TITLE: QCA and Social Movement Studies: Existent applications, potential for studies of demobilisation, and prospects for methodological diversification

KEYWORDS: QCA, social movement studies, demobilisation, mixed-methods research

ABSTRACT: Several phenomena in the field of social movement studies (SMS) are characterised by complex causal relations: factors produce an outcome in conjunction with other factors; different permutations of factors produce outcomes; negative outcomes are not the mere inverse of factors that yield the outcome. In other words, in SMS we often observe conjunctural causation, equifinality, asymmetric causation, and other hallmarks of set relational causation. Yet SMS has made little use of the most prominent set-theoretic method, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). This paper reviews SMS literature that has applied the QCA approach and techniques. While existent studies demonstrate how QCA can be applied in SMS, they have certainly not exhausted the sub-fields accessible to QCA. The paper underscores this point by justifying the suitability of QCA for studies of the demobilisation of social movement organisations. In a proposed conceptual framework, demobilisation results from the concurrence of certain causal conditions, and can occur from many combinations of these conditions. This example illustrates how certain conceptualisations in SMS lend themselves to the application of QCA. The paper concludes by discussing the potential of QCA to contribute to the diversification of SMS methods. Long characterised by the predominance of case studies—particularly single-case studies, often with insufficient attention to the generalizability of findings—SMS is showing signs of shaking off this methodological monotony. QCA, as well as methods like network analysis and automated text analysis, present exciting opportunities to enhance understanding of social movement phenomena and improve social movement theories.