

# Power in Movement

Social Movements and  
Contentious Politics

Updated and Revised 3rd Edition



Sidney Tarrow

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## Power in Movement, Revised and Updated Third Edition

Social movements have an elusive power but one that is altogether real. From the French and American Revolutions to the post-Soviet, ethnic, and terrorist movements of today, contentious politics exercises a fleeting but powerful influence on politics, society, and international relations. This study surveys the history of the modern social movements in the West and their diffusion to the global South through war and colonialism and puts forward a theory to explain their cyclical surges and declines. It offers an interpretation of the power of movements that emphasizes their effects on the lives of militants, policy reforms, political institutions, and cultural change. The book focuses on the rise and fall of social movements as part of contentious politics as the outcome of changes in political opportunities and constraints, state strategy, the new media of communication, and transnational diffusion.

Sidney G. Tarrow is Maxwell M. Upson Professor of Government and Professor of Sociology at Cornell University. His recent books include *Dynamics of Contention* (with Doug McAdam and Charles Tilly), *Contentious Europeans* (with Doug Imig), *Transnational Protest and Global Activism* (coedited with Donatella della Porta), *The New Transnational Activism*, and *Contentious Politics* (with Charles Tilly). He is currently researching war, state building, and human rights.



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SIDNEY G. TARROW

*Cornell University*



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*For DEA and J LaP –  
Mentors, colleagues, friends*



# Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page xi</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xix
Introduction	i
1 Contentious Politics and Social Movements	16
PART I: THE BIRTH OF THE MODERN SOCIAL MOVEMENT	
2 Modular Collective Action	37
3 Print and Association	57
4 States, Capitalism, and Contention	71
PART II: POWERS IN MOVEMENT	
5 Acting Contentiously	95
6 Networks and Organizations	119
7 Making Meanings	140
8 Threats, Opportunities, and Regimes	157
PART III: DYNAMICS OF CONTENTION	
9 Mechanisms and Processes of Contention	183
10 Cycles of Contention	195
11 Struggling to Reform	215
12 Transnational Contention	234
Conclusions: The Future of Social Movements	259
<i>Sources</i>	275
<i>Index</i>	315
	ix



# Figures

1.1	Tilly's Simple Polity Model	<i>page</i> 21
2.1	Verbs in the Wilkes and Gordon Campaigns, 1768–1780	47
2.2	Verb Distributions in Two Reform Campaigns, Great Britain, 1830–1832	51
3.1	Network Structure of the Revolutionary Movement in Boston	66
5.1	Italian Contention, 1966–1973	100
5.2	A Typology of Interpersonal Violence	106
5.3	Number of Armed Conflicts by Type, 1946–2009	109
6.1	The Intersecting Elements of Social Movements	121
6.2	Total Number of Women's and Minority Groups in the United States, 1955–1985	128
7.1	Components of Movement Solidarity	143
7.2	Boundaries, Ties, and Identities	150
8.1	Demonstrations and Violent Events in the Soviet Union and Its Successor States, 1987–1992	158
9.1	A Dynamic, Interactive Framework for Analyzing Mobilization in Contentious Politics	189
10.1	1848 Events by Month, March 1847–August 1849	196
10.2	Trajectories of Social Movement Organizations	213
11.1	News Events Initiated by Women's Groups and Women's Bills as a Percentage of All Bills Introduced in Congress, 1950–1985	229
12.1	Growth of Transnational Civil Society Events, 1990–2005	236
12.2	KOF Index of Globalization, 1980–2007	245
12.3	Number of Europrotests in the EU, 1992–2007	247
12.4	Human Rights International Nongovernmental and Intergovernmental Organizations Active in Each Year, 1948–2003	249
C.1	National Constitutions and the French Declaration of Rights	263



# Tables

8.1	A Reduced Typology of Protest Control	<i>page</i> 171
8.2	State Strength and Prevailing Strategies as Structuring Principles for Contentious Actors	175
11.1	Percentage Differences between Those Who Did and Those Who Did Not Engage in New Left Activities, for Three Age Cohorts (b. 1943–1964)	224
12.1	Transnational Social Change Organizations, 1953–2003, by Main Issue Focus	239
12.2	International Judicial and Quasi-Judicial Bodies as of 2010	248



## Preface

When the second edition of *Power in Movement* appeared in 1998, it was during a period when it seemed to many that advanced industrial democracies such as America's had entered a period of social movement calm. In East Central Europe, the excitement generated by the collapse of Communism had subsided; in Western Europe, the talk was of postindustrial politics; and the United States was roiled with bitter but low-level conflicts such as that which surrounded the bedroom behavior of President Bill Clinton. In Africa, Latin America, and Southeastern Europe, festering conflicts had exploded into civil wars; to many American scholars, including this one, it seemed as if social conflict was being contained (Meyer and Tarrow, eds. 1998).

Toward the turn of the new century, changes in the "real world" and of contentious politics began to be translated into scholarly work. First, scholars questioned the airtight separation of social movement studies from other forms of contention (McAdam et al. 2001). Next, they began to ask how, if we were living in a social movement society, ordinary people were responding to the dislocations caused by global neo-liberalism. Finally, although the 1990s had been a decade of relatively contained conflict, questions were raised about the violent movements that, here and there, were already roiling the surface of society.

These questions came together in Seattle, when a coalition of domestic and transnational groups exploded onto the streets and shut down a meeting of the World Trade Organization. That protest electrified activists around the globe. In rapid succession, similar protests broke out in Genoa, Göteborg, Montreal, Prague, and Washington, DC. In that wave of contention, protesters not only attacked targets beyond the nation-state but began to experiment with a new and imaginative repertoire of contention. They combined peaceful and violent performances, face-to-face and electronic mobilization, and domestic and transnational actions, leaving many convinced of the coming decline of state sovereignty and the rise of a movement for global democracy. They also triggered a new and more aggressive repertoire of protest policing, causing the

death of a protester in Genoa and the arrest of many in protests surrounding the Republican National Convention in New York in 2004.

Only a year into the new century, the massacres on 9/11/2001 unveiled a new axis of transnational conflict between insurgent Islamist movements and the United States and its allies. In the wake of those events, scholars and statesmen became aware that the era of contained contention was over. In the United States, police and federal security agencies ratcheted up surveillance of all manner of groups, whether or not they had a relationship with the Islamist threat; in Madrid and London, lethal train bombings led to fear of home-grown Islamist militants in the heart of Europe; meanwhile, in the East, a string of electoral corruption protests shook the quasi-authoritarian systems of Serbia, Ukraine, and Georgia, and the violence between Jews and Palestinians in Palestine/Israel ratcheted up with a new *Intifada*.

And that was not all: Under the government of George W. Bush, the anger, fear, and confusion of Americans at the massacres of September 11 were transfused into wars of reprisal and imperial expansion in Afghanistan and Iraq – the latter producing a brief but vital antiwar movement all over the planet. That movement failed to stop the rush to war, but it did give a boost to a new wave of antiwar contention. With its innovative use of the Internet to mobilize supporters, the movement sustained the surprising success of Governor Howard Dean in the 2004 primary elections and ultimately fed into the massive defeat of Bush's Republican Party in the elections of 2006 and 2008. The age of the Internet had entered the world of social movements.

In the meantime, global support for neo-liberalism began to erode. In Latin America, leftwing and indigenous-backed governments rose to power: first, in Venezuela and Chile; then in Brazil, Ecuador, and Bolivia. Each built on domestic sources of conflict, but all framed their domestic campaigns against global neo-liberalism. At the same time, in East Central Europe, where post-1989 governments had warmly embraced “the Washington consensus,” a shift away from neo-liberal politics occurred as the costs of neo-liberalism began to sink in. And, finally, following the crisis set off by the Wall Street housing bubble, the entire edifice of the global financial system trembled, and a rhetoric of populism and class conflict spread across the world. Faced by these changes, new waves of contention began to traverse Europe and America.

Scholars were not slow to respond to these changes. The social movement canon that had been gradually constructed in the academy since the 1960s began to give way to new ideas and different perspectives. Some critics observed that scholars had focused too narrowly on Western reformist movements; others were troubled by the fact that existing models left out culture and emotions; still others complained that we had ignored the more violent forms of contention – civil wars, terrorist movements, and ethnic violence – that were spreading across the globe. Meanwhile, other scholars were investigating these broader expressions of contention, often with significant results, for example, in the systematic study of civil wars and guerilla insurgencies (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and Sambanis, eds. 2006; Weinstein 2006).

Could these new efforts be blended with the more established tradition of social movement research? And could the latter encompass both the more violent forms of contention erupting in the global South and the dramatic increase in “nongovernmental organizations” around the planet? Some scholars – this author among them – thought the study of social movements could profit from a deliberate effort at integration with the study of other forms of contention and with newer strands of scholarship. With my collaborators, Doug McAdam and the late Charles Tilly, in a book titled *Dynamics of Contention*, we argued for an integration of social movement studies with the analysis of more violent forms of contention (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001).

No one put this argument more pithily than the late Roger Gould, who called for a broadening of the social movement canon to encompass the study of “contentious collective action.” Under this umbrella, Gould called for including in the same framework studies of “contemporary social movements along with peasant *jacqueries*, bread riots and grain seizures, slave revolts, ‘rough music,’ eighteenth and nineteenth century democratic societies, urban uprisings, artisanal blacklists and workshop turnouts, and revolutionary sects” (2005: 286). The second edition of *Power in Movement* already moved in this direction; this new edition has been revised and updated in the spirit of Gould’s more expansive notion of contentious politics.

In 1998, when the second edition of *Power in Movement* appeared, it was still too early to integrate many of the new empirical developments and scholarly initiatives into a book already overloaded with movements, protests, campaigns, and evidence from different historical periods. That edition did include a chapter on the growing phenomenon of “transnational contention,” but the book appeared before the major transnational campaigns of the new century erupted; it was too soon to take account of the growing role of the Internet as a vehicle for mobilization. And it was drafted just as its author was beginning to employ a deliberate mechanism and process approach to contentious politics. This edition attempts to fill these gaps.

This edition maintains almost the same structure as the last one. But it attempts to address four lacunae: First, it integrates new material on social movements in Europe and the United States that has appeared over the last decade. Second, the chapter on transnational contention has been expanded to take advantage of excellent new work on contention, beyond borders by Clifford Bob, Donatella della Porta, Jackie Smith, and others. Third, the book draws on new material on civil wars, terrorism, and guerilla movements, especially in the global South. And, finally, it builds on my collaboration with McAdam and Tilly, a partnership whose fruits are most evident in an almost entirely rewritten and expanded Part III.

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