

Hi Everyone,

I hope you have the patience to read yet another effort of mine to come to grips with Chuck's legacy. This is the introduction to an edited volume on political opportunity structures that Jeff Goodwin and I are publishing next year with Stanford University Press that has been in the works for a while. I've just added the table at the end, so I'm especially curious what you think of that, as well as the usual comments on every- and anything.

Tabinda decided to wait until February to have a more advanced draft for us to read. I apologize for the tardiness of this posting, but I needed to run this paper through another revision at the last minute.

By the way, this is printed in a font called Century Gothic, which is supposed to use less ink than other fonts. I began using it when I realized that each of my toner cartridges was costing more than my printer had.

See you Thursday,

Jim

INTRODUCTION:
FROM MACRO OPPORTUNITIES TO MICRO MECHANISMS

James M. Jasper

If the enemy opens the door, you must race in.

–Sun Tzu

Men who have any great undertaking in mind must first make all necessary preparations for it, so that, when an opportunity arises, they may be ready to put it in execution according to their design.

–Machiavelli

The French town of Poitiers lent its name to one of the most famous battles of European history, when England's Black Prince captured the French king in 1356, seventeen years into the series of sporadic campaigns known as the Hundred Years' War. At first light Prince Edward, commanding 6,000 men in comparison to the French King John's 20,000, was pondering (and may have begun) a retreat in order to protect the many wagons of his booty that had already departed. The French, camped on the highest hill in the vicinity, charged down when they saw the treasure escaping, and for most of the morning dismounted troops fought hand to hand around a thick hedge. Suddenly, a fresh contingent of French forces appeared, coming down the hill toward the now exhausted combatants. Many English soldiers began to withdraw, under the guise of escorting their wounded comrades. Edward's situation looked grim.

The French then decided to dismount and attack on foot, as they had earlier, inadvertently offering an opportunity to the 26-year-old Edward, who immediately recognized it, turning the tide and making a name for himself as a brilliant strategist. His soldiers, although dismounted, still had their horses nearby—a resource the French, having marched the final distance to the hedge, lacked. The English mounted and charged the large French army. Galloping horses are intimidating to men on foot, especially in this age before the pike, but equally important was the boost to English morale that came from going on the offensive rather than waiting to be attacked again. This restored the English soldiers' sense of agency. In addition, Edward sent a small cavalry group down the back and around the side of the small hill where he was camped. When they suddenly appeared at the French army's flank, soon after the second engagement had begun, the startled French scattered. This was another opportunity for Edward, who pursued them right up to the walls of the town, where he captured King John. In the midst of several thousand corpses, he pitched his tent and sat down to dinner with John as his guest (before shipping

him, with the rest of the booty, off to England to await ransom).

At dawn, King John had seemed to hold most advantages: good position, a much larger force, and the relatively modest goal of preventing Edward from getting away with his slow-moving wagon train. And with the first engagement, the French seem to have shaken their main disadvantage, a forbidding sense of the superiority of English warriors. But by dusk, through vigilance and quick decisions, the Black Prince had pulled off one of the great victories of military history.

Central to strategic engagement of any kind is to be alert to changes that give you some new advantage. Opponents make a mistake, or circumstances alter in a way that suddenly favors your resources, skills, or position. In war, the fog lifts, the wind shifts, or a sudden freeze hardens the mud. In other contentious arenas, it may be new rules, a change in personnel, or some event – such as a scandal – that redirects attention and opinion. These temporary openings often make the difference in an engagement, and they are especially valuable for those with few stable resources. One side's mistake is the other's opportunity (Jasper and Poulsen, 1993).

Other aspects of any field of conflict are more stable, encouraging certain kinds of action while discouraging or preventing others. You tailor your team and strategies to these structural features of the environment. These are long-run *rules* of the game or physical *attributes* of an arena, as distinct from short-run windows of *opportunity* within in arena. The rules of arenas advantage some and disadvantage others, depending on what resources, skills, statuses, and positions they hold. (Holding a position in a hierarchy is like holding a position on a field of battle: different positions allow for different actions.) Both structures and opportunities impose costs and constraints on strategic agency, encouraging action to move in easier directions rather than harder ones (but rarely altogether determining that action).

It has been called action and order, agency and structure, actors and their environments, players and games, and many more things: the mysterious interplay between intentions and outcomes in human action. Deep philosophical anxieties over determinism and free will lurk here, as well as unsettling explanatory challenges for all the social sciences. Observers of protest and social movements have always recognized these two sides of political efforts, acknowledging that protestors rarely get what they want, that social movements rarely succeed. But it is vital to understand why, sometimes, they do (Ganz, 2009). Diverse strategic arenas – wars, diplomacy, markets, party politics, as well as protest – exhibit the same complex interplay (Jasper, 2006). This book aims at a better understanding of this interaction.

Political Opportunity Structures

The late Charles Tilly revolutionized the study of collective action in the 1960s by redirecting attention from the motivations and choices of protestors to

their demographic, economic, and especially political contexts. In 1964 with the *Vendée*, in my opinion his best book, he showed that seemingly local mobilizations reflected broader changes in political institutions and who controlled them. For the next forty years he would elaborate on this idea that, as national political institutions developed in France and England, new struggles appeared over who would be represented and how, and whose interests would be served. In this way Tilly created what became known as the political process tradition, centered on changes in the environments of protestors, in their external opportunities to act in certain ways. Let's take a look at the evolution of Tilly's views of the contexts of political action as he developed his *polity-centered approach*.

Urbanization was the central process which, according to Tilly, explained why in 1793 rural communities of France's Vendée region erupted in resistance to the French Revolution while their more urbanized neighbors continued to support it. He lumped different processes under the heading of "urbanization," including economic and political integration with cities and especially Paris. Central were the religious, economic, and political elites who linked local with national: "The difference in apparent political affiliation [between pro- and counter-revolutionary areas] was less a matter of sharp disagreement in political philosophy than of differences 1) between an essentially apolitical electorate and a politicized one, 2) between two different kinds of linkage between communities and the national political process" (Tilly, 1964, p. 154).

Pre-existing attitudes and ideologies mattered little, and Tilly's main target was grievance theories based on individual attitudes or emotions, or indeed any explanations that relied on mental states, which he considered "phenomenological individualism." He stated the kernel of the political-opportunity model: "A set of circumstances which significantly weakened one or the other of these competitors [primarily bourgeois merchants and traditional nobles, vying for leadership over peasants and artisans], or transformed the external situation of the community, could give the bourgeois an opportunity to increase greatly his local power and, in the long run, his prestige" (1964, p. 157). The Revolution did just this. Nobles and bourgeois were both clear about their objective interests, and the emergence of a new, national arena centered on the Assembly gave an advantage to the latter.

In further research on France, Tilly would give less prominence to urbanization patterns and more to the rise of national markets and to the centralization of power in the national state, but the opening of *new arenas* remained central. In his grand summary of four centuries of popular contention in France, *The Contentious French* (1986), his basic framework consisted of interests, organization, and opportunity. He drew heavily on Marxism, which he admired for its stress on "the ubiquity of conflict, the importance of interests rooted in the organization of production, the influence of specific forms of organization on the character and intensity of collective action" (Tilly, 1978, p. 48). What he claimed was missing from the Marxist tradition became Tilly's

specialty, political processes. Simply put, “increasingly the action (or, for that matter, the inaction) of large organizations and of national states has created the threats and opportunities to which any interested actor has to respond” (1986, p. 77). Actors *already have interests* and are aware of them. The large organizations that intrigued him most were those of the state, which became the ubiquitous context for contention in the modern world.

Despite Tilly’s (1975, 1992) research on the state as an actor, especially in making war and taxing citizens, when it came to contentious politics the state tended to remain a “context” in his accounts rather than a player or set of players. Unlike Max Weber, for instance, who was interested in the intentions and ideologies of politicians, leaders, and officials (and the interactions among them), Tilly seemed content to read “interests” of state officials from their positions (as he did with non-state actors). They wanted territory, order, and especially revenues. His awareness of long-run historical change led him to focus on the emergence of the modern state *as a relatively unified player*, an explanandum that perhaps encouraged him to exaggerate the cohesion of the contemporary state. It is so much more unified than previous states, why look inside it for conflicts?

In one way, Tilly saw the state as a set of often-conflicting strategic players, since it was this conflict that opened opportunities for protestors to promote their causes, providing allies or distracting attention. But otherwise this conflict within the state was never Tilly’s object of interest. He did not examine the conflicting logics of different state institutions, the ideologies of parties or their leaders, the professional training of bureaucrats, the worldviews that might lead some officials to disagree with others, the contention between monarchs, nobles, parliamentary parties and factions, police forces, armies, judiciaries, Finance Ministries, and so on. *All this remained “context,”* with the salient outcome either a divided state or a unified state. In his final book, *Contentious Performances*, Tilly summarized the relevance of the state in just two variables: its capabilities and the political and civil rights it granted.

In his great project of the 1980s and 1990s, on British contention from the 1750s to the 1830s, Tilly (1995, 1997) deployed the same basic variables as with France to show how the expansion of capitalist markets and of the national state affected protest, now especially conceptualized and aggregated into *repertoires of action*. This period saw the creation of a new arena, a powerful and accountable parliament, to which popular demands and displays were oriented – and remain oriented today in the form of social movements. Tilly (1995, p. 36) downplayed the language of opportunities here, but retained a strong focus on the “logic of interaction, of struggle itself,” as opposed to scholars who seek “accounts of the actions of actors – individuals, communities, classes, organizations, and others – taken singly.” He occasionally mentions goals, especially interests and rights, but these are scantily defined except that a gain for one group seems to entail losses for other groups. The influence of Marxism remains, in that economic classes seem to be the example that fits his

model best. In this strongly contextual view, *arenas define players' goals*. (Just as for Alain Touraine (1981), in an unexpected parallel, the stakes of an arena help define a social movement.) In retrospect Tilly's idea – developed in criticism of earlier theories – that one may study players or their interactions but not the two together seems both wrong and unfortunate.

By this time, others had adapted Tilly's contextual approach, defining it as a distinct paradigm of research and in the process extracting his concepts from their dense historical contexts to apply them to new periods and places. In 1982 Doug McAdam identified a new "political process" model in sharp distinction to both collective behavior and resource mobilization. He especially intended it to highlight indigenous efforts more than John McCarthy and Mayer Zald (1977) did in their resource mobilization model, which McAdam thought overstressed elite resources and overextended the concept of resources into anything useful to a movement.

In McAdam's process model, four sets of variables explain the emergence of a social movement: broad socioeconomic processes, indigenous organizational strength (especially social networks and leaders), expanding political opportunities, and cognitive liberation (which includes both a sense that the current system is illegitimate and belief that change is possible). Yet political opportunities tend to absorb the other factors. Citing Peter Eisinger (1973), McAdam (1982, p. 41) says, "any event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured occasions a shift in political opportunities." And in his empirical chapters on the U.S. civil rights movement he proceeds to adduce a wide range of opportunities: the decline of the cotton industry, the migration of African Americans out of the South, their electoral support for Democrats, America's cold-war struggle with the USSR, black organizations and networks and leaders, and more. These matter to the extent they lead to political opportunities. McAdam had moved away from Tilly's narrowly political type of opportunity. As James Rule (1988, p. 187) gently complained, "McAdam's work...illustrates some ambiguities in political accounts of militant action. It is difficult to draw falsifiable commitments from the explanatory factors he invokes." But falsifiability is always difficult in complex political settings; to me the underlying problem is the inclusive vagueness of McAdam's variables. We needed more precise mechanisms.

Perhaps because of its looseness, the word "opportunities" caught the imagination of scholars. Soon there were *cultural opportunities* (McAdam, 1996), *organizational opportunities* (Kurzman, 1998), *transnational opportunities* (della Porta and Tarrow, 2004, 2007), *discursive opportunities* (Koopmans, 2004; Koopmans and Olzak, 2004), and more. Any advantage became an opportunity, and anyone who needed some theory could easily adapt the term. I think the excitement over the concept reflected an awareness of the open-ended, sudden nature of strategic interaction, combined with an anxious desire to systematize the unsystematic, to predict the unpredictable, to tame

agency by reducing it to structures.

Later, in the face of ever-proliferating lists of political opportunity structures (see chapter 8 of this volume), McAdam (1996, p. 27) returned to Tilly's narrowly political approach by offering this "highly consensual" list: (1) The relative *openness or closure* of the institutionalized political system, (2) The stability or instability of that broad set of *elite alignments* that typically undergird a polity, (3) The presence or absence of *elite allies*, and (4) The state's capacity and propensity for *repression*. (This is the list that Jeff Goodwin originally asked our initial contributors, in chapters 1 through 8, to comment upon.) McAdam had apparently relaxed his objection to McCarthy and Zald's emphasis on elites. The list seemed sensible, although the factors often proved hard to define tightly or to observe independently of the actions they were intended to explain.

The world around us channels our actions in certain directions, or in Sidney Tarrow's favorite formula, it both enables and constrains us. There are many different forms of this channeling, and the challenge of any book on political context is to sort them out. The risk of political opportunity theory was to overextend its key concept and not distinguish sufficiently among different types of constraint. William Gamson and David Meyer (1996, p. 275) famously complained, "The concept of political opportunity structure is in trouble, in danger of becoming a sponge that soaks up every aspect of the social movement environment – political institutions and culture, crises of various sorts, political alliances, and policy shifts." Expanding on these risks, in 1999 Jeff Goodwin and I (1999/2003) complained that process models conflated short-term openings and long-term structural shifts, implied "objective" shifts outside human interpretation, and ignored a number of important cultural and emotional factors. Why call something a structure, we asked, if protestors can *change* it? Especially if their main *goal* is to change it?

Only after political opportunity structures had come under attack, interestingly, did Tilly explicitly embrace the term, in his last major book, *Contentious Performances* (2008). (He had mostly ignored them in his 2004 overview of social movements, where the central context is "democratization.") He addresses three of Goodwin's and my criticisms of the concept: "that analysts have used it inconsistently, that it denies human agency, and that it remains unverifiable because it only applies after the fact" (Tilly, 2008, p. 91). He admits the charge of inconsistency but denies the other two. "POS can only shape contention through human agency," he says, shifting the way we should think about political opportunity structures. They are no longer independent variables, but dependent ones as well. A contentious campaign changes them, and they in turn change the context for future campaigns (which themselves can change the context, and so on, back and forth). Poignantly, this importance for particular campaigns opens the door to a range of topics – the sources of strategic creativity, the symbolic resonance of events such as foundings, the decisionmaking styles of powerful leaders, the rhetorical resonance of various tropes, and emotions and sensibilities – that Tilly had no

time to explore. But by finally acknowledging agency as inextricably tied to structure, Tilly left an enormous agenda for the rest of us.

The endless lists of opportunities, Tilly also argued, show that they *can* be specified in advance. He names six (2008, p. 91), in contrast to the four that McAdam had identified: openness of the regime, coherence of its elite, stability of political alignments, availability of allies for potential challengers, repression or facilitation, and pace of change. The generality of all these, quite far from the concrete “mechanisms” that McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) desire, suggests there is still work to be done. The first four are hard to recognize before insurgents attempt to take advantage of them: how do we know if elite allies are available before protestors do the strategic and rhetorical work of trying to align with them; and once they’ve done that work how do we know what potential was really there beforehand? And how do we know just how divided elites are unless some segment decides to align with insurgents? Because the six factors are highly correlated, we need to be especially careful to specify the concrete mechanisms by which each operates. We need to replace catch-all categories with *observables*.

To me, these opportunities are not independent variables. They arise out of struggles and challenges, through an interaction even more continuous than Tilly implies in his sequence of campaign-structure-campaign-et cetera. It would be simpler to see them as actions and reactions rather than as structures, to see them first as moves in a conflict and only second as (occasional) precipitates out of those moves. (Actually, they are complex sequences of interactions not single actions: they need to be analytically broken down into the latter.) We can’t “compare” the agency of protestors with the structures of the state, since all players exhibit choices and thus agency. Chuck Tilly found remarkably few things to change his mind about in fifty years of research, so we should pay attention to those he did. It’s typical of him to leave us, in his final book, a new formulation of old problems, causal imagery that should prove fruitful for research over years to come, even as we question and criticize it.

Can Political Opportunities be Patched?

In *Dynamics of Contention*, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) seemed to abandon the whole system of political opportunities in favor of a mechanisms approach that specifies smaller causal chunks which can be concatenated to explain complex processes and outcomes (although, confusingly, they also retained “processes” as predictable concatenations of mechanisms). Others have been pushing in the same direction, toward viewing political context in a more dynamic, less structural way. Three years later, in a continuation of the 1999 debate, a number of other scholars joined the fray (Goodwin and Jasper, 2004), pointing out emotional, cultural, strategic, and other directions overlooked by political-opportunity models. Richard Flacks (2004, p. 146), for instance, complains, “One of the defining characteristics of activists is that they

are people whose actions are not interpretable simply in terms of situations; instead, they are people who act against institutionalized expectations, accepted belief, conventional values and goals." Like another contributor, Marshall Ganz (2004, 2009), Flacks finds *strategy* missing: "Surprisingly little attention is paid to examining, in a given movement situation, what activists themselves believe their strategic options to be and how these get evaluated and debated within the movement" (p. 147). Aldon Morris (2004, p. 246) similarly faults the process model for its "tendency to assign undue causal weight to external factors and its propensity to gloss over the deep cultural and emotional processes that inspire and produce collective action."

Reflecting on these debates, an astute French observer, Olivier Fillieule (2005), composed a "Requiem" for the concept of political opportunity structures. Admiring the concept when restricted to comparative research into the effects of national political structures, he found inadequate mechanisms to explain the effects of broad structures as well as inattention to the ways in which interactions affect the structures in turn. Accordingly, he concluded that the models remained static instead of dynamic. Fillieule added that the opportunities remained structural, rather than interpretive, due largely to the accompanying methods of research: "macro-comparisons based on quantitative analyses, statistical data, newspaper counts, surveys of organizations, etc." (2005, p. 208-209; also Fillieule, 1997). As Meyer and Minkoff (2004) also show, it is difficult to get at dynamic interactions through these kinds of data.

At the same time as Fillieule's requiem, David Meyer (Meyer, 2004; Meyer and Minkoff, 2004) tried to fix the concept, although partly by replacing political opportunity structures with the even broader term political opportunities. He reminds us (2004, p. 126) of the original point of the approach, "that activists' prospects for advancing particular claims, mobilizing supporters, and affecting influence are context-dependent." This is the kind of broad formulation that led Goodwin and me to call the perspective "trivial," but Meyer more usefully observes that political opportunities can be used to explain different things, including mobilization, tactical choices, and outcomes. But opportunities remain the primary independent variable. Meyer also claims that some protestors shift their tactics in reaction to opportunities more readily than others (2004, p. 140), but this proto-typology of players raises more questions than it answers – all of them outside the realm of political opportunity models. Meyer is true to the Tilly tradition here, reading the players from their actions in arenas rather than developing an independent definition and account of players and their goals and actions.

Howard Ramos (2008) has taken up Meyer and Minkoff's challenge to specify how different protest movements face different political opportunities, as an alternative to the "cycle" model in which all insurgents tend to face the same opportunities and threats. Ramos points out that dynamic models, in which movements and countermovements interact (e.g. Meyer and

Staggenborg, 1996), and in which therefore protestors can create their own opportunities, make it even more difficult to assess the effects of changing opportunities on mobilization (because they are not seen as part of an ongoing interaction, or strategic game). Interestingly, his most robust finding is that *resources* matter: available funding increases mobilization. This harks back to an older model of protest that political-opportunity theory was meant to displace, but with the twist that the relevant funding comes from the government. Funding is also a goal of mobilization as well as a means for it. By treating resources as a political opportunity, Ramos risks the “sponge” trap against which Gamson and Meyer (1996) warned. Something similar happened when scholars began to include *grievances* on their list of political opportunity structures (Meyer, 1990; Smith, 1996; see chapter 8 below). But if political opportunities include everything, ends as well as means, then they no longer mean much of anything.

Opportunity versus Structure

Once we reach the point that political opportunities include both grievances and resources – the very factors that opportunities were meant to displace – then we need to make some distinctions where there has been too much conceptual lumping (Koopmans, 2003). The most obvious distinction – which the term “political opportunity structure” unfortunately blurs – is between short-run opportunities and long-run structures. Oberschall (1996:95) calls them events and institutional structures; Tarrow (1996:41) contrasts dynamic and cross-sectional opportunities; Gamson and Meyer (1996:277) observe that scholars compare opportunities either over time or across political systems.

Windows of opportunity open and close, often suddenly and unexpectedly; a rapid response is usually necessary to take advantage of them. Unsure of what others will do in strategic engagements, players cannot plan too far in advance—so that most strategy consists of responding to the actions of others, always looking for new opportunities (Jasper, 2006). For example, in a devastating blow to game theory, behavioral economists have shown that gameplayers typically anticipate only one or two moves in advance, rather than imagining the possible final outcomes and working back to select their moves (Johnson et al., 2002). This makes sense, since strategic interaction is simply too complicated to predict more than a move or two in advance. Our crisis is our adversary’s opportunity, and vice versa. Windows of opportunity fit dictionary definitions of opportunities as something timely and seasonable or favorable to some end or purpose. To be opportune is to be suitable, appropriate, and convenient; to be well-timed and fitting for the circumstances; to be advantageous, useful, serviceable. Opportunities are good things, but special things, because they are temporary.

Structures, in contrast, are relatively stable and difficult to change. People must adapt themselves to structures, much as the structure of a house forces us

to walk through doors rather than walls. Herbert Kitschelt (1986:58) saw this, using the term political opportunity structures to refer to “specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization, which facilitate the development of protest movements in some instances and constrain them in others.” He contrasted open and closed state structures for input into policymaking, and strong and weak state capacities for implementing those policies. Protestors, he argued, would either confront the state or try to work within it depending on how open it was at each of these two stages. Perhaps because I started my scholarly career as a comparativist, I am sympathetic to Kitschelt’s structural model. He wisely avoids the “historical precedents” part of his definition in favor of institutional arrangements, a conceptually crisp set of national laws for making and implementing decisions. I call these “arenas.”

Like Fillieule (2005), I think that institutional political structures – arenas – are a necessary concept to retain in our toolbox, even though I think they are easily reified. Hanspeter Kriesi and his collaborators (1995) have done the most to distinguish the relevant factors here. They claim to use political opportunity structures to explain the effects of several new social movements, but fortunately these are both catch-all phrases that do little of the analytic work. Instead these authors contribute by breaking political opportunity structures into more observable mechanisms. They distinguish long-run and short-run factors. Among the former are institutional arrangements much like Kitschelt’s, but Kriesi, Koopmans, Dyvendak, and Giugni add traditional social and cultural cleavages (especially religion and class) that may or may not leave much room for additional conflicts to surface. New issues frequently emerge, but they are often twisted to fit the rhetorical frames of older cleavages such as partisan ideologies (Jasper, 1992). They also add “prevailing strategies” with which the state deals with challengers, although they restrict this to various forms of inclusion or exclusion.

Kriesi and his collaborators also address short-run dynamics, conceived as whether there is a left-leaning party in government and whether it is open to a movement’s demands. They recognize that movements gain these allies through elaborate rhetorical and strategic processes – indeed most of their book concerns these. They acknowledge that these are fluctuating, short-run accomplishments. They also usefully introduce movement *choices*, arguing that waves of protest are due to these strategic decisions as much as to openings on the part of the state. There is constant interaction among various players. Although these authors surprisingly retain the language of political opportunity structures, they deploy a more open-ended strategic model. Had they fully embraced this alternative, I think they could have gone even further in elaborating it. Opportunities are not usually structural, and structures are rarely opportunistic.

Edwin Amenta, in a series of articles and a book on the Townsend Movement (2006), has similarly laid out a number of political factors that lie

between movements and their effects, ranging from long-run electoral rules to short-run alliances. In the structural tradition of Kitschelt and Kriesi, he rejects groups' stated goals and hence their success or failure as proper explananda, preferring to examine a variety of outcomes that might hurt as well as help the beneficiary population. Like others in the political-opportunity tradition, he can assume a group's interests or benefits as an unproblematic concept because he is interested in "disadvantaged" "challengers." Although he presents his view ably in chapter 9, I am not altogether persuaded by his rejection of player goals, which he himself uses in characterizing politicians and bureaucrats who may share the movement's goals and hence be available as allies. Without a careful catalogue of players and their goals (on all sides of a conflict), we cannot understand the defection of leaders from the group projects to pursue their own agendas, or the basis on which alliances are formed. Nor can we distinguish between intended and unintended outcomes, a staple of sociological and political analysis. If we don't understand what players want, we can't comprehend what constrains them.

The Problems of Power

Political structures are parallel to the concept of power, another way analysts have tried to get at the constraints and openings facing protestors. Power also "enables and constrains," depending on who has it. It channels action. We see power primarily in relations and interactions. Unfortunately the concept has inspired dense, unresolved debates – mostly of a philosophical sort – over what exactly power is, how we recognize it other than through its effects, and so on (Dyrberg, 1997). It is as easy to reify power as it is to reify political opportunity structures, misrepresenting them as exogenous to strategic engagements in cases when they are not.

Like political-opportunity scholars, most analysts of power have focused on the ways it is used to constrain people; only occasionally do insurgents manage to break the bonds of power and change social arrangements. In contrast, Talcott Parsons and Michel Foucault both emphasized the enabling side of power, which allows groups to get things done – but there was a swing of the intellectual pendulum between these two scholars. Power allowed "societies" to accomplish their various "functions," in Parsons' consensus-oriented eyes. He emphasized legitimate authority and the trust that it entailed. For Foucault power was far more sinister, although like Parsons he tended to imply that power was a structure operating behind people's backs. In between Parsons and Foucault the pendulum had swung toward Marxism, which in the U.S. academy reacted sharply against Parsons to emphasize the ubiquity of class conflict. Foucault, although in a very different national-political setting, led the subsequent reaction against Marxism. He showed that subjects had to be created, through a variety of disciplinary techniques, before they could enter politics, and that their economic class was only one kind of subject position

(Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). What he termed disciplinary practices, furthermore, did not line up precisely with states, weaving together various players inside and outside the state and thus breaking the state into a number of components.

Tilly, although a contemporary of Foucault, was part of the intellectual turn fashionable *between* Parsons and Foucault. He praised Marxists for seeing conflict everywhere, and his models largely accepted economic classes as the primary political groupings. Tilly's models go a little distance toward Foucault, recognizing that new political arenas help political players create new repertoires. But ever the structuralist, he was interested only in their actions, not their subjectivities. Political-opportunity models remain more Marxist than Foucaultian, assuming potential groups with pre-existing desires and objective interests who only await the opportunity to pursue them, and giving no attention to the processes that might create the appropriate subjects and dispositions and desires. And like many Marxists, political-opportunity scholars tend to see the state or the polity as the only field of struggle that really matters; their models recrown the "sovereign" state that Foucault was so insistent on decentering. And so we see a key difference between Tilly and Foucault: for Foucault power does not simply constrain or enable (Tilly's language) pre-existing projects, it entices and creates new goals, new subjects, new streams of action, new types of knowledge. For Tilly, a new institutional arena offers new means, not new ends or new players.

For the purpose of understanding protest, the most promising formulation of power comes from two scholars unusually sensitive to the perspective of the oppressed, Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1977). If poor people or ordinary people are going to win concessions from elites, they must disrupt things. Piven and Cloward have devoted their lives to demonstrating this stark insight. Recently Piven (2006, p. 26) has added a structural layer to the act of disruption: *disruptive power*, "rooted in patterns of specialization and the resulting social interdependencies." Disruptive power lies in the threat of halting some process – typically economic production but also the production of state legitimacy – that one's opponents value. Reinterpreting Tilly, she says (2006, p. 33), "industrialism meant the erosion of a power nexus between large landowners and the rural poor, and the emergence of interdependencies between capital and industrial workers." Disruptive power is a form of veto power, based on the holding of key positions in some economy, polity, organization, or network.

Piven (2006, p. 26) says this form of power is not simply "there for the taking," as a pot of money might be. Rather, "the ability to mobilize and deploy contributions to social cooperation in actual power contests varies widely and depends on specific and concrete historical circumstances." This warning risks the problem facing all concepts of power and structure: a conflation of some pre-existing potential with the action that supposedly realizes that potential. *Something* must be there before the strategy, even if as Piven suggests it is a necessary rather than a sufficient condition. We need to specify carefully what

those preexisting advantages or disadvantages are: resources, laws, physical or bureaucratic position, public opinion, and so on. Events and actions of others may then make some of these preconditions more advantageous or less, but so may one's own actions. (It usually takes both: the French left their horses behind, but the Black Prince had to realize that the value of his own mounts had suddenly risen.) The parallels with political opportunity structures are obvious.

What if we drop the oxymoron, political opportunity structures (and its companion, power)? On the one hand, "political structures" seems a reasonable enough concept, as long as we remind ourselves of the metaphorical limits of the image of a structure as something fixed. But what about "political opportunities"? What does it add other than loose language? In the end, the word opportunities not only allows but probably encourages vague overextension. Although an analyst may define it in a special, narrow way, the English word has a very broad, loose meaning that will always tend to incorporate too much.

Instead, we need to distinguish different kinds of advantages based on their sources, such as control over physical resources, legal rights to make certain decisions, reputations that inspire trust or sympathy, attention from others, moral resonance, cultural symbolism, the mistakes and vulnerabilities of opponents, political alliances, and more. Even within this last category, why not just talk about how challengers make alliances, how state players decide to repress or not repress them, how politicians respond, how state bureaucrats are playing other strategic games with each other, and so on. Why say that a player "makes an opportunity" for itself instead of simply saying what it *does*?

Causes and Consequences

In addition to structures versus opportunities, a confusion arises over whether political opportunities are causes or consequences of protest (independent or dependent variables). At the end of his life, we saw, Tilly (2008) claimed they are both. They are the outcomes of protest campaigns, and the conditions for future campaigns. While apparently dynamic, this model makes it difficult to sort out the various factors, as Ramos and others have argued. "Campaigns" and "contexts" are just too abstract to be of much help. Tilly's imagery simply repeats the same static causal model over and over, in the hope that the changing content of campaigns and opportunities provides sufficient dynamism. I would like to build more dynamism into the interactions themselves. The obvious solution is to move down to a more micro level of concepts so that we can see what is really going on rather than examining broad correlations between action and context. In a Tilleian perspective spanning hundreds of years we can see the connection between a new arena and repertoires of action; for a shorter time frame we need finer-grained, observable mechanisms of interaction before we can sort out any causality.

For complex strategic interactions, we may even need to abandon

multivariate models that try to specify independent and dependent variables. If instead we can observe a series of actions and reactions, we can see how the contexts change rapidly, based on protestors' own choices and the actions they inspire in other players (although the sequence typically begins with actions by those players: Jasper 2006, chap. 2). We may need something similar to the extended forms of game theory that would allow us to follow long sequences of intentional and emotional actions by a number of players. When Bader Araj and Robert Brym (2009), for instance, operationalize shifting political opportunities/threats to account for Fatah and Hamas strategy during the second Intifada (2000-2005), all are in fact choices made by the various parties to the conflict: "when the Israeli security apparatus substantially increased or decreased the number of (1) assassinations of Palestinian militants and (2) violent deaths of Palestinians by other means (during riot control or Palestinian attacks), and when the governments of (3) the United States and (4) Arab countries offered substantial inducements and/or made substantial threats that aimed to alter Palestinian strategy." Here "context" has usefully dissolved into a number of players reacting to each other.

We now see the limits to Meyer's effort to save political opportunity structures by distinguishing models for the emergence, tactics, and outcomes of protest. These are all part of a long series of interactions, not easily separable dependent variables or even distinct phases. This is no doubt why they are so often conflated in political-process research. Every action has potential effects on our allies, our opponents, on bystanders, on the rules of arenas, and so on. Only in retrospect, furthermore, can we say for sure which of these effects was decisive. One possibility is to focus more on choices as events, triggering other events (Jasper, 2006). Most opportunities are the proximate result of players' choices and interactions; structures are the residue of more distant choices and interactions. Others' choices are our contexts, and vice versa, as we'll see in a more micro-strategic framework.

Note that the cases in parts 1 and 2 address the impact of political opportunity structures on emergence alone. If they are going to be independent variables, it is most likely at this stage, when movements do not yet exist.

A Micro-Strategic Alternative

Several threads of our discussion point in the same direction: the need for observable micro-level mechanisms aimed at explaining strategic interaction (Jasper, 2006) or contention (McAdam et al., 2001). A simple strategic vocabulary (drawn from Jasper, 2004, 2006) should allow us to make better sense of players and their contexts. *Players* may be individuals, formal organizations, or informal groups and groupings; much political action consists of creating new players where only shared interests, intuitions, or values existed before (Polletta and Jasper, 2001). Because players share *some goals* (never all),

they can judge events as good or bad; they can construct grievances. These are complex cultural processes that often depend on moral entrepreneurs. Players also use a variety of *means*, due to expected efficacy, moral loyalty, and available know-how. Players interact with one another in various ways, which can run the gamut from well-intentioned cooperation all the way to hostile conflict. Players also make *decisions* and act, in *arenas* that provide stakes, rules, and often physical venues. Players often shift from one arena to another to get what they want, and they typically seek arenas where their skills and resources have the most value. *Cultural and psychological meanings* are fundamental because players are audiences for each others' words and actions, constantly interpreting what all the players (including themselves!) are doing.

Just as the characteristic blindness of collective behavior models was to overemphasize goals (and goals of a particularly murky, often unconscious kind), that of political opportunity approaches was to give undue prominence to arenas. Tilly himself tended to "read" the players and their intentions from the stakes in a given arena. The growth of an accountable Parliament in Britain in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Tilly, 1995) called forth social movements to make demands on it, created new repertoires, and eventually resulted in new policies and rules of the game. Tilly recognized some external influence of capitalism on the new arena of contention, but the arena was the big independent variable affecting almost everything else. In the same period, Meyer and Staggenborg (1996, p. 1633) presented political opportunity structures as the independent variables accounting for "emergence, development, and ultimate impact of social protest movements." Arenas metastasized into entire theories.

Strategic arenas are more open-ended than political-opportunity models generally allow for. In one example, Meyer (2004, p. 137) concedes that, contrary to political-opportunity theory, "Unfavorable changes in policy can spur mobilization, even at times when mobilization is unlikely to have much *noticeable* effect on policy." Meyer is recognizing some role for interpretation here, as well as acknowledging the awkward (perhaps even fatal) fact that closing windows of opportunity often spur mobilization rather than discouraging it (through emotional dynamics that political process models do not address). In a more open-ended strategic model, however, we could recognize more than the fact that mobilization sometimes fails. We could recognize that mobilization can provoke a strong reaction from other players that actually leaves the original player worse off than before it mobilized. Jane Poulsen and I (Jasper and Poulsen, 1993) pointed this out for American animal-rights and antinuclear activists: their own initial successes led to countermobilization which in turn made their own later campaigns less likely to succeed. The strategic *Engagement Dilemma* suggests there is always some risk, and often a considerable risk, to starting a fight (Jasper, 2006, p. 26). The blunt model of the "environment" which remains the core of political opportunity theory has little

place for such strategic contingencies, or for the many mechanisms that would help us explain one outcome rather than another. As Flacks (2004) complains, political-opportunity theory tells us nothing about how players grapple with such dilemmas.

This common-sense strategic vocabulary, derived inductively from research into a variety of institutional arenas (Jasper, 2006), fits in many ways with Pierre Bourdieu's more jargon-ridden arsenal of concepts (Crossley, 2002, chap. 9). His idea of a "field" of contention, in particular, is close to an arena, which I prefer because it reminds us that there are audiences watching most of the action. "Field" often conflates players and arenas. To deal with the many advantages that players can bring to the field, Bourdieu discussed a number of types of capital. In addition to economic capital, we deploy cultural, social, and symbolic capital in strategic projects. Capital is a neat metaphor, since it belongs to players but its value depends on how others respond. Like power, the concept which it can displace or explain, capital mediates between players. Finally, Bourdieu used the idea of habitus to get at ingrained dispositions to act in certain ways, showing how these work their way into our very bodies, gestures, and stances. For my taste, the habitus, like Tilly's repertoires of contention, tends to focus on the conservative constraints, telling us little about the occasional innovations.

We can reformulate process theory armed with this strategic vocabulary. The best candidate for the label of "political opportunity structure," and the one most true to Tilly, seems to be changes in the rules of arenas. Players jostle to take advantage of any new rules (which amount, in varying degrees, to new arenas). Amenta (2006, p. 17) calls arena changes "the highest level" of benefits, since they "give a group greater leverage over political processes and augment the impact of future collective action." Second, the arenas themselves may usefully be seen as structured: as Kitschelt and Kriesi analyze them, they are structures, not opportunities. The mistake of the political-opportunity tradition is to forget that contention always continues over those rules, especially in their interpretation and application. A more strategic approach can show us tradeoffs, for instance, between the direct pursuit of goals within arenas using existing resources and the pursuit of indirect objectives meant to change arenas and the distribution of resources. Changes in arenas are usually the result of contention, but they sometimes create new players to take advantage of the new rules.

Most of the "events" that get swept under the rubric of opportunities are *actions* by other players, including changes in arenas. These actions are strategic choices and moves intended to have various effects (they don't always have the intended effects, but that need not change our explanation of the moves or of their effects). Some of these choices become grievances for other players, around which they construct outrage and threat in order to mobilize supporters or sympathizers. Grievances are perhaps the worst candidate for "political opportunities," which were intended to displace

grievance-based models in the first place (Snow et al., 2005). Grievances tap into players' goals rather than their means, whereas opportunities should provide new means to pursue those goals.

We can recast McAdam's four opportunities in more strategic language. The first (openness) is about which players are allowed to play in what arenas, according to the official rules. (Although much of the action is about how excluded players influence arenas in unofficial ways.) Numbers two and three (elite alignment and potential allies), which are often difficult to distinguish, are choices made by other players ("elites") that help or hinder protestors. The fourth factor (repression) is really two nested factors: the *capacity* for repression is mostly due to resources (tear gas, tanks, guns, and so on); the *propensity* for repression reflects the strategic decisions and perspectives of those with the capacity.

By distinguishing players from arenas more carefully, we can see that political-opportunity models tend to conflate three things: the creation of a new strategic *arena*, different players' access to that arena, and their relative success once they have access. This tradition usefully emphasizes weaknesses in the state, but fails to distinguish the state as a set of arenas for conflict from the state as a set of players in those arenas. By assuming a kind of zero-sum competition between those in the polity and those trying to get in, the model also fails to appreciate the many arenas that comprise the state, and thus the ways that a player can maneuver these against each other.

We can say that a "social movement" faces its "environment," but I fear this formulation reifies both things. A social movement is never a unified player, but a shifting coalition of players (groups and individuals) who come together for occasional events based on perceived overlapping goals. The idea of the "context" or the "environment" of that movement is even more of a stretch. What matters most are the many players out there, with their own goals, choices, and actions, just as protestors have theirs. "Business," often the opponent of movements, is not some structural force, but a set of organizations that make decisions and act to pursue their interests – and they should be analyzed in this way (e.g. Silver, 2003; Chorev, 2007; Gates, 2009). Similarly, Rojas (2007) emphasizes the decisions made by university administrators (often based on individual idiosyncrasies) in their interaction with black power and black studies movements. If the rules of arenas matter, it is because some player is interpreting, enforcing, and creating them. There are other things in that "environment," such as physical resources, cultural meanings, and rules (Jasper, 1997), but they matter primarily when they are put into action – "into play" – by other players. (They can also exert an influence through an implicit or explicit *threat* that they will be used, but this is also a form of action.) It makes a difference that a law is on the books, to be sure, but mostly because other players can refer to it in eliciting or preventing action from other players.

We can say many things about players and how they are formed, how they operate, how they make decisions; about different kinds of actions and

their implications; and even about players' goals. The phraseology of political opportunities hides much of this, although it may be elaborated to tell us about arenas and their rules, and the impact of changes in those rules.

I try to distinguish different situations that might cause protestors to act in Table I-1. The upper left cell seems true to the long historical changes Tilly studied, especially in his early work, although he tended to portray the players as existing in themselves before they became "for themselves." Foucault's disciplines might also belong in this cell, with more of an emphasis on the creation of players in their deepest desires. The other cells involve the kinds of short-run opportunities involved in all strategic engagements. I should add that exogenous events, such as oil spills, earthquakes, or wars, can trigger action in any of these cells, but they are not portrayed here.

TABLE I-1 ABOUT HERE

Once we dig beneath images of a "social movement" and its "environment" to the microfoundations which compose them, we simply see a number of individuals and compound players engaged in a variety of actions and interactions, in the course of which they refer to laws and other rules, deploy physical resources or coercion, and rely on new and existing understandings. A social movement comes to life as various individuals, formal organizations, informal networks and groupings, who coordinate events and share some goals and know-how about tactics. These entities no longer have a strict "boundary" with the rest of the world, but instead shade off through networks and interactions into potential recruits, tacit supporters, bystanders, and others. Even more strikingly, the "environment" is no longer a set of structures, but other players doing things that may help or hinder the protestors, players who also use resources, meanings, rules, and so on as tactical tools.

Mistakes and Vigilance

A strategic perspective helps us see events as intended actions, unintended accidents, or complex interactions of these. Some authors already have redefined certain short-run opportunities as events (Ramos, 2008). In a strategic perspective, we are primarily interested in actions, almost all of which are events. But some actions are more influential than others, and Staggenborg (1993) and others who use the term event are thinking of big, important events such as salient successes or defeats, the foundings of organizations, and public moral shocks. The process tradition, I once complained (Jasper, 1997, p. 92), treats events "as an additional piece of information, changing rational assessments of chances for success or the costs of repression," and in the process missing the special mnemonic and emotional resonance of a prominent event. (Prominent leaders can serve much the same function.) Tilly (2008) partly rectified this in recognizing the influence of particular protest campaigns.

Many authors have moved in a more strategic direction while dragging the empty shell of political opportunity structures along with them. Valentine Moghadam and Elham Gheytauchi (2010) try to meld strategic choices and political opportunities – the latter being McAdam’s list of four. In practice, the opportunities get summed up as either open or closed or “semi-open,” although also distinguished at a local and a global level. The real action takes place in a string of decisions by protestors and especially the state, mostly based on election results. Intriguingly, repression raises the stakes of action, it does not simply close it off: action in these circumstances “could lead to further government repression but it also could win widespread sympathy” (p. 272). We need to know much more about the emotional and cognitive mechanisms here, a case of the “Engagement Dilemma” of high risk.

Many or perhaps most opportunities arise because our opponent makes a strategic *mistake* upon which we can capitalize, like sending his army forward on foot. A mistake may not even be directly related to the engagement at hand. The most obvious “blunder” in Jasper and Poulsen’s (1993) discussion is to be caught in a lie, an embarrassment that undermines an organization’s credibility in all arenas. Some mistakes are glaring, so obvious that any opponent could capitalize on them. At the other extreme, some moves aren’t really mistakes at all, but nonetheless allow or inspire opponents to react brilliantly to snatch victory from defeat. Most lie in between these extremes: whether they are seen as mistakes in retrospect depends on how the other side responds. King John’s decision to send his troops on foot only became a mistake when the Black Prince decided to mount his in response. Opportunities are what you make of them in the give and take of strategic interaction. As Machiavelli (1965/1521, p. 122-3) put it, “Some advantages may result from the enemy’s negligence and misconduct, and others from your own vigilance and good conduct.” Most result from the interaction between these.

In other cases, something happens or comes to light that undermines an adversary’s ability to act. A fiscal crisis or defeat in foreign war leaves a state open to revolutionary movements (Skocpol, 1979)–or at least to the electoral advances of the opposition. A scandal discredits a player, opens the way to reform efforts, or destroys a player’s power to maneuver. Depending on who makes public the damning information, it is either an explicit denunciation or – if the media are simply doing their job – a revelation. Ari Adut points out that avoiding scandals “is an essential motive and ongoing activity of individuals, groups, and institutions” (2005, p. 213; also Adut, 2008). (A *potential* scandal, on the other hand, opens the way to something more like blackmail, when we have damning information that we can use to our advantage.)

In some cases, *accidents* reveal operations or publicize conditions that would otherwise remain hidden. Often these are literal accidents. It takes an oil spill to reveal the risks oil companies take every day (Molotch, 1970). A “normal” nuclear accident reminds us how fragile these technological systems are (Perrow, 1984). A military failure allows us to examine chains of command and

normal operating procedures. Accidents can be more figurative, such as the inadvertent disclosure of damaging information. All such events bring attention and scrutiny to the activities of one or more players, frequently damaging their reputations.

Vigilance, with sufficient resources, can be systematized. Governments tap phones, corporations send spies to protest meetings. Unions and protest groups gather what information they can about their opponents, too, despite fewer resources to devote to the task. Not only does it take time to be vigilant, to watch one's surroundings carefully for opportunities, it also takes time to then move into action. You must contact others, call press conferences, hire a lawyer, file legal documents, and so on. With resources, you can hire people with little notice; without them you must be capable of mobilizing other people or doing the necessary work yourself.

At the extreme, systematic vigilance is more like harvesting a resource than opening a window of opportunity – as in military “intelligence gathering.” Obtaining information that is not widely available may give you an immediate opportunity to act. Or you may simply store that information away for a later chance to use it—like a police interrogator looking for inconsistencies in testimony. *Information* is an advantage much like that of money or technological resources.

There is a strategic *Planning Dilemma* or tradeoff between advance planning and flexible opportunism (Jasper, 2004, p. 13). You can make plans in advance and endeavor to stick to them as closely as possible through the heat of strategic interaction, or you can flexibly respond to the unfolding situation in order to take advantage of any opportunities that come your way. Opportunism may entail advance preparation, such as training and practice, but not the planning out of your moves. Although it allows more room to maneuver, it runs the risk that you will forget your main (or original) goal in favor of subsidiary ones, or allow subteams to pursue their own agendas (a form of defection).

Strategic players may or may not recognize when windows of opportunity have closed: when the other side has regrouped, when the moment has passed for a statement to the press, when a confession of misdoing will no longer arouse sympathy but taint you with a coverup. Nothing is more disastrous than trying to climb through a closed window. Reflecting the Engagement Dilemma, some apparent opportunities are actually traps. Windows of opportunity are temporary and must be recognized promptly. Good strategists see ways to take advantage of events and information that poor strategists do not. Many different responses are usually possible to any given opportunity.

With mechanisms like these, even though I've expressed them crudely, I think we can better understand some of what has been grouped under the catch-all rubric of “opportunities.”

Empirical Tests

The political-opportunity debate has been tangled because it involves a number of conceptual entities that cannot be directly measured. Structures, opportunities, and agency are concepts or presuppositions, not observational statements (Alexander, 1982). Scholars end up operationalizing broad ideas such as opportunities in their own ways, formulating their own lists that suspiciously fit their own cases. And they rarely find measures adequate to the theories they hope to test. Much of the debate has been about whether the language of political opportunities is useful, not whether it is accurate. And much of the criticism has been that the language is too loose to be useful. In my view, it was extremely fruitful in the past, but the time has come to replace it with alternatives that might prove more useful in the future – a more progressive research program.

One mistaken way to proceed is to try to measure metaphorical or conceptual entities such as structure versus agency or context versus strategy, and then to compare their causal impacts. Structure and agency are present in all actions and engagements, and their salience depends on our point of view. Goodwin and I originally criticized political opportunity models because they were too one-sided, ignoring half the factors at work. Araj and Brym's (2009) work on Hamas and Fatah is a model of how to account for decisions, as they sort through the actions by the many players, examining how these shifted the incentives for other players, who then weighed their options and reacted accordingly. They are especially good on how leaders of the different compound players tried to balance pressures from outside and inside the teams, acting "in an intentional, anticipatory, self-reflective, and self-reactive manner, making plans in anticipation of future contingencies and regulating and correcting their actions in light of current and past effects." But in their conclusion, they try to *compare* the influence of culture, political opportunities, and agency. They define agency as "truly creative breakthroughs," which they reasonably say are quite rare. But creativity is not agency, only one special form (or possibly even a result) of agency. In the end, even these careful researchers cannot separate agency from context in a way that can be measured.

Contexts matter to strategy because strategic choices are made *with a context already in mind*; choices are not somehow prior to or independent of the context. Actions take place within arenas, geared to those arenas. (This was Tilly's great insight.) Strategy matters to context not only because it changes contexts, but because the contexts are contexts *for* something, namely strategic action. Action and context cannot be compared to each other at this level. *What we can see* are players engaged with each other, doing things, pursuing goals, and having effects (even when these are unintended). Players and their actions are observable; structure and agency are not. We must drop to a more concrete level of reality, closer to empirical observations, to measure and compare.

One possible solution to the empirical challenge is to say that political

opportunities are useful for understanding some types of regimes and not others. In *The Art of Moral Protest* I argued that Tilly developed political-process models to understand French and British movements for citizenship rights, as the repressive old regimes changed. When McAdam adapted the model to the United States, he applied it to a case that fit this model especially well, the Southern black civil rights movement (see chapter 5). Here was a group, well defined legally and culturally, excluded from political participation, and legally and economically oppressed. They needed new opportunities for political advancement. In such cases the collective players are well aware of their identities and interests. In contrast, most social movements in the “democratic” West consist of participants who already have basic civil and political rights. They must do considerable cultural work in order to see themselves as a collective, as the “animal protection movement” for instance. Political opportunity models, I argued, apply better to “citizenship movements” than to “post-citizenship movements” (Jasper, 1997). As a polity-centered approach, it works best for movements demanding access to the polity.

In *Dynamics of Contention*, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly seem to argue the opposite, that existing political models reflect the movements of the 1960s in the industrialized nations. This “classical social movement agenda,” which they had helped to formulate, was too static, too centered on individual movements, and too focused on the origins of movements (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001, p. 42). Plus, “Its genesis in the relatively open politics of the American ‘sixties’ led to more emphasis on opportunities than on threats, more confidence in the expansion of organizational resources than on the organizational deficits that many challengers suffer.” My view, in contrast, is that those who *lack* opportunities need them most.

The contrast between these two sets of scope conditions was the original intuition that led Jeff Goodwin to organize the discussions found in parts 1 and 2 of this volume, organized around the contrast between authoritarian regimes and the less repressive American context. He began with a test of 50 cases, asking scholars to make their best judgments about which of McAdam’s four opportunities were present. He summarizes this work in the conclusion, finding that expanding opportunities matter in only 19 of the cases (and *contracting* opportunities seem to have spurred mobilization in another 12).

Goodwin finds that opportunities matter more in repressive contexts than democratic ones. In repressive contexts, it is almost tautological that protest movements can benefit from some lessening of repression. But even this depends on the kind of repression, the emotional reactions to it, and many other factors. In less repressive regimes, this factor will be less important. There, elite allies are perhaps more important, especially in helping protestors achieve their goals rather than in emerging as a movement. Strategic engagements unfold across a number of arenas, where your allies can help you win. The most common pattern of helpful opportunities was a combination of elite allies and elite cleavages (there may be some correlation between the two: if some elites

defect to support insurgents, that will itself cause a cleavage if one wasn't already there).

There is some potential circularity here. If dissatisfaction and protest appear, there are often some individuals or groups among political elites who see an opportunity to advance their goals by taking charge (or credit) for this mobilization. Rather than elites being an opportunity for protestors, the latter are an opportunity for elites. But the real problem remains the vagueness of the word "opportunity."

The contrast between repressive and democratic polities partly appears in our subsample of Goodwin's cases that are analyzed in detail in parts 1 and 2. Among the repressive contexts, Jack Goldstone found most of them (in three different mobilization efforts), Anthony Pereira found two, John Hammond found all four but concluded they were unimportant, and Amy Risley found none. In the American cases, Francesca Polletta and John Skrentny found several, Adam Green found none early in gay rights mobilization but all four later, and I found none. More productively, even most of the authors who find political opportunities in their cases are dissatisfied with the explanatory work they are called on to do. Political opportunities may still be more important under repressive regimes, but careful consideration of cases leads in altogether new directions.

In chapter 1 Jack Goldstone reads John Markoff's extensive data on the complaints and actions of French peasants during the revolution as demonstrating that threat motivated as much action as opportunities did; opportunities are neither sufficient nor necessary for protest. What makes the most sense of Markoff's data, they agree, is to follow the interaction among the various political players, and to watch the peasants respond to others' actions. In his reply, Markoff adds the pressures of war on the old regime as a kind of opportunity. He also points out the broad extent to which opportunities involve culture, as players constantly watch and interpret each other's actions. An interpretive, interactive context requires far more attention to detail than McAdam's four broad opportunities. Goldstone ends with his notion of a relational field among players (Goldstone 2004) as a way to understand these complex interactions.

For movements in rural Nicaragua, in chapter 2, Anthony Pereira and Jeffrey Gould agree that there is an interaction of movement capacities with the opportunities in their environment. Pereira says further that we need much more specification of what kinds of opportunities there are, while Gould insists on the consciousness of workers in the flow of action. Movement leaders face choices about what kinds of alliances to make, presumably facing dilemmas as well as structural constraints. Like Markoff, Gould additionally points to international players putting pressure on local political players.

Alison Brysk and Amy Risley agree in chapter 3 that the human rights movement in Argentina emerged in spite of – in fact triggered by – extreme repression, without any of the four political opportunities. Instead, the movement

managed to create opportunities for itself. International factors again mattered, this time as support for the rights movement, but support that emerged only after the movement itself. Both scholars point to the cultural work that the *Madres* did in order to persist as a movement, with Brysk emphasizing the new roles and identities they created for themselves out of maternal expectations and Risley focusing on the emotional dynamics. Although they disagree over the adequacy of Brysk's critique of rationalistic models, they both use that critique as a path toward more cultural, micro-level mechanisms.

In chapter 4, John Hammond digs below the surface to conclude that political opportunities, which he carefully identifies, do not explain the emergence of rural unions in Brazil, except for some redirection of organizing after the military dictatorship was imposed in 1964. More important were the continuing efforts at mobilization, which was itself affected by local agrarian class structures. Pereira largely agrees, although he observes that political opportunity structures are not a clear theory and so are hard to test.

All four of the cases in authoritarian regimes show that the efforts of the oppressed to mobilize create opportunities as much or more than they respond to them; we need to know more about the work they do and the choices they make. All the authors prefer to follow interactions among players directly, including international players, without the supposed intervening political opportunities.

The case which fits the political-opportunity model best is the U.S. civil rights movement, as refracted through Francesca Polletta's analysis of a book by Charles Payne in chapter 5. This is not surprising, since Doug McAdam (1982) derived his version of political opportunities through his research on this movement. It is a sharp case of a citizenship movement by those deprived of all sorts of material benefits, political and human rights, and cultural recognition. Polletta extends the political-opportunity apparatus downward, suggesting that local networks filter how national opportunities are interpreted locally, that both challengers and elites are always internally differentiated in important ways, and that "elites" appear in the challenging community as well as outside it. She also continues a theme from other chapters: state repression can ignite mobilizing anger and indignation as well as demobilizing fear, suggesting the need for greater attention to emotional mechanisms.

Ann Costain enthusiastically adopted a political-opportunity approach in her book on the American women's movement, and in his essay on her work John Skrentny accepts much of that framework. If Polletta shows how the categories of movement and elite need to be broken down more finely, Skrentny does something similar in finding the state and the movement interwoven with each other. The implication is that players must be defined at a different level, perhaps of networks of individuals, or of professions (Dobbin, 2009). In his own work he has shown the importance of the perceptions of political elites concerning other groups or players. Their views obviously affect how they react to others.

Adam Green and John D'Emilio, while not entirely rejecting political opportunities as part of an explanation of the homophile and gay liberation movements, point to some limitations. More influential, they agree, were long-term cultural shifts. Different factors unfold over different time scales, more complex than a contrast between short-run windows of opportunity and long-term structures. I believe that a strategic perspective, in which various time-frames are filtered through the perceptions of decisionmaking players, is the best way we might integrate such diverse factors in the future. As with the women's movement, gay and lesbian rights demonstrate that a dichotomized view of a movement versus the state obscures many players. The other protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and individuals who move across them, provide know-how and emotional encouragement without necessarily joining a new movement. Most of all, D'Emilio points to the immense complexity of movement emergence, making it hard to explain such an imprecise "timing." A carefully documented series of actions and reactions may be a focus that a strategic approach and a historian's approach share.

In chapter 8 I interrogate Christian Smith's *Resisting Reagan*, about the US movement to end Reagan's murderous support for repressive regimes in Central America. Whereas Skrentny accepts Costain's labeling of party competition as "elite division," I question whether this aspect of normal electoral politics is in the spirit of political-opportunity theory. The women Costain studied and the activists Smith studied all had normal voting rights, middle-class incomes, and no ongoing repression. These groups were not excluded from political arenas, they simply were not able to use those arenas effectively.

The international cases of part 1 and the American cases of part 2 do not demonstrate a greater importance of political opportunities in one rather than the other. The conclusion of most authors, when asked to evaluate the presence of political opportunities, is something like "Yes, but..." If you look hard enough you can find one or more political opportunity in most cases, but no one seems satisfied that these explain the emergence of the movements.

Instead, our authors point to many other mechanisms that lie behind political opportunities. A sense of threat, according to Goldstone, was key in the peasant insurrections of the French Revolution, with opportunities neither necessary nor sufficient. (Although note that, in Goodwin's generous scheme, Goldstone is marked as having found political opportunities, even though he does not think they are important.) Hammond makes the point that a social class, in this case Brazilian peasants, are always changing due to economic and political developments. If one weakness of political-opportunity models is that they tend to assume a pre-existing player, ready to act when the opportunity arises, then we need to learn more about the ways in which groups form and change. Pereira finds alliances with elites the most important opportunity, but suggests that what matters most is what *kind* of alliance. We need to push beyond its mere presence or absence to the more specific mechanisms of alliances. Risley and Brysk agree that Argentine human rights activists created

their own opportunities, and in her final rejoinder Risley describes how emotions such as indignation were crucial to their mobilization.

Most of the American movements faced nothing like these levels of repression. The civil rights movement is the exception, although Polletta revises most of the political opportunity variables before they fit her case. In particular, she questions the contrast between external elites and internal leaders. John Skrentny points to the cultural meanings held by state players, which make them more or less friendly to social movements depending on whether they see them as morally just and as a potential threat to their own power. Green also sees shifting cultural meanings key to the emergence of gay and lesbian rights. In my own exchange with Christian Smith, I try to recast Smith's rich case study in a strategic language, as various players (both new and pre-existing) pursue their goals across many arenas. Political-opportunity language becomes redundant, and perhaps misleading, as a way to characterize fairly typical political interactions.

As we develop an adequate list of mechanisms, we no longer need a crude typology of scope conditions; we simply find different micro-mechanisms at work in different cases. Three final chapters further this work, all by authors close to the political-opportunity tradition. Edwin Amenta defends the importance of context – who would not? – but suggests that political opportunity language is not the way to analyze it. He finds the European structural approach more persuasive than the American windows approach. One of the developers of the European approach, Jan Willem Duyvendak, writes with Christian Bröer about ways that cognitive and emotional mechanisms allow new players to emerge. They defend the idea of opportunities, especially those that lie somewhere between long-term structures and short-term windows. Finally, Donatella della Porta examines protest as a series of events that can themselves reshape the political landscape, in a way taking advantage of Tilly's late recognition that campaigns shape context as much as context shapes campaigns. To understand such processes, we need the kind of fine-grained mechanisms that authors like these are developing.

Charles Tilly forever changed the study of protest. No one will ever be able to ignore state players or reduce political contention to psychology. Just as others established the economic context of protest or its cultural context, Tilly did the most to demonstrate its political, institutional context. But we need to think about that context in the most useful way, a way that is true to Tilly's insights but perhaps cleans up some of the language of the political-process approach.

One limit to Tilly's approach to context is that he tried to downplay the players, whether protestors or state agents, in favor of their "relationships." But the processes through which they engaged each other took on an odd, reified reality. Without a sense of goals or decisions or biographical backgrounds,

players are reduced to their participation in a particular interaction, like a kind of tar baby from which they cannot extricate themselves. Structures migrated, over the course of Tilly's career, from the economy and the state, as external realities to protestors, into the engagements themselves. He even defined repertoires as peculiar to the pairs of actors who were engaged, with little left over to travel to new arenas.

I began this introduction with a Tillean historical vignette, meant not only to introduce some ideas but to show that the discussion of opportunities and environments applies to more arenas than protest. It is also a nod to Tilly's insistence on warmaking as a central process that creates states. Chuck might agree that we need to develop causal mechanisms that apply across many arenas. I think that a more strategic perspective, focusing on arenas and on players with ends and means, is the way to do that. But my vignette differs from his in a crucial way: Edward's quick decisions mattered crucially to the outcome. In strategic rather than structural models, individual actions can make a difference.

Table I-1: Players and Arenas

Protestors can respond to:		
	Changes in Arenas	Other Players' Actions within Arenas
Creates	Tilly's POS:	Shocks, threats, and other
New Players	Democratization, Revolution, Foucault's disciplines	mobilizing actions: State violence, unpopular decisions
Players already Exist	Powerful players can change arenas to their advantage	Institutional contention: party competition, policing, prevailing strategies