Social Movements, Contentious Politics, and Democracy

MA course, Political Science Department, 2014/15 Winter Semester, 4 credits
Instructor: Professor Béla Greskovits
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Classes: Mondays and Wednesdays 11.00-12.40, classroom tba.
Office hours: Mondays 3-5pm, and Wednesdays 5-7pm, or by appointment in Faculty Tower 602.

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.
   d) 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

1. *Presence and active participation in in-class discussions / absence only in case of illness substantiated by medical documents (30% of final grade).*

2. *One mid-term in-class closed book written exam (30% of final grade).* The exam will test familiarity with the key terms and concepts covered by the readings during the weeks 1 to 5 (January 12 to February 15).

3. *One term paper submitted no later than April 10, 1pm, electronically in PDF format.* Length must not exceed 2000 words, all included. When investigating a concrete example of a social movement or contentious politics, the papers should rely on the concepts and terms studied in the course, as well as on relevant other literature and/or data collected by the author. Paper ideas must be discussed with the instructor, and briefly presented in class 2 of week 6. The completed papers must be presented in Class 1 or Class 2 of last week (March 30-April 5).

Topics and required readings

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

Week 1: January 12-January 18

**Class 1: Introduction: course content and requirements**

**Class 2: Overview of social movement research**

Required readings:


Week 2: January 19-January 25

**Class 1: Social capital and social movements**

Required readings:


Class 2: „Uncivil” society and the turn to authoritarianism in interwar Germany, Italy, and Spain

Required readings:

Week 3: January 26-February 1

Class 1: Ideas and contentious claims

Required readings:

Class 2: Framing labor demands in different varieties of capitalism

Required readings:

Week 4: February 2-February 8

Class 1: Political opportunity and social movement agency

Required readings:

Class 2: Challenging authoritarian rulers in Eastern Europe and the Middle East & North Africa

Required readings:

Week 5: February 9-February 15
Class 1: The transnationalization of protest

Required readings:

Class 2: The transnational and the local: Attac and the European Social Forum

Required readings:


Week 6: February 16-February 22

Class 1: Midterm exam

Class 2: Presentation and discussion of final essay ideas

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

Week 7: February 23-March 1

Class 1: Changing values and motivations for social activism

Required readings:

Class 2: Left-libertarian and radical right movements

Required readings:
Week 8: March 2-March 8

Class 1: The hollowing of Western democracy and its consequences for movements and parties

Required readings:

Class 2: Populist anti-system parties: threats or assets?

Required readings:

Week 9: March 9-March 15

Class 1: Does economic liberalism breed political illiberalism?

Required readings:

Class 2: Civil society and democratic (de)consolidation in Post-Communist Europe

Required readings:

Week 10: March 16-March 22

Class 1: Civil society and contentious politics in autocracies: Russia and China

Required readings:
Class 2: Civil society and contentious politics in new East Asian democracies

Required readings

Week 11: March 23-March 29

Class 1: East European protest during the Great Recession – variation in intensity

Required readings:

Class 2: East Central European economic protest – varieties in form


Week 12: March 30-April 5

Class 1 and 2: Student presentations of final essays