Social Movements, Contentious Politics, and Democracy

MA course, Political Science Department, AY 2017-18 January, Winter Semester, 4 credits
Instructor: Professor Béla Greskovits
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Classes: Mondays and Wednesdays 15.30-17.10pm.
Classroom tba.
Office hours: Wednesdays 13.00-15.00pm, or by appointment in Vigyázó F. 2, room 217.

Course outline

The course introduces participants into the study of contentious politics and social movements in various historical periods and distinct parts of the world. With Barrington Moore, we ask: “why people so often put up with being the victims of their societies and why at other times they become very angry and try with passion and forcefulness to do something about their situation.” (Injustice. The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt. New York: M. E. Sharpe 1978: xiii.)
The first part of the course covers theories and historical examples, which help better understand how power relations, political opportunities and risks, availability of allies, utilization of organizational resources, and ideas on the purpose of contentious claims shape peoples’ choices between obedience and revolt.
The second part focuses on the impact of long term processes – such as changing values across generations, increasing dependence on the global economy, the passing of popular involvement in democracy, and the growing tensions between various tasks of good government – on the emergence and spread of particular types of social movements, and movement-based parties. The examples reflect the experience of mature Western and nascent East Central European and East Asian democracies, as well as East European and East Asian authoritarian regimes. In all these cases we shall also investigate the consequences of social movements and social contention for the quality and prospects of democracy and democratization, respectively. The second part concludes with the study economic protest in the current hard times of East European capitalism.

Learning outcomes

The course improves students’ analytic skills required for future careers, whether in academia or policy making, through facilitating:
  a) in-class discussion and debate;
  b) critical thinking about the views expressed in the literature;
  c) and experience in making comparisons across concepts and cases.
While not focusing particularly on Eastern Europe, the course provides background theoretical and empirical knowledge for students who plan to write theses and do research on related issues in this region.

**Requirements and grading**

**Presence and active participation in in-class discussions / absence only in case of illness substantiated by medical documents.** (15% of final grade)

**1 short presentation (15 minutes).** The presentation will tackle a concrete example of social movement and/or contentious political event chosen by the author. The presentation is expected to give a short overview over the event, justify why it is important, explain what is its relationship to readings of the course, and raise one related problem or question the author wants to discuss with the participants of the course. (15% of final grade)

**One in-class closed book mid-term exam (60 minutes).** The exam will test familiarity with the key terms and concepts covered by the readings during the weeks 1 to 6. (35% of final grade)

**One in-class closed book final exam (60 minutes).** The exam will test familiarity with the key terms and concepts covered by the readings during the weeks 7 to 11. (35% of final grade)

**Topics and required readings**

**Part I: Powers in Movement. Theoretical and Historical Perspectives**

**Week 1**

**Class 1 (January 8):** Introduction: course content and requirements

**Class 2 (January 10):** Overview of social movement research

**Required reading:**

Week 2

Class 1 (January 15): Social capital and social movements

Required reading:

Class 2 (January 17): “Good” and “bad” civil society

Required reading:

Week 3

Class 1 (January 22): Ideas and contentious claims

Required reading:

Class 2 (January 24): Framing labor demands in different varieties of capitalism

Required reading:

Week 4

Class 1 (January 29): Political opportunity and social movement agency

Required reading:

Class 2 (January 31): Challenging authoritarian rulers

Required readings:


**Week 5**

**Class 1 (February 5):** The transnationalization of protest

**Required reading:**

**Class 2 (February 7):** The transnational and the local: Attac and the European Social Forum

**Required readings:**


**Week 6**

**Part II: Changing values, globalization, the hollowing of democracy, austerity, and their impact on movements and contention in good times and bad**

**Class 1 (February 12):** Changing values and motivations for social activism

**Required reading:**

**Class 2 (February 14):** MIDTERM EXAM

**Week 7**

**Class 1 (February 19):** Left-libertarian and radical right movements

**Required reading:**

**Class 2 (February 21):** The hollowing of democracy and its consequences for movements and parties

**Required readings:**

**Week 8**

**Class 1 (February 26):** Does economic liberalism breed political illiberalism?

**Required reading:**

**Class 2 (February 28):** Austerity and protest during the Great Recession

**Required reading:**

**Week 9**

**Class 1 (March 5):** Simultaneous attack on inequality and political correctness

**Required readings:**

**Class 2: (March 7):** The rise of the right in EU democracies

**Required reading:**
Week 10

Class 1: (March 12): The Hungarian case I.

Required reading:

Class 2: (March 14): The Hungarian case II.
Required reading:

Week 11

Class 1 (March 19): Civil society and contentious politics in non-EU autocracies

Required readings:

Class 2 (March 21): Civil society and contentious politics in non-EU democracies

Required readings:

Week 12

Class 1 (March 26): Wrapping up

Class 2: (March 28): Final exam