Elections and Social Movements

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Introduction

Elections and social movements are closely related forms of political mobilization. Elections are opportunities for eligible citizens to vote for their leaders, who have a hand in addressing policy issues. Social movements are efforts by citizens and noncitizens to create social change, often directing public attention toward policy issues, pressuring elected officials to take action on those issues, and/or aiming to replace officials with people who are more sympathetic to the movement's stand on the issues.

McAdam and Tarrow (2010) explain that elections and social movements are "reciprocally" related to one another. This view highlights that movements influence elections and elections influence movements, thus modulating cycles of contention. These processes lead to and are affected by the creation of new actors and identities, the projection of political frames and signals, and the facilitation of mobilization and demobilization.

New actors and identities

The interaction of social movements and elections is regularly associated with the formation of new political actors and identities. *Movement parties* that hybridize partisan and movement forms are the archetypal new actors to emerge from these interactions. Pirro (2019) documents the evolution of the Hungarian Jobbik Party as an illustration of this phenomenon. The party had its origins in 1999 as a Christian, right-wing, student movement. In its early days, it focused on typical movement-like activities, such as protest. As Jobbik's organizers grew increasingly frustrated with their country's right-leaning political leaders, they reached the decision to officially register as a political party in 2003. The party offered a vision that blended "radical patriotism, Christianity, and anti-communism," along with anti-globalism, anti-capitalism, and anti-corruption (Pirro 2019, 792).

Jobbik's initial electoral forays were unsuccessful, but by 2018 it had become the largest opposition party in Hungary and perhaps the most well-known far-right party in Europe. Its successes are partly due to its introduction of movement-style tactics into electoral work, such as internet-based grassroots mobilization and ongoing (as opposed to periodic) election campaigning. These innovations have altered the prevailing dynamic of Hungarian politics and provided fodder for far-right politics in other European nations.

Although movement parties usually originate as movements and then shift toward electoral politics, other types of new actors may travel from electoral to movement domains. For example, Karpf (2012) explains how Blue State Digital (a for-profit business) grew by working for the presidential election campaigns of Howard Dean (in 2004) and Barack Obama (in 2008) in the United States. After establishing its reputation by applying advances in internet

technology effectively to electoral politics, it branched out to partner with left-leaning political advocacy organizations and social movements. This shift helped to provide digital organizing advantages to left-leaning movements over right-leaning movements, which have been less sophisticated in this regard.

New identities may develop from the interplay of elections and movements. For example, the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States birthed an oppositional movement known as "The Resistance" (Fisher 2019). Growth of the movement led to shifts in identities among activists, some of whom began to think of themselves as "resisters" (Bilali, Godfrey, and Freel 2020). These identities have added to the growth of movements for women, science, climate change, and other causes. The energy directed into these movements then helped to convince many activists to engage more in electoral work.

The overall pattern is that events taking place in electoral or movement arenas lead to the creation of new actors. Those new actors, then, take their innovative features from elections or movements and bring them over to the other domain. That transfer affects politics in the other domain, with the potential of generating a feedback loop.

Frames and signals

Elections and social movements produce and exchange politically relevant information in the form of frames and signals. Gold and Peña (2019) elucidate how these processes unfolded among activists and political parties leading up to the 2013 legislative elections in Argentina. The extensiveness of "pot-banging protests" provided signals to opposition political parties that the time was ripe to consolidate their challenge to the government. The opposition did so, in part, by making statements embracing the protests, which reciprocally gave protesters grounds to insist that the parties not turn their backs on the people. Movements and parties were eventually able to synchronize the framing of their messages on judicial reform. This alignment increased pressure on the government to make progress on "independent justice," corruption, and crime, among other issues.

While movements may help to promote frames that affect electoral politics, as was the case in Argentina, the opposite may also be true: electoral outcomes may compel movements to reframe their activism. For example, the victory by Daniel Ortega in the 2006 Nicaraguan elections led different organizations in the Nicaraguan feminist movement to reframe their messages. Lacombe (2014) explains that some activists saw Ortega's win as the worst-case scenario for feminists, while others thought that they could advance their goals effectively even though Ortega was in power. As a result of these disagreements, the Autonomous Women's Movement chose to frame its positions based on "autonomy," stressing that their activist work was separate from their partisan sympathies. In contrast, the Nicaraguan Feminist Movement preferred to tune its frames to focus on "women's rights," leading it to reject the oppositional alliances favored by the Autonomous Women's Movement. This case illustrates how elections restructure political realities in ways that coax movements to adjust the way they frame discourse.

Beyond the impact that they have on frames, signals from social movements may facilitate fundraising and voter turnout during elections. In a study of electoral fundraising in the United States, Gillion (2020) finds that left-leaning protests serve as a kind of advertising for allied politicians. When large, left-leaning protests take place, allied politicians receive immediate spikes in campaign contributions. Protests signal to the public that now is the time to give to

these causes. Gillion also finds that protests signal to voters when it is important to turn out to vote. Looking specifically at the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which objects to police brutality against black people, Gillion's results show that black voter turnout rose during the 2016 election in districts with more BLM protests.

Frames and signals are significant ways for actors in movements and elections to communicate and learn from one another. If they see an idea working in one area, they may be inclined to believe that it could work as well in the other. Social network ties among actors, especially those enhanced by internet tools, help to propel these dynamics.

Mobilization and demobilization

Activists and political organizations are inclined to see elections and social movements as opportunities to mobilize their supporters for one cause or another. According to Kellogg (2018), the rise of the "Indigenous Rock the Vote" movement in Canada – motivated by an upsurge in missing Aboriginal women – was decisive in shifting the balance of power from the Conservative Party to the Liberal Party in 2015. This rise not only removed Prime Minister Stephen Harper from office (in favor of Justin Trudeau), but also displaced the previously ascendant New Democratic Party, which is closely aligned with left-leaning movements in Canada. Further, social movement mobilization can be relevant in electoral authoritarian contexts, even if it does not change the outcome of an election. Dollbaum (2020) reveals that in Russia, for example, the "For Fair Elections" movement established the preconditions for the (ultimately unsuccessful) presidential campaign of opposition leader Alexei Navalny in 2018.

In addition to serving a mobilizing function, elections may have a hand in *de*mobilizing social movements. Sinpeng and Kuhonta (2012) demonstrate that the results of the 2011 election in Thailand served to settle issues that had previous motivated the so-called "Red Shirt" and "Yellow Shirt" protests. The election gave a decisive parliamentary majority to the opposition Phua Thai party, which had been backed by the Red Shirts, and its program promising higher wages, more easily available credit, and better transportation infrastructure. Given that the election was widely perceived as fair and legitimate, the government and other opposition parties accepted Phua Thai's right to govern. As a result, both Red and Yellow movements demobilized in the aftermath. Similarly, in the United States, the anti-war movement demobilized after Democrat Barack Obama's presidential victory in 2008, despite the fact that he continued many of his predecessor's war policies (Heaney and Rojas 2015).

Future directions for research

The 2010s were enormously productive for research on the interaction of elections and social movements, and the 2020s promise to be equally fruitful. A first area for progress is likely to be in understanding cycles of contention over longer periods of time. The United States provides a case in point. A revived US anti-war movement began after 9/11 during the presidency of Republican George W. Bush, which buoyed the activist candidacy of Barack Obama (Heaney and Rojas 2015). When Obama won the presidency in 2008, his victory was quickly countered by the rise of the reactionary Tea Party movement (Parker and Barreto 2013). The Tea Party fomented the far-right candidacy of Donald Trump, who was elected president in 2016 (Blum

2020). The Resistance immediately materialized to jolt multiple left-leaning opposition movements, which enhanced the fortunes of Democrats during the 2018 midterm elections. More research is needed to unpack these ongoing dynamics, such as how they are shaped by factors like partisan polarization and electoral competitiveness.

Another area of expected progress is in mapping how innovations in internet communication strengthen ties between actors in elections and movements. Fisher (2012, 130) remarked that internet tools may be responsible for "a new type of cycle emerging, one that seamlessly transitions individuals from movements, to electoral politics, and back to movements." Scholars of movements and elections would be wise to continue examining the invention of internet communication technologies, how they alter communication patterns among activists and politicos, and the nature of their application to political organizing. The potential for research in this vein is not likely to be easily exhausted.

SEE ALSO: Activism; Anti-Trump Resistance Movement; Framing and Social Movements; Identity Politics; Internet and Social Movements; Outcomes, Political; Political Opportunity/Political Opportunity Structure; Tea Party Movement (United States); Trumpism.

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