

Movements' Impact, Media, and Policy Outputs

Environmental events' effects on environmental protection expenditure in Italy

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Abstract:

In what regards the sociological literature on movements' consequences, previous empirical research is scarce and is mostly focused on intra-movements consequences such as impact on activists, movement organizations, or movement fields (Earl 2000). Recognizing this uneven development in the study of movements' consequences, this paper looks at extra-movement impact by analyzing the conditions towards high environmental expenditure in Italy between 1996 and 2011. Additionally, this paper acknowledges that movements' consequences do not happen in a vacuum and that these can often interact with other features of the political environment such as the media. Thus, the analysis presented here focuses on the interplay between movement-controlled characteristics, such as the conflictual nature of environmental events and their yearly number, and media specific characteristics, the tone with which such events are reported and their coverage. Taking into account the different models of movements' effects existing in the literature, the method used, QCA, is particularly aimed at uncovering causally complex solutions which, rather than assuming linearity between the different variables under analysis, allow for asymmetry, equifinality and conjunctural causation.

The first part of the paper is dedicated to providing a thorough conceptualization of movements' consequences and deals with the wide spread inconsistencies regarding the precise meaning and usage of the umbrella term impact and related terms such as success, outcomes, or outputs. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical models that have been identified in the literature on movements' impact and of the results of previous empirical research. The second part of the paper discusses methodological aspects related to QCA, introduces the raw data used and the aggregation procedures chosen, and illustrates the calibration process of assigning set-membership scores to cases based on the aggregated data. Finally, the third part of the paper presents the results of analyses of necessary and/or sufficient conditions for high environmental protection expenditure and, based on these, evaluates the theoretical models previously identified in the literature.

The results lend support to a joint effect model of movements' consequences in which both movement specific characteristics and media specific characteristics need to be present for policy output impact. Thus, while a positive tone of environmental events in the media was found necessary for high environmental protection expenditure, this was not sufficient. A positive tone had to be combined with either a non-conflictual nature of events or with a high number of events for having high environmental spending in subsequent years. With these results the paper also brings new empirical evidence to a line of inquiry that has been marked by contradictory findings. Thus, as far as the literature on violence and disruption is concerned, we can see that one of the sufficient paths to high environmental spending includes a non-conflictual nature of events. This suggests that movements can have an impact on policy outputs through more moderate tactics if they are backed up by positive media coverage.