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Introduction to Strategies and Outcomes

Lisa Leitz and Socrates Mbamalu

On September 20, 2023, leaders from 67 states signed onto the United Nations' Global Ocean Treaty (Stanway, 2023). Each nation must ratify the treaty and funding needs to be allocated to implement international actions to maintain the oceans' biodiversity. However, beginning with the initial rollout of the treaty earlier in March, Greenpeace announced this treaty as a partial victory in their campaign to improve the health and safety of the world's oceans (Meyer, 2023). For decades they had sent ships around the world to document vulnerable animal species, plastic pollution, and the effects of drilling and mining ventures and problematic fishing methods. The impact of such tactics and strategies aimed at building a global consensus around the need for protection of oceans appears visible. Greenpeace is but one of the many organizations involved in efforts to demonstrate problems with unregulated open oceans and climate change; many pressures, including activism, led to this change by world leaders.

While that treaty took decades of work by numerous international players, there are times we can see more direct links between strategy and outcomes. For example, we could examine one instance of significant strategic planning in 2015 involving one of Greenpeace's "monkeywrenching" tactic or sabotage against those deemed to be exploiting the environment (Abbey, 1975). At the end of July 2015 Greenpeace activists joined other efforts to draw attention to problems with Arctic drilling and attempted to stop a Shell Oil icebreaker ship from leaving Portland, Oregon, where it had come for repairs. Thirteen activists attached themselves to the St. Johns Bridge with climbing gear for forty hours using civil disobedience to stop MSV Fennica from heading to Arctic waters (Brait, 2015). Greenpeace leadership was well aware that Shell had faced significant delays from the harsh Arctic conditions that summer and the window for drilling was rapidly closing. Their calculation would pay off with Shell unable to market any

Arctic oil in 2015, and then announcing an indefinite end to its Arctic drilling plans (McCallister, 2015).

In 2023 Arctic drilling and oceanic concerns continue to be foci of environmental organizations, but these examples demonstrate how strategy matters for outcomes, often through piecemeal social change. While social movements help to drive change in many societies, international arrangements, and institutions, their existence does not guarantee any one type of outcome for policy, and movements also change the activists themselves, other movements, and/or culture. Overviews of social movements demonstrate that movement strategies dictating framing, tactics, and many other characteristics within activists' control are but one factor in determining outcomes (Almeida, 2019; Amenta and Caren, 2004; Amenta, Caren, Chiarello, and Su, 2010; Amenta & Polletta, 2019; Bosi and Uba, 2009; Earl, 2000; Giugni, 1998; Meyer, 2021; Rucht, 2023).

Despite the attention paid to outcomes by social movement scholars, it is incredibly difficult to determine how much of or even whether an outcome came to be because of a movement's strategic decisions. David Meyer's perfectly (if somewhat cheekily) titled book, *How Movements (Sometimes) Matter* (2021) demands that scholars examine the variety of ways that social movements can influence the world and explore how they often fail to do so. Social movement strategies, tactics, and organizational characteristics are only one part of the debate in which other groups, issues, policies, and context exist. All of this exists in a field of interaction, whereby various institutional and extra-institutional actors along with social conditions shape the emergence of movements and possibilities for change (Useem and Goldstone, 2022).

In this, Volume 48 of *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, chapters contribute to scholarship on the strategies and outcomes of social movements, with only one

(Corrigall-Brown, this volume) exploring the relationship between the two and others examining each aspect of social movement scholarship independently.

Strategies

Movements must carefully develop their messaging, tactics, organizational structures, and methods for mobilizing and preparing people for the movement work; some of that planning involves agreeing upon what goals, or outcomes, are desirable. All of this is part of the strategy work of a movement. Gene Sharp famously compared the strategic planning necessary in a nonviolent movement to that of military preparation for war (2005). It is the intentional focus on social change and the strategic order of social movements that separate them from other types of collective action, such as riots and fads.

The first substantive chapter examines the diffusion and spread of social movements by proposing another use of a militarized model for understanding social movement strategy. “How Movements (Sometimes) Move: Base-Mission Spatial Extension in the Nashville Civil Rights Movement” by Larry Isaac, Daniel Cornfield and Dennis Dickerson, applies military theory and continues social movement scholarship’s deep historical study of this movement. By examining the United States Civil Rights campaigns of the later 1950s and 1960s, Isaac, Cornfield, and Dickerson build from past scholarship on how Gandhian praxis diffused from India to the U.S. (Scalmer, 2011; Chabot, 2012; Slate, 2012; Isaac et al., 2012), to demonstrate how these ideas took roots in “movement centers” of southern communities (Morris, 1984). The authors weave data from a variety of secondary sources along with qualitative interviews from those involved in the Nashville “base” who brought their campaigns to other Southern locations. By drawing links

to other movements, the authors demonstrate the importance of the development of a hub for activist training and strategic planning.

This volume continues to explore race-focused social movements as the book makes a stark transition from civil rights organizing to white nationalism to continue its exploration of strategic decision-making. In “‘The only optics that matter are the scopes on our rifles’: How White Supremacist Organizations Impression Manage, Maintain Proper ‘Optics,’ and Dramaturgical Loyalty” Alessandro Giuseppe Drago moves beyond the intentional choices of leaders to examine strategy conversations of everyday activists. He makes use of a large data set of nearly 2 million leaked Discord chat messages from white supremacist organizations to explore the intentional presentation of activists in public. Using data that people never expected to be public, Drago draws from classic sociological theorist Irving Goffman (1959; 1963) to advance social movement scholarship on the careful presentation of activist selves (Bernstein 1997; 2008; Leitz, 2011). This is especially important among white supremacists since they have mostly been studied from scholars who disagree with their perspectives (Schoerer, 2008). This chapter offers important insight into the strategic avoidance of Nazi and other similar controversial symbols in order to maintain their audience (see also Smith, 2023).

Continuing Volume 48’s examination of strategy, Jaylene Murray, Tarah Wright, and Marcia McKenzie bring higher education scholarship to bear on their examination of student organizing about the environment. Using data from interviews and focus groups at six institutions across Canada, they identify lack of political opportunities and capital as the main hindrances to student mobilization. Students attempt to overcome these by building collaborative networks with faculty and students on other campuses. This chapter fills a gap in understanding how student activism may contribute to social change by adapting tactics to overcome the

hindrances they face. By demonstrating how the lack of political opportunities creates grievances (see also Muliavka, 2021) that motivate student activists, Murray, Wright and McKenzie encourage social movement scholars to more holistically understand why so much activism originates from college campuses.

Activists within a movement often disagree over the strategies and necessary for social change (Cunningham, Dahl, and Fruge, 2017; He, 2020; Leitz, 2014; McCammon, 2003); Meyer, 1990), as addressed in “Folk Theories and Social Movements: Tactical Disputes Within the Animal Rights Movement in Brazil.” In fact, Matheus Mazzilli Pereira and Marcelo Kunrath Silva argue here that tactics and frames are shaped more by culture than strategic determinations; they suggest that activists claim a strategic status for tactical choices that are morally and emotionally grounded. Although this research draws on a small sample of interviews and media data from Porto Alegre, Brazil, Pereira and Silva build a theoretically rich analysis of the tactical dilemmas, choices, disputes, and justifications by Brazilian activists on behalf of animal rights. They draw from social constructionists both in the social movement tradition and beyond to offer the useful notion of “folk theories on social transformation” that help to explain how one’s understanding of how social change happens shapes activists’ decisions and sense of efficacy.

Section II: Outcomes

Movements have intentional and unintentional outcomes (Einwohner, 2001; Guigni, 1998; Useem & Goldstone, 2022). Although most scholarship examines their effects, or if there are any, on government policy or regime change, movement outcomes can be seen in a variety of institutions, culture, other movements, and the individual lives of those involved as well as generations to come.

In parallel with the previous section, the first chapter on outcomes begins with an examination of the Civil Rights movement. Dana Williams evaluates the relationship between the locations of social movement organizations and geographic differences in reductions to racial inequality in the United States. In “‘The Movement Never Came Here:’ Civil Rights Organizational Presence and Southern Racial Inequality,” Williams uses county-level census data over decades to construct a measure of racial inequality change using education and employment rates. This work offers an important quantitative analysis of the long-term cultural impacts of social movements (Amenta and Polletta, 2019). In Southern U.S. counties, the presence or absence of the Big Four civil rights organizations the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) correlates with racial inequality changes in ways that suggest long-term structural and cultural outcomes of social movements. However, this work also challenges ideas that the Civil Rights movement positively impacted the situation of Southern Blacks in general. Rather, Williams found counties that had no presence of these civil rights organizations were more likely to experience increased racial inequality. The chapter also illuminates the role of other demographic effects, such as urbanity and ratios of Black and White residents, along with the presence of Historically Black Colleges or Universities on these changes in racial inequality as well.

Matthew Kearney looks at the long-running protest sing-along in the Wisconsin, USA state capitol building, which began in response to budget bills restricting public employees collective bargaining. Building on scholarship that reveals how repression increases or decreases activism, sometimes both over time, or causes a change in tactics (Earl, 2000; 2022; Earl and

Soule, 2010; Ferre, 2004; McCarthy and McPhail, 1998; Steinhoff and Zwerman, 2016) this chapter looks at the outcomes of mild repression of arrests and minimal sentencing which Kearney terms “messy.” Using a six-year ethnography of this protest, “The Solidarity Sing-Along and the Ineptitude of Repression” moves social movement scholarship closer to understanding the conditions that shape the effects of repression on protest. Kearney concludes that repression ineptly executed against sympathetic victims can increase rather than decrease protest. Additionally, due to a lack of strategic planning the sing along protests achieved nothing but early media attention, demonstrating the critical role of strategy in outcomes.

This book’s culminating chapter is Corrigall-Brown’s examination of the connections between strategies and outcomes. In “What Comes After the March? Tactical Choices and Social Movement Success,” she focuses on three main tactical choices social movement organizations make and the effects of such choices. Corrigall-Brown used extensive social media data and interviews to examine the survival and mobilization of 35 indivisible groups across 10 American cities, following the 2017 Women’s March in response to the election of President Trump in the United States. She finds that pathways to such organizational success depend on the location, particularly the area’s overall political leaning and population size. Corrigall-Brown continues work demonstrating that protest tactics and electoral work are often done by social movement organizations, and she shows how flexibility and diversity of tactics can be important for organizations. One of the most important strategic decisions activists make regards the use of tactics, and this chapter shows that the longevity of organizations depends upon it.

Scholarly Insights on Strategies and Tactics

Nearly fifty years following Gamson's (1975) seminal work exploring the relationship between outcomes and movement strategy this volume continues to explore the nuances of strategies and outcomes and their convoluted relationship in social movements. The meticulous preparation of Civil Rights activists who engaged in lunch counter sit-ins and the Mississippi voter registration of Freedom Summer has been well-documented. However, not all activism is quite as strategic; sometimes activists engage in tactics that are simply comfortable morally and socially, long past when they have much impact or even when it has not been effective, as the chapters by Kearney and Pereira & Silva demonstrate (see also King and Cornwall, 2005). Chapters of this Volume of RSMCC illuminate the importance of strategic decision making, as opposed to habitual practice in movements.

Although few to no movements achieve all of their goals, they often influence public opinion, awareness and framing of issues, and political conversations (Meyer, 2021; Leitz, 2014; Lichterman 2021; Porta and Tarrow, 1999; Rucht and Tarrow, 1999). Some have specific policy successes, shape agendas, or influence institutional processes (Amenta, et al 2010). Other movements have effects on specific people in need (Flammenbaum, 2016) or on the activists themselves (Carvacho et al, 2023; Drury and Reicher, 2000 and 2005; McAdam 1989; Ulag and Acar, 2018). How these outcomes come about continue to drive scholars of social movements, and there is still so much to learn about how "social movements (sometimes) matter" (title, Meyer, 2021). The field is indeed in need of innovative research that compares social movements over time as was seen in the previous volume by (Amenta, Caren, and Yuan, 2023).

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