Collective Action

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The article answers the questions of what is collective action, why do people participate in collective action, and how is preparedness to participate turned into action? As most collective action concerns acts of political protest, I concentrate on collective political action. Three motives are distinguished: instrumentality referring to participation as an attempt to influence one's situation; identity referring to participation as an expression of group identification; and ideology referring to participation as an expression of one's views. Anger strengthens motives to participate and increase the likelihood that motivation turns into action. Social embeddedness is crucial in the transformation of readiness into action.

Protests in the 'new' democracies in Central Europe about 'stolen elections', street demonstrations in the 'old' democracies against austerity measures, ongoing protests in the Arab world for more democracy, and occupied city squares throughout the world to rally against inequality and to claim better governance. Men and women of all ages express their grievances and aversion. They are mobilized through the media, through organizations they are members of, or by people they know. They come alone, or with family or friends. This article is about collective political action, that is to say, collective action aiming to influence politics. Almost daily our news media report on how people try to influence politics by collective action. This is not to say that political protest is something people regularly do. In fact, participants in political protest are most of the time a minority. Even mass mobilization rarely encompasses more than a few percent points of the population. This raises a question that has always occupied students of collective political action, especially social and political psychologists: *Why do some individuals participate in collective action while others do not?*

What Is Collective Political Action?

Collective political actions are challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in interaction with elites and authorities (Tarrow, 1998: p. 4).

This definition includes two key elements that deserve some elaboration. First, collective political actions are *challenges*. They concern disruptive direct action against elites, authorities, other groups, or cultural codes. There is an obvious reason why this is the case. Collective political action is typically staged by people who lack access to politics. Had they had access there would have been no need for the action. Disruption forces authorities to pay attention to the claims brought forward. Second, it concerns people with a common purpose and solidarity. Participants rally behind common claims; they want authorities to do something, to change a state of affair or to undo changes. Such common claims are rooted in feelings of collective identity and solidarity. If these challenges gain sustainability, they constitute a social movement.

At the same time, a decline of participation in party politics is reported (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). Some labeled this trend 'movimentization of politics' (Neidhardt and Rucht, 1993), while others coined the term 'movement

society' (Meyer and Tarrow, 1998; Johnston, 2011). Some facts: for example, in 1975, 22% of the British people signed some petition. In 1990, the figure was 75%. In 1974, 9% of the British participated in a demonstration against 25% in 1990. Between 1979 and 1993, the number of protest events in the French city of Marseille more than doubled from 183 to 395 events per annum. In that same period, considerable increases in protest events in Germany were reported, a result that is confirmed by Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, and Giugni's now classical study on new social movements in Europe (1995). According to the European Values Surveys, between 1981 and 2008, the proportion of the French population declaring they had at some time or another actually signed a petition, has climbed from 43 to 64%, as has participation in a lawful demonstration (25–42%), or a boycott (10–16%). Finally and somehow against the observed trend, the five rounds of the European Social Survey between 2002 and 2010 reveal a fairly stable 6–7% of the population of 16 European countries reporting participation in lawful demonstration in the past 12 months; 25–26% signed a petition, while 17–18% boycotted some products.

Why Do People Participate in Collective Political Action?

The social psychology of protest suggests that three fundamental motives plus anger account for participation in collective political action (van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2007): people may want to change their circumstances, they may want to act as members of their group, they may want to express their views, or they may want to vent their anger. I suggest that together these four factors account for most of the participation in collective political action. I refer to the three motives as: instrumentality, identity, and ideology. *Instrumentality* refers to participation as an attempt to influence one's social and political situation; *identity* refers to participation as an expression of identification with a group; and *ideology* refers to participation as an expression of one's views. *Anger* amplifies and accelerates; it strengthens motives to participate and makes it more likely that motivation turns into action. I hold that approaches that neglect any of those factors are fundamentally flawed. To be sure, individual participants may participate because of a single motive, but all three plus anger are needed

to understand why people take part in collective political action.

The Motivation to Participate in Collective Political Action

Instrumentality

Instrumentality begins with grievances (Klandermans, 1997), be it the experience of illegitimate inequality, feelings of relative deprivation, feelings of injustice, moral indignation about some state of affairs, or a so-called suddenly imposed grievance (an event imposed on people, for example, austerity measures taken by government). Social psychological grievance theories such as relative deprivation theory, or social justice theory have tried to specify how and why grievances develop. Resource mobilization theory and political process theory, the two approaches that dominate the field since those days, have always taken as their point of departure that grievances are ubiquitous and that the key question in action participation research is not so much whether people who participate are aggrieved, but whether aggrieved people participate. The instrumentality paradigm holds that participants are people who believe that they can change their social and political situation at affordable costs.

The perceived costs and benefits of collective action can be distinguished in *selective* and *collective* incentives (Klandermans, 1997). Selective incentives relate to costs and benefits that differentiate between participants and nonparticipants. You are only spending time or money if you participate; you only run the risk of being beaten up by the police if you participate; your friends will only blame you for not participating if you stay home, and so on. Sometimes movement organizations try to make participation more attractive by providing selective benefits: a popular music group, a train ticket to the city where the demonstration is held, a T-shirt, etc. Authorities or opponents on their part can try to make participation less attractive by imposing costs upon participants. Collective incentives are related to achievement of the movement's goals and the extent to which participation in a specific activity contributes to goal achievement. Obviously, it is not enough for a goal to be important to a person, some likelihood of success is also needed (Corcoran et al., 2011). The problem with collective action is that it is difficult to know to what extent an activity will have any influence on authorities. In any event, chances are low that an activity will have any impact if only a few people participate. Therefore, the likelihood of success is influenced by the expected behavior of others (Klandermans, 1984). If too few people participate it is unlikely that the activity will make any difference. As a consequence, expectations about the behavior of others play an important role in the decision to participate. If someone expects that only a few people participate his or her motivation to participate will be low. In a way, the expectation about other people's behavior functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy: if people believe that only few will participate, they will not be motivated to participate and thus make their own expectation true.

Instrumentality presupposes an effective movement that is able to enforce some wanted changes or at least to mobilize substantial support. Making an objective assessment of a movement's impact is not an easy task, but movement organizations will try to convey the impression of an effective political force. They can do so by pointing to the impact they have had in the past, or to the powerful allies they have. Of course, they may lack all this, but then, they might be able to show other signs of movement strength. A movement may command a large constituency as witnessed by turnout on demonstrations, or by membership figures, or large donations. It may comprise strong organizations with charismatic leaders who have gained respect, and so on. Instrumentality also implies the provision of selective incentives. Movements may vary considerably in the selective incentives for participation they provide. This is, obviously, also a matter of the resources a movement commands. Surprisingly little comparative information is available on the resources movements have at their disposal. In a similar vein, systematic documentation is lacking on the way in which the larger political system and the alliances and opponents of movement organizations influence movement participation. It was Tilly, who in 1978 coined the now classic terms 'repression' and 'facilitation' to distinguish between political systems that increase or decrease the costs of participation. Indeed, repressive political environments may increase the costs of participation considerably: people may lose friends, they may risk their jobs, or otherwise jeopardize their sources of income, they may be jailed, and they may even lose their lives.

From an instrumental perspective, a solution must be found to the dilemma of collective action. In 1965, Mancur Olson published his *The Logic of Collective Action*. The core of the book is the argument that rational actors will *not* contribute to the production of a collective good unless selective incentives persuade them to do so. Collective goods are characterized by 'jointness of supply'. That is to say, if they are made available to one person, they become available to everybody irrespective of whether people have contributed to the production of the collective good (for example, a law against discrimination, or measures against pollution). Therefore, according to Olson, a rational actor will choose to take a free ride, unless selective incentives prevent him from doing so. Olson's argument was soon applied to social movement participation. It helped to explain why so often people do not participate in social movements, despite the interest they have in the achievement of the movement's goals. Movement scholars argued that movement goals typically are collective goods. If the goal is achieved people will enjoy the benefits irrespective of whether they have participated in the effort. In view of a goal for which achievement is uncertain, but for which benefits – if materialized – can be reaped anyway, rational actors will take a free ride.

However, social movement scholars quickly discovered that reality was more complex than Olson's simple model suggested. The problem with Olson's logic of collective action is that it provides an explanation for why people do not participate, but fares poorly in explaining why people *do* participate. Moreover, Olson's solution that people participate for selective incentives is fundamentally flawed, as it does not give a satisfactory answer to the question of where the resources needed to provide selective incentives come from (Oliver, 1980). If these must be collected from individual citizens the same collective action dilemma arises again. This is not to say that selective incentives are irrelevant, but that in the final instance they cannot solve the collective action dilemma. In other words, if

collective and selective incentives do not provide a sufficient explanation of movement participation, what else might make the difference? A recurring criticism was that Olson's model assumes that individuals make their decisions in isolation, as if there are no other people with whom they consult, with whom they feel solidarity, and by whom they are kept to their promises. This pointed to the significance of collective identity as a factor in movement participation.

Identity

It soon became clear that instrumentality was not the only reason to participate. After all, many goals are only reached in the long run if at all. Similarly, when it comes to material benefits, costs frequently outweigh benefits. Apparently, there is more in being a movement participant than perceived costs and benefits. Indeed, one of those motives relates to belonging to a valued group (Simon et al., 1998).

Identity is described as a place in society. People occupy many different places. They are student, unemployed, housewife, soccer player, politician, farmer, and so on. The different roles and positions a person occupies form his or her personal identity. At the same time, every place a person occupies is shared with other people. I am not the only professor of social psychology, nor the only Dutch, or the only European. I share these identities with other people – a fact that turns them into collective identities at the same time.

Most of the time collective identities remain latent. Self-categorization theory hypothesizes that an individual may act as a unique person, that is, display his personal identity, *or* as a member of a specific group, that is, display one of the many collective identities he has (Turner, 1999). Obviously, this is often not a matter of free choice. Circumstances may force a collective identity into awareness whether people like it or not, as the Yugoslavian and South African histories have illustrated dramatically and there are other equally or even more dramatic examples throughout human history. But also in less extreme circumstances, collective identities can become significant. Take, for example, the possible effect of an announcement that a waste incinerator is planned next to a neighborhood. Chances are that in no time the collective identity of the people living in that neighborhood will become salient.

Self-categorization theory proposes that people are more prepared to employ a social category in their self-definition, the more they identify with that category. Identification with a group makes people more prepared to act as a member of that group. This assertion refers, of course, to identity strength. Social identity literature tends to neglect that real-world identities vary in strength. But, the strength of group identification may make a real difference especially in political contexts. We may expect that strong identities make it more likely that people act on behalf of their group. The basic hypothesis regarding collective identity and movement participation is fairly straightforward: a strong identification with a group makes participation in collective political action on behalf of that group more likely. The available empirical evidence overwhelmingly supports this assumption.

Movements offer the opportunity to act on behalf of one's group. This is most attractive if people identify strongly with their group. The more farmers identify with other farmers the more appealing it is to take part in farmers' protest. The more women identify with other women the more attractive it is to participate in the women's movement. In addition to the opportunity to act on behalf of the group, collective political action participation offers the opportunity to identify with the movement's cause, the people in the movement, the movement organization, the group one is participating in, or the leader of the movement. Not all these sources of identification are always equally appealing. Movement leaders can be more or less charismatic, or the people in the movement or in someone's group can be more or less attractive. Moreover, movements and movement organizations may be, and in fact often are, controversial. Hence, becoming a participant in a movement organization does not mean taking a respected identity upon oneself, on the contrary. Within the movement's framework, this is, of course, completely different. There the activist does have the status society is denying him. And, of course, for the activist in-group–out-group dynamics may turn the movement organization or group into a far more attractive group than any other group 'out there' that is opposing the movement. Indeed, it is not uncommon for militants to refer to the movement organization as a second family, a substitute for the social life society is no longer offering them. Movement organizations not only supply sources of identification, but they also offer all kinds of opportunities to enjoy and celebrate the collective identity: marches, rituals, songs, meetings, signs, symbols, and common codes.

A complicating matter is the fact that people simultaneously hold multiple identities while movements tend to emphasize a single identity and refer to a single place in society. As a consequence, people may experience that conflicting identities steer behavior in different directions. Individuals might find themselves under cross pressure when two groups they identify with are on opposite sides of a controversy. Indeed, movement activists who challenge their government are often accused of being disloyal to the country. Gonzalez and Brown (2003) coined the term 'dual identity' to point to the concurrent workings of supra- and subordinated identities. They argue that identification with a subordinate entity (e.g., ethnic identity) does not necessarily exclude identification with a supra-ordinate entity (e.g., national identity). In fact, they claim that dual identity is a healthy configuration, as it implies sufficient identification with one's subgroup to experience basic security *and* sufficient identification with the overarching group to preclude divisiveness. There is evidence that indeed people who hold a dual identity are more satisfied with their situation than people who do not (Gonzalez and Brown, 2003). However, if they are dissatisfied, individuals who hold a dual identity were more likely to participate in collective action (Klandermans et al., 2008).

In 2001, Simon and Klandermans published an influential paper on the politicization of collective identity (PCI). In order to become the vehicle of collective action collective identity must politicize, they argued. Shared grievances, common enemies, and a search for third party support are the building stones of PCI, the authors maintain. Some sense of identification with the superordinate political entity seems to be a basic requirement of social and political mobilization, in that it ensures that this entity is acknowledged as one's own social or political habitat. Therefore, politicized identity is by

definition dual identity. More specifically, to the extent that one identifies with the superordinate entity one should feel entitled to make political claims. Similarly, one should feel motivated to get actively involved in the political game, because it becomes one's own game, and one should feel encouraged to approach third parties as potential allies, because they can be viewed as in-group members at the superordinate level, so Simon and Ruhs (2008). Politicization divides people's social environment into allies and opponents and results in polarization. Polarization concerns the process of distancing of the opposing camps. Eventually, this may result in radicalization. Simon (2011) suggests that in a polarized situation, to the extent that PCI is a dual identity including identification with the superordinate polity, PCI has a pacifying effect on politicization and associated collective action in that it prioritizes claims and actions that stay within the limits of normative acceptance in the larger polity. In contrast, collective identities lacking this pacifying effect, such as separatist identities based on more exclusive cultural, ethnic, or religious allegiances, should be more prone to escalation and radicalization. Collective identities must politicize to become the engine of collective action. Typically, politicization of identities begins with the awareness of shared grievances. Next, an external enemy is blamed for the group's predicament, and claims for compensation are leveled against this enemy. Unless appropriate compensation is granted, the power struggle continues. Politicization of identities and the underlying power struggle unfold as a sequence of politicizing events that gradually transform the group's relationship to its social environment, whereby the tactical choices are again shaped by identity. Hence, workers strike and anarchists fight the police.

Ideology

The third motive – wanting to express one's views – refers at the same time to a longstanding theme in the social movement literature, and to a recent development. In classic studies of social movements, the distinction was made between instrumental and expressive movements, or protest. In those days, instrumental movements were seen as movements that aimed at some external goal, for example, the implementation of citizenship rights. While expressive movements had no external goals. Participation was a goal in itself, for example, the expression of anger in response to experienced injustice. Movement scholars felt increasingly uncomfortable with the distinction, as it was thought that most movements had both instrumental and expressive aspects and that the emphasis on the two could change over time. Therefore, the distinction lost its use. Recently, however, the idea that people might participate in movements to express their views has received renewed attention. Attention arising this time from movement scholars, who were unhappy with the overly structural approach of resource mobilization and political process theory. These scholars began to put an emphasis on the creative, cultural, and emotional aspects of social movements, such as music, symbols, rituals, narratives, and moral indignation (Goodwin et al., 2000). People who are angry develop feelings of moral indignation about some state of affairs or some government decision, and wish to make that known. They participate in a social movement not only to enforce political change, but

also to gain dignity in their lives through struggle and moral expression.

Social movements play a significant role in the diffusion of ideas and values. Rochon (1998) makes the important distinction between 'critical communities', where new ideas and values are developed, and 'social movements' that are interested in winning social and political acceptance for those ideas and values. "In the hands of movement leaders, the ideas of critical communities become ideological frames" (p. 31), states Rochon, who continues to argue that social movements are not simply extensions of critical communities. After all, not all ideas developed in critical communities are equally suited to motivate collective action. Social movement organizations, then, are carriers of meaning. Through processes such as consensus mobilization or framing, they seek to propagate their definition of the situation to the public at large. A study of flyers produced by the various groups and organizations involved in the protests against the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in Berlin is an excellent example in this respect (Gerhards and Rucht, 1992). The study shows how links are constructed between the ideological frame of the organizers of the demonstration and those of the participating organizations in order to create a shared definition of the situation. In the social movement literature, such definitions of the situation have been labeled 'collective action frames'.

Social movements do not invent ideas from scratch; they borrow from the history of ideas. They build on an ideological heritage as they relate their claims to broader themes and values in society. In so doing they relate to societal debates that have a history of their own and that history is usually much longer than that of the movement itself. Gamson (1992), for example, refers to the 'themes' and 'counterthemes' that, in his view, exist in every society. One such pair of a theme and countertheme he mentions is 'self-reliance' vs 'mutuality', that is the belief that individuals should take care of themselves vs the belief that society is responsible for its less fortunate members. In my own work, I have demonstrated how in the Netherlands these two beliefs became the icons that galvanized debate and spurred protest over disability payments. While, 'self-reliance' became the theme of those favoring restrictions in disability payment, 'mutuality' was the theme of those who defended the existing system (Klandermans and Goslinga, 1996).

Emotions

Ideology has a significant affective component. Acting on one's ideology is deemed to be one of the fundamental motives of action participation and necessarily charged with emotion. Appraisal and action are socially constructed, that is to say, are formed in interpersonal interaction, especially in the case of politically relevant emotions. Cultural and historical factors play an important role in the interpretation of the state of affairs by which politically relevant emotions are generated. Obviously, appraisal can be manipulated. Activists work hard to create moral outrage and anger, and to provide a target against which these can be vented. They must weave together a moral, cognitive, and emotional package of attitudes. But also, in the ongoing activities of the movements, emotions play an important role. In the literature, two kinds of collective emotions are distinguished – reciprocal emotions and shared emotions – that reinforce each other. Each measure of shared

outrage against an injustice reinforces the reciprocal emotion of fondness for others precisely because they feel the same way. Conversely, mutual affection is a context in which new shared emotions are easily created. Anger and indignation are emotions that are related to a specific appraisal of the situation.

Recent work in sociology and social and political psychology has brought emotions to the study of social movements (Goodwin et al., 2000; van Zomeren et al., 2004). For those of us who have been part of protest events or watched reports on protest events in the news media, this is hardly surprising. Indeed, it is hard to conceive of protest detached from emotions. Emotions can be avoidance or approach oriented. Fear, which makes people refrain from taking action, is an example of an avoidance-oriented emotion. Anger is an approach-oriented emotion and is known to be an antecedent of protest participation (van Zomeren et al., 2004). There appears to be a relation between emotions and efficacy. When people do not feel efficacious, they are more likely to experience fear; feeling efficacious, on the other hand, is associated with experiencing anger. Findings from a study among migrants we conducted confirm this, feelings of efficacy reinforced anger and reduced fear, while in their turn, anger fostered collective action participation while fear undermined it (Klandermans et al., 2008). van Zomeren et al. (2004) show that anger is an important motivator of protest participation of disadvantaged groups. Anger and fear are not the only emotions relevant in the context of movement participation; indeed, other emotions such as hope and despair are proposed as well (Gould, 2009; Stürmer and Simon, 2009). Anger moves people to adopt a more challenging relationship with authorities than subordinate emotions such as shame and despair or fear.

The Transformation of Potential into Action

People who are prepared to take part in collective action do not automatically participate. Potential must be transformed into action (Klandermans and Oegema, 1987). This is what mobilization campaigns are about. Targeting potential participants and turning them into actual participants. Obviously, a campaign will never be 100% successful in that regard. In the course of a campaign, people may loose their sympathy for the movement, or the movement may fail to target or to motivate its sympathizers. As the previous section concentrated on motivating, I will focus now on targeting.

Targeting sympathizers implies answering two strategic questions: Who are the sympathizers? And, How can they be reached? These are two questions every attempt to mobilize must find an answer to. Social networks are of crucial importance in this regard. People are embedded in the social fabric of society (Klandermans et al., 2008). Targeting sympathizers implies knowing where to find them and commanding communication channels that reach them. Movement organizations have two options in that respect: they can try to co-opt existing networks or they can build new networks. Both strategies are mobilization efforts in itself (Boekkooi, 2012). Co-optation is the easier strategy of the two, because it builds on existing commitments to organizations and networks that are the movement organization's allies. There are risks,

however. The co-opted organization may use the campaign for its own ends or negotiations with the leadership fail so that it decides to not collaborate. The latter makes it more difficult for the rank and file to cooperate. Yet, co-opting existing networks such as churches, unions, political parties, youth organizations, and the like is frequently applied, if only because it implies an answer to both strategic questions at the same time. On the one hand, it works from the assumption that most members of the allies sympathize with the movement, and on the other hand, it is assumed that these sympathizers can be reached through the allies' communication channels.

Building new networks implies the recruitment of people, who are willing to spend sometimes considerable amounts of time for a prolonged period as a movement activist. It will, therefore, require more effort on the part of the organizer than co-optation of existing networks, but once established the networks are more reliable. The recruitment of such movement activists is a process, which is determined, on the one hand, by factors that influence who is being asked, and on the other hand, by factors that influence who agrees to serve as an activist when asked. As for the first type of factors, a crucial determinant is someone's embeddedness in networks linked to the movement organization, or more specific to the movement organizer, who is undertaking the recruitment effort. Movement organizers tend to recruit first among the people they know and often that suffices. You need activists to maintain the network, and once you have those the return of having additional activist is rapidly diminishing. In fact, long-term activism is one of the forms of activism that must cope with free rider behavior. The people who are asked to serve as an activist understand perfectly well that they are giving most of the sympathizers to the movement a free ride, but that they are prepared to do so because they care. Only people who really care a lot are prepared to sacrifice for the others. They make the effort because they feel that "If [they] do not do it, nobody else will" (Oliver, 1984).

Once the mobilizing structure is in place, the actual mobilization for collective action can proceed (Boekkooi, 2012). Again embeddedness in the social fabric of society plays a crucial role. People may be directly or indirectly connected to the networks of a movement's mobilization potential or not connected at all. Such embeddedness or unembeddedness is of crucial influence on the likelihood of being targeted and if targeted on the likelihood of participation.

See also: Collective Behavior, Social Psychology of; Intergroup Relations; Political Psychology; Social Identity in Social Psychology; Social Movements: A Social Psychological Perspective; Social Psychology.

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