

Collective Mobilization and Dynamic Representation

From Citizens to Policy and Back Again

by

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Budapest, 18 March 2019

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Abstract

The question of whether collective mobilization makes a difference in policy is a puzzling one for social scientists, but also for citizens and activists. This dissertation focuses on the dynamics between collective mobilization and its consequences. On the one hand, it investigates whether mobilization influences policy outputs and agendas, and what role contextual factors such as public opinion and elite support play in this relationship. On the other hand, it inquires into reverse causality asking whether policy change affects mobilization in turn. The theoretical and empirical chapters in this dissertation approach this dynamic phenomenon from different angles.

Chapter 2 develops the conceptualization and measurement of collective mobilization as public claim making, and introduces the machine-coded protest event data (GDELT) used in the subsequent empirical analyses. Chapter 3 introduces a comprehensive typology of the consequences of mobilization, trying to put distinctions into a common framework. This typology is used for specifying the scope of the empirical analyses which are focused on analysing two specific types of consequences of mobilization: policy outputs and policy agendas. Next to that, this chapter also proposes a new dynamic model of representation, bringing together the impact of public claim making, public opinion, and elite support on policy outputs and agendas.

Within two issue areas, the environment and education, the dynamic model of representation was empirically tested using a large scale sample of 26 EU countries across a large time span (2002-2013). Chapter 4 looks into the effects of public claim making and its interactions with contextual factors on policy outputs in the form of public expenditure, while Chapter 5 focuses on consequences on policy agendas measured in two ways: governmental events in the media, and legislative activities. The results of both chapters suggest that mobilization does matter for policy. Large-scale increases in mobilization for issues generally correspond to large-scale shifts in policy outputs and agendas addressing those

issues. Nevertheless, this is not a simple process. Collective mobilization interacts with both public opinion and elite support for issues in opposite ways. While public opinion support appears to be a catalyser of this impact, elite support seems to reduce collective mobilization's effects.

Extending the empirical findings, Chapter 6 illuminates the differences in protest events and the wider array of public claim making events. It shows that while the difference between using a wider range of public claims compared to just protest events is not always critical, for issue areas where protest events are few, using only such events can underestimate the influence of mobilization on policy outputs.

Finally, Chapter 7 focuses on reverse causality in the relationship between mobilization and policy outputs. The effects of policy change and public opinion on intentions to engage in protest participation are analysed using experimental survey data. The results indicate that an unsupportive public opinion decreases mobilization, while policy change has a thermostatic effect as increased benefits lead to decreased mobilization intentions.

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