on this grid, above the larger category of “individual aggression,” in which the degree of damage inflicted may be great, but coordination is absent.

Tilly’s six forms bleed into one another but can be distinguished as follows:

brawls – highly violent but involving low levels of coordination – are attacks between individuals in groups in a previously nonviolent gathering; examples include barroom fights or battles at sporting events.

opportunism – at a slightly higher level of coordination – is when individuals shielded from social control use damaging means to pursue forbidden ends, as in examples of looting after natural disasters, gang rape, or revenge killing.

scattered attacks – less violent and slightly more coordinated than the first two forms, these occur when, in the course of nonviolent interaction, like a party conference or a march, some participants engage in damaging acts, like sabotage, assaults on government agents or arson.

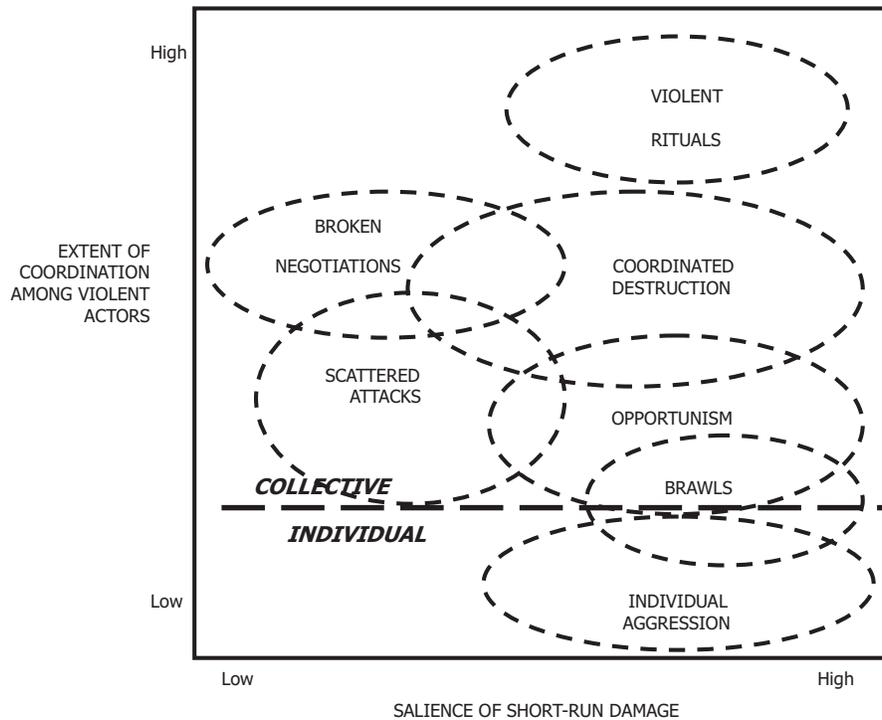


FIGURE 5.2. A Typology of Interpersonal Violence. *Source:* Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, p. 15. Copyright © 2003 Charles Tilly. Reprinted with permission of Cambridge University Press.

broken negotiations – higher on the coordination scale but less certain to result in actual violence – occur when agreements cannot be reached or when negotiations break down between opponents, one of whom escalates the conflict by threatening violence, as when demands for change in a government by military leaders lead to a military coup.

coordinated destruction – both very violent and highly coordinated – occurs when persons or organizations that specialize in coercive means deliberately undertake a program of damage to others: examples include war, many forms of terrorism, and genocide.

violent rituals – at the top of the scales of coordination and the certainty of violence – occur when an organized actor follows a culturally known script to inflict damage as it competes for priority with others, as in the lynching of “uppity” African Americans in the Old South or in gang rivalries.⁷

⁷ These descriptions merely paraphrase Tilly’s longer definitions and lists of examples in *The Politics of Collective Violence* (2003). Each type is then elaborated and examined in detail in a separate chapter of his important book.

Note that although the incidental forms of violence that Tilly charts in the lower part of [Figure 5.2](#) are most widespread, it is the coordinated forms of violence – such as guerilla movements, terrorism, and civil wars – that make their mark in the history books. Yet even these major episodes demonstrate the importance of incidental or opportunistic violence, as we will see from a rapid survey of the recent literature on civil war.

Warring Movements

As the Soviet Empire began to collapse in the early 1990s, a series of militant Islamist movements, taking their inspiration from the Iranian Revolution of 1979, challenged both secular regimes such as Egypt and royal theocracies such as Saudi Arabia. In North Africa, one such movement took control of the Sudan, while another fought to the death against the Algerian government. Nowhere was their triumph more electric than in Afghanistan, where, following a fight over the spoils of the defunct Socialist regime, the fundamentalist Taliban came to power as the victors in a civil war.

Fundamentalist Islam was not alone in creating turbulence around the globe. In Central Africa, a genocidal war in Rwanda in 1994 produced a mass migration into neighboring states and fed a devastating civil war in Zaire, whose corrupt leadership was overthrown in 1997. In Southeast Asia, challenges arose to both the Indonesian and the Burmese military dictatorships – the first with success, and the second failing. In Latin America, in 1995, a rebellion in Chiapas held the world's attention for almost a year (Olesen 2005), while in 1997, a desperate guerilla movement was able to hold hundreds hostage in the Japanese embassy in Peru.

The new century, if anything, exacerbated this picture of violence and political decay. The civil war in Sudan gave way to a rebellion in the Western region of Darfur, followed by genocide by government-backed militias. In Iraq, the American invasion of 2003 unleashed Sunni-Shi'a conflicts that had been suppressed under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. In South Asia, the long stalemate between Pakistan and India gave way to explosions of communal conflict, culminating in the massacre in Mumbai in 2008. And then of course, the endless civil war between Jews and Arabs in Israel/Palestine was punctuated by factional fighting between two groups of Palestinians in Gaza (Alimi 2007; Tilly and Tarrow 2007: Chapter 8).

Scholars of social movements have been stunned by these events, some applying models of mobilization from the West to violent challenges elsewhere, and others studying these challenges by applying new methods and theories. A whole new specialty of “security studies” responded to the threats of fundamentalist Islam, with no reference to the social movement canon. New methods of analysis drawing on microeconomic models have been employed to examine large numbers of these violent conflicts (Collier and Hoefler 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003) and by applying variants of rational-choice theory (Kalyvas 2003; 2006; Weinstein 2006). Some of the best work combines theories derived from

microeconomic models with detailed case materials (Collier and Sambanis, eds. 2005; Wood 2000 and 2003; for a review, see Tarrow 2007).

The most striking departure from the violent patterns of the past has been the partial replacement of interstate war by civil wars. A civil war occurs when two or more distinct military organizations, at least one of them attached to the previously existing government, battle each other for control of major governmental means within a single regime (Sambanis 2004). Over the last twenty years, civil wars have raged in Colombia, Iraq, Israel/Palestine, Kashmir, Nepal, Peru, Uganda, Guatemala, and Sudan. Scandinavian scholars have done annual tallies of major conflicts, counting as civil wars those armed conflicts between governments and other actors in which at least twenty-five people die during the year (Harbon and Wallenstein 2009). These cases range from regimes in which the major parties fight for control of a single national government (e.g., Nepal) to others in which at least one major party seeks to escape entirely from a central government's jurisdiction (e.g., the Philippines).

Scholars have divided armed conflicts since World War II into these four categories:

- *Extrasystemic war*, which occurs between a state and a nonstate group outside its own territory, the most typical cases being colonial wars
- *Interstate war*, between two or more states
- *Intrastate war*, between the government of a state and internal opposition groups without intervention from other states – e.g., civil wars
- *Internationalized internal war*, between the government of a state and internal opposition groups, with military intervention from other states (Strand, Wilhelmsen, and Gleditsch 2004: 11)

Figure 5.3, adapted from Harbon and Wallenstein's work (2010), shows colonial wars declining, then disappearing after 1975; interstate wars fluctuating but never predominating; and internationalized civil wars reaching their maximum during the 1980s, then declining around the turn of the century, only to increase again after 2003. In terms of sheer frequency of conflict, it is civil wars that have predominated during the last decades over all other types of violent conflict. Why is this so? It occurred in part because of militant nationalist and religious ideologies and in part because of the opportunities for violence that they trigger.

In his book on civil wars, Stathis Kalyvas distinguished between the central ideological/political cleavage at the center of civil war conflicts and the varieties of local conflicts and violence at their periphery. Referring to two great political theorists – Thomas Hobbes and Karl Schmitt – Kalyvas developed two parallel models of civil war violence: a *Hobbesian* model in which violence is privatized (e.g., roughly coinciding with Tilly's brawls, opportunism, and scattered attacks), and a *Schmittian* model, which "stresses the fundamentally political nature of civil wars and its attendant processes"; this corresponds roughly to

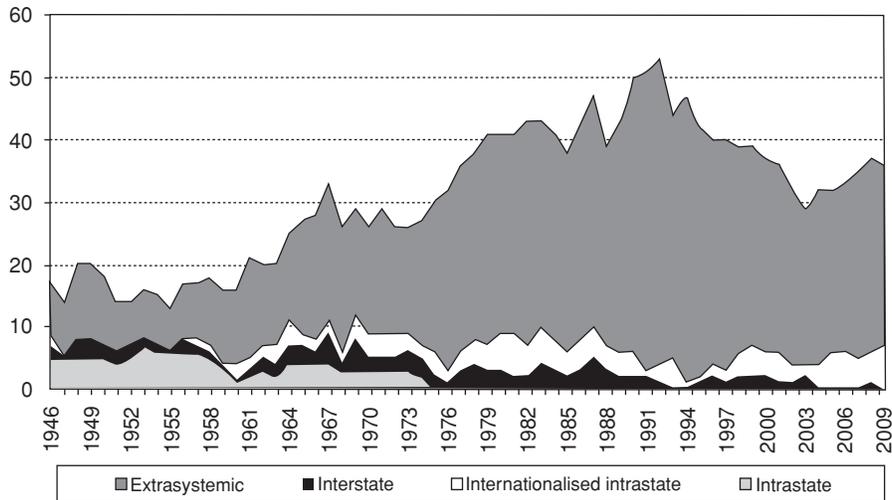


FIGURE 5.3. Numbers of Armed Conflicts by Type, 1946–2009. *Source:* Reproduced with permission from Lotta Harbom and Peter Wallensteen (2010). “Armed Conflicts, 1946–2009.” *Journal of Peace Research* 47: 501–509.

Tilly’s coordinated destruction and violent rituals (Kalyvas 2006: 475–476). Kalyvas found both Hobbesian and Schmittian elements in the civil wars he studied, and – most important – he argued that the extreme brutality of civil war violence results not from one or the other, but from their interaction and from the alliances they foster between those whose violence is the result of “Schmittian” ideological commitments and those who take advantage of the central ideological conflict to attack people they don’t like or fear (2006: 381–386). Translating the complexities of Kalyvas’ argument into the abstract terms of Tilly’s paradigm, we can say that the explosion of a “Schmittian” central conflict into civil war violence triggers “peripheral” brawls, opportunistic violence, and scattered attacks among people who may have lived side by side for generations, but seize the opportunities offered by a central conflict to attack one another.

Kalyvas’ insight can be extended to other forms of violence, both historical and contemporary. For example, during World War II, when Poles and Rumanians turned on their Jewish neighbors with knives and pickaxes, they did so because of the opportunity offered by the presence of Nazi invaders who were engaged in a “Schmittian” genocidal campaign. In a contemporary example, the invasion of Iraq by American and coalition forces in 2003 opened opportunities for violence between Shiite and Sunni groups who had lived in more or less uneasy peace under the repressive regime of Saddam Hussein. Rather than bringing social peace to Iraq, war – the most general form of collective

violence – opened opportunities for scattered attacks between religious groups that broadened into a civil war.

Suppressing Violence

Given the relative ease of initiating violence, it is striking that – over the long run – violence has become rarer than other forms of collective action (della Porta 1995: 216). The change began with the rise of the national state in the West, as it suppressed private armies and took control of organized violence to build its own monopoly of power. We saw evidence of this change in Chapter 2 from Tilly’s research on British collective action. As Britons shifted from the brawls, the *charivari*, and the rick-burnings of the mid-eighteenth century to the petitions and demonstrations that dominated the historical record in the nineteenth, private violence declined, and contention migrated to Parliament (1995a and b). We also see it in our own century in the growing availability of legitimate forms of nonviolent protest and their acceptance by government authorities.

Every polity draws lines between collective action that is *forbidden*, *permitted*, or *facilitated* (McAdam et al. 2001). We can find all three in authoritarian China. The Chinese Communist authorities *facilitate* official or sponsored protests, similar to those that erupted after the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade by American planes in the Balkan Wars. But the Chinese government also *forbids* mobilization across social sectors or geographic areas, because it threatens the central control on which Communist Party power is based. On the other hand, small-scale or local protests are often *tolerated*, both because they are often directed at local authorities whom the central government likes to monitor and occasionally see punished for corruption, and because protests reveal where dissent is brewing and where problems can be addressed (O’Brien ed. 2008; O’Brien and Li 2005).

Liberal democratic governments, in contrast, tolerate a much broader range of forms of contention, sponsor relatively few, and mainly forbid violent or threatening forms of contention. This does not mean that they are generally tolerant, for such governments have a range of forms of suppression other than state violence with which to suppress dissent (see Chapter 8). For example, since September 11, 2001, the United States has enormously increased its invasion of citizens’ privacy (Sidel 2004). But it has not notably increased its repression of actual protest.

As long as violence remains a possibility behind protesters’ actions, uncertainty reigns and collective actors gain psychological leverage vis-à-vis opponents. But where violence occurs or is even likely, this gives authorities a mandate for repression (Eisinger 1973) and turns sympathizers away. When this happens, organizers are trapped in a spiral of military confrontation with authorities that, in the modern age, is virtually impossible for them to win. This may be why practically all of the modular forms of collective action that have developed as staples of the contemporary repertoire in democratic states

are nonviolent. Or more specifically, as we saw in the Tea Party movement, why disruptive protesters often adopt contained forms of action.

CONTAINED COLLECTIVE ACTION

It is easiest for people to employ a form of collective action that they know how to use, and this is what best explains the predominance of contained forms over all others. Look back again at [Figure 5.1](#): You will see that the largest numbers of events were not disruptive nor violent but were the strikes, marches, demonstrations, and meetings that are the stock-in-trade of modern contentious politics. Why was this? Most modern forms of contention have become part of a repertoire that is generally known and understood. Coordinated through a process that resembles the “contracts by convention” outlined by Russell Hardin in his work on collective action (1982), they involve at least the tacit coordination of participants’ implicit expectations (Schelling 1960: 71). And because they require relatively little commitment and involve low risk, they can attract large numbers of participants. These are the major appeals of contained forms of contention such as the strike and the demonstration.

Conventionalizing the Strike

The strike is an organized withdrawal of labor or cooperation with the intended effect of stopping production, reducing profits, or impeding the flow of public or private business. The strike offers a good example of how forms of contention that began as forbidden practices are ultimately conventionalized. The first use of the term “strike” in English seems to date from the actions of the eighteenth century sailors who “struck” the sails of their ships as a sign of their unwillingness to work (Linebaugh and Rediker 1990: 240). But the emergence of the term “strike” in many European languages about the same time suggests that the strike had multiple origins (Tilly 1978: 159).

Though mainly associated with industry, the strike form has come to include a variety of social actors, few of whom could be regarded as “proletarian.”⁸ As it became generally known that strikes could succeed, striking spread from skilled to unskilled workers, from the large factory to smaller firms, from the withholding of labor to the withholding of produce, from industry to agriculture, and from there to the public services. By now, the strike has become a virtual part of the institutions of collective bargaining, with its own jurisprudence, rituals, and expectations among both challengers and opponents.

Strikes developed as a means for workers to put pressure on management, but in the course of the nineteenth century, they also became a way of building

⁸ As late as the 1872 French census, writes Ronald Aminzade, though artisans in both handicraft and industrial production “constituted only 21.9% of the labor force and 29.5% of the working class, handicraft artisans alone accounted for 72% of the strikes during the years from 1830 to 1879.” See his *Class, Politics and Early Industrial Capitalism* (1981: 77–78).

class solidarity. This was reflected in the increase in mutual support across occupational and geographic lines (Aminzade 1981: 81–82) and the growing ritualization of the strike. Strikers could parade within the precincts of the factory, carrying banners and tooting horns, chanting slogans, and singing songs of solidarity to induce their workmates to join them. Solidarity sometimes was imposed, by “sending to Coventry” a worker who refused to down his tools when a strike was called.

Strikes could be combined with other forms of contention: occupations, marches, industrial sabotage, petitions, and legal actions. Assemblies prepare the workers for a strike and elect strike committees; organizers in an especially militant sector try by example to bring out workers in other sectors; pickets block the gates of the plant to keep raw materials out. Strikers who want to gain community solidarity can march from the factory through working-class neighborhoods in “turnouts,” which – at their most successful – induce merchants to close their shutters and housewives to join their marches. From a spontaneous withdrawal of labor, the strike became the major means through which workers build and express solidarity, demonstrate their challenges, seek external support, and negotiate their differences with opponents from a position of enhanced, if temporary, power.

Demonstrating in Public and for the Public

Similar to the strike, the protest demonstration began as a disruptive direct action that eventually was institutionalized. Owing much to the traditional form of the religious procession, it developed when challengers moved from one target to another, either to attack opponents or to deliver demands. Public demonstrations are connected historically with democratization; it was in the democratic phase of the 1848 Revolution that the demonstration appeared in its full modern form, for the leaders of the new French Republic could not refuse the people the right to present their petitions (Favre 1990: 16). From that time on, the typical form through which all types of French movements made themselves known was the peaceful demonstration in a public place. By the late nineteenth century, the demonstration had become the major means by which unions and mass parties publicized their demands and demonstrated their strength in numbers. By the twentieth century, it had become part of the political process.

In contrast to strikes, which require some relationship to the withholding of labor or of a product to attract supporters, the use of demonstrations spread rapidly from place to place and from social actor to social actor. Demonstrations could be employed on behalf of a claim, against an opponent, to express the existence of a group or its solidarity with another group, or to celebrate a victory or mourn the passage of a leader. Demonstrations thus became the classical modular form of performance of collective action.

As demonstrations became legalized, similar to the strike, they gave rise to a jurisprudence and a culture (Hubrecht 1990; Champagne 1990). Rather

than allowing the police to manhandle demonstrators, organizers began to employ their own parade marshals (Cardon and Huertin: 199), developed a repeated sequence of routes, slogans, and signs, and had a regular marching order. Different ideological families favored one route or another, so that the political coloration of the group could often be determined from its itinerary. Even the roles of nonparticipants – the press, the forces of order, bystanders, and opponents – eventually became part of the demonstrative performance (Favre: 18–32).

Repressive states almost always see demonstrations as potential riots, which leads to the repression of peaceful protesters and sometimes – as in the events of January 1905 in Russia – to revolution. Constitutional states have come to accept demonstrations as a normal, and even an advantageous, practice, as indicated by the fact that demonstrators receive police protection and even guidance. In Washington, D.C., in Rome, and in Paris, organizers are offered advice by the police on how best to run a demonstration (McCarthy and McPhail 1998; della Porta, Fillieule, and Rieter 1998). From an unruly movement of protesters from one place to another, the protest demonstration has become the major nonelectoral expression of civil politics.

REPertoire STABILITY AND CHANGE

Over time, many changes have been made in the repertoire of contention, some resulting from changes in the state and capitalism, and others from the internal evolution of particular performances. Some repertoires give way to new ones more easily than others. We can distinguish among four main types of repertoire:

- *No repertoires*, which is the use of forms of contention that fail, make no impression on popular memory, or are no longer relevant to people's claims. The “armed demonstration” in mid-nineteenth century France was such a case (see Chapter 2).
- *Weak repertoires*, which have somewhat more purchase, develop amid special circumstances such as war, repression, or immigration, and give way to new performances when those circumstances change. When the former Soviet Union emerged from state socialism, the tradition of “samizdat” (self-published clandestine writing) lost its relevance (Fish 1995; Mendelson and Gerber 2005).
- *Ritual political performances* sometimes evolve when performances lose their original meaning but are preserved for symbolic reasons (Kertzer 1998; Muir 1997). May Day began as a day of protest but evolved into a ritualized festival of labor.⁹

⁹ For example, May Day began in July 1889, when a congress of French trade unionists proposed that “a great international demonstration should be convoked, on the same day all over the world, to put governments on notice to reduce the workday to eight hours” (Tartakowsky 2005: 14).

- *Strong repertoires* are performances that retain their original meaning in popular memory and continue to have purchase in popular politics.

The American “Strong” Repertoire

In the United States today, the repertoire was strongly marked by the period Americans remember as “the sixties.” Three major developments marked a shift in performances that culminated in the “strong” repertoire of today:

First was the practice of “marching on Washington” in major set-piece demonstrations culminating in rallies before the Lincoln Memorial. The sixties’ marches on Washington evolved out of the veterans’ marches of the 1930s and from the civil rights march that A. Philip Randolph threatened to organize in 1941, just as the United States was mobilizing for its part in World War II (Kryder 2000). There are elements of ritual in Americans’ marches on Washington, but there were changes too. For example, antiwar protesters marched across the Potomac to the Pentagon, which they surrounded in a mock levitation. Eventually organizers learned to provide mobile TV monitors for demonstrators who were too numerous or too far away to see the speakers (McCarthy and McPhail 1998). The march on Washington became a culturally embedded part of a strong repertoire.

The second new practice was the dedication of a period of time – usually the summer – to a particular campaign. Summers have always brought out more protesters than other periods of the year, if only because of the more clement climate and the fact that students are off from school. Mississippi’s “Freedom Summer” was the most notable example of the choice of a finite period of time in which to concentrate the energies of militants on a particular goal – in that event, to register African Americans to vote (McAdam 1988). Other campaigns such as Vietnam Summer and Labor Summer soon followed.

The third development was the disruptive practice of sit-ins, blockages, and building occupations. First at lunch counters, then at bus stations, and finally wherever public segregation was practiced, the sit-in became the most important new performance in the American strong repertoire. Though the sit-in has a family resemblance to the factory occupations of the 1930s (Piven and Cloward 1977), it gained its power from the presence of a new actor in public life: television. If the public saw spitting thugs brutalizing well-dressed young black men sitting quietly at lunch counters, it would be hard to ignore the contradiction between the American claim of freedom and the reality of segregation. “The whole world is watching,” wrote Todd Gitlin (1980).

Despite the resilience of strong repertoires, practices of contentious politics often change in imperceptible ways that are visible only at some distance. We can chart the itineraries of repertoire change within four major categories: *the institutionalization of disruptive forms* of contention; *innovation at the margins* of inherited forms; *tactical interaction with police* and other actors; and *paradigmatic change*.

The Institutionalization of Contention

We saw earlier how the strike and the demonstration gradually became part of the existing repertoire. The pattern of institutionalization is almost everywhere the same: As the excitement of the disruptive phase of a movement dies and the police become more skilled at controlling it, movements institutionalize their tactics and attempt to gain concrete benefits for their supporters through negotiation and compromise – a route that often succeeds at the cost of transforming the movement into a party or interest group (Piven and Cloward 1977).

At times, forms of disruption that invite repression are discarded as participants learn to avoid them. Such was the case for the “armed demonstrations” used by the French Montagnards during the 1851 insurrection against Louis Napoleon’s coup d’état.¹⁰ At other times, forms of confrontation are themselves institutionalized as authorities learn to tolerate them or facilitate their use. And at times, to win concessions that supporters demand or authorities proffer, leaders move from confrontation to cooperation. This is particularly true when a political ally comes to power – as occurred in the democratization of South Africa in the mid-1990s (Klandermans, Roefs, and Olivier 1998).

Institutionalization frequently results in what sociologists have called “goal displacement” – the suppression of a movement’s original radical goals for more moderate ones. This was how European social democratic parties eventually gave up their “maximum program” for what were originally seen as short-term “minimal goals.” Such changes are often adopted for tactical reasons – for example, the threat of police repression, or the desire to attract the support of moderates. But once a movement’s chosen form of action crystallizes into convention, it becomes a known and expected part of the repertoire. As Franz Kafka metaphorically wrote in one of his most prescient fables:

Leopards break into the temple and drink to the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers; this is repeated over and over again; finally it can be calculated in advance, and it becomes a part of the ceremony.¹¹

Innovation at the Margins

Even within inherited forms of collective action, innovation often occurs incrementally. For instance, using the general form of the demonstration, demonstrators can march in costume, brandish pitchforks, wave monkey wrenches to display their militancy (Lumley 1990: 224), or carry props that symbolize their goals. Feminists wear witches’ costumes to ridicule feminism’s stereotyping by male opponents (Costain 1992: 49). Peace marchers don skeleton outfits to

¹⁰ “In taking arms against the government,” writes historian Ted Margadant, “they appeared to engage in an intrinsically violent form of collective action. . . . But as an instrument of military force,” he continues, “it was hopelessly outclassed by the French army.” See Margadant’s *French Peasants in Revolt* (1979: 267).

¹¹ From Franz Kafka, *Parables and Paradoxes* (1937: 92–93).

symbolize their fear of nuclear holocaust. And protesters against sexual crimes against children march in white clothing – as they did in Belgium in 1996 – to symbolize the purity of the victims (Hooghe and Deneckere 2003).

In the short run, innovation at the margins may simply enliven a familiar form of collective action by adding elements of play and carnival to its basic form. But over the long run, innovations in a given performance can transmute into wholly new forms. For example, the hunger strike in India began as poor Indians sat outside the doors of rich men who refused to pay them what they were owed (Siméant 2009: 13). And when four African American students sat in at a lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, the lunch counter sit-in became well known to potential demonstrators and through the public at large. Ultimately, it became a modular form of contention (Andrews and Biggs 2006).

Tactical Interaction

Innovation in collective action forms often results from the interaction between protesters and their opponents. This can be seen in the history of industrial relations. When employers used the tactic of locking their workers out of a factory to defeat a strike, workers invented the sit-down strike and added the factory occupation to their repertoire (Spriano 1975). By the time the French Popular Front was elected in 1936, the factory occupation had become routine, with its characteristic rituals, roles, and activities (Tartakowsky 1996: 56–57). Lockouts eventually were made illegal in most countries to protect the legality of the strike and to defend factories from potentially damaging occupations.

The same interactive process occurred between the American Civil Rights movement and the Southern police who tried to repress it. Doug McAdam determined from a detailed analysis of the movement's actions that each time its leaders approached a crisis in participation or opposition, the threshold of collective action was raised to a new level – using its tools selectively and creatively to outguess opponents and increase participation (1983). For example, the use of public marches expanded when it appeared that police chiefs like “Bull” Connor were responding to them by the violent arrest of hundreds of demonstrators before the eyes of the nation. In response, police chiefs more subtle than Connor began to use more restrained tactics.

Paradigmatic Change

Given the long, slow, historical evolution of the repertoire of contention, it may seem surprising to use the term “paradigmatic” change for the forms that people use to express their claims. And indeed, given the need to root collective action in cultural expectations, paradigmatic change is rare and unusual (Tilly 2008). That it does sometimes occur, however, can be gathered from examples that have been used in this chapter and in preceding chapters. The shift from rigid to modular forms of contention in the eighteenth century; the invention of the strike and the demonstration in the nineteenth; the development of

nonviolent forms of resistance in the twentieth; and the invention and rapid diffusion of suicide bombing in this century – these could not be explained if no breakthroughs were made in the way people mount claims and how authorities respond to them.

Part of the reason for what seem like sudden breakthroughs is undoubtedly that protest routines are “sticky”: Cultural familiarity and the habits of organizers may lead people to continue to employ familiar forms rather than more appropriate or effective ones long after they lose their force. As a result, when a new form is “discovered,” its appropriateness becomes immediately obvious. For example, part of the reason for the rapid diffusion of the democratization movements in East Central Europe in 1989 was the discovery that many citizens felt the same way as the early protesters, and that ordinary means of public expression would be tolerated and could succeed (Kuran 1991; Lohmann 1994).

The same was the case for the diffusion of the “electoral model” of opposition to authoritarian regimes in Southeastern Europe and Eurasia. The strategy of using outrage at stolen elections began in Slovakia and Serbia in the late 1990s (Bunce and Wolchik 2006). Once it was shown that mobilizing against corrupt authoritarian regimes could succeed, election revolutions spread across the region, and beyond – to the Caucasus and into Central Asia. There, of course, their success was much weaker, which takes us to the need to examine the other three powers in movement – networks and organizations, framing and identity construction, and political opportunities – to which we turn in the next three chapters.

CONCLUSIONS

To many scholars writing in the 1990s, the industrial West seemed to be becoming a “social movement society” (Meyer and Tarrow, eds. 1998). This concept was developed to describe two related, but not identical phenomena: first, that more and more people seemed to be using what had previously been seen as unconventional forms of political action; and second, that as these forms continued to be used, they were becoming conventionalized.

For example, Sarah Soule and Jennifer Earl’s (2005) analysis of protest events in the United States suggests that protest events increased in size between the 1960s and the 1980s.¹² The United States was not alone: when Dieter Rucht and his colleagues examined contention from major newspapers for the years 1950–1988 for West Germany and for both halves of Germany

¹² From the World Values Study, we know that the U.S. propensity to protest has increased. The World Values Survey data can be found at <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>. Recent data from the General Social Survey suggest a flattening and possible reversal between 1996 and 2002. In the latter year, just over 6 percent reported having participated in a rally or protest in the previous 5 years, compared to just over 9 percent in the former year. However, the differences are too small to reach statistical significance.

over the following decade, they found a dramatic increase in the numbers of protests in the 1960s, and smaller, but still substantial, increases over the next three decades (Rucht 1999). Most of this increase in protest occurred in the more contained forms of participation – such as petitions and peaceful demonstrations – while the violence that erupted in the 1960s and the 1970s largely subsided (Caren et al. ND: ms. p. 5). (An exception was the violence against immigrants and minorities in Europe, which grew rapidly in the 1990s.)

The increase in terrorism, guerilla warfare, and civil strife elsewhere in the world in the last decade presents another form of “social movement society.” Was it the result of the end of the constraining influence of the Cold War? A result of failing states and newly mobilized populations? Or was the world bifurcating into two different repertoires of contention: peaceful, contained, and increasingly institutionalized contention in the West, and violent, uncontrolled, and destabilizing contention in the rest of the world? Only a long-term comparative analysis of the performances and repertoires of contention across the planet will answer this question.

In the meantime, we have seen how social movements combine challenge, solidarity, and uncertainty in their actions. They maintain support and grow, in part because they have available a known, well-understood script of modular forms to build upon. And they innovate around that basic script, much as jazz musicians improvise on a basic tune. But the presence of a large number of protest events does not, in itself, constitute a social movement. Actors first must find ways of coordinating contention and organizing themselves to sustain mobilization – tasks that depend on their capacity to build on existing social networks and to construct more formal organizations to maintain solidarity and aggregate resources. These are the “internal” powers through which social movements are constructed and maintained; we turn to them in the next chapter.