RESEARCH IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, CONFLICTS AND CHANGE

Edited by Patrick G. Coy

RESEARCH IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, CONFLICTS AND CHANGE

VOLUME 42

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RESEARCH IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, CONFLICTS AND CHANGE

EDITED BY

PATRICK G. COY
Kent State University, USA

United Kingdom – North America – Japan
India – Malaysia – China

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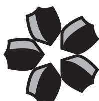

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LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Amanda D. Clark	Department of Political Science, Kent State University, USA
Patrick G. Coy	School of Peace and Conflict Studies, Kent State University, USA
Prentiss A. Dantzler	Department of Sociology, Colorado College, USA
Danielle N. Gage	College of Social Sciences, University of West Georgia, USA
Kathryn Gasparro	Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Stanford University, USA
Michelle I. Gawerc	Department of Sociology, Loyola University Maryland, USA
Piotr Konieczny	Department of Informational Sociology, Hanyang University, South Korea
Ashley E. Nickels	Department of Political Science, Kent State University, USA
Alexandra V. Orlova	Department of Criminology, Ryerson University, Canada
Nicolás M. Somma	Instituto de Sociología, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile
Winston B. Tripp	Department of Sociology, University of West Georgia, USA
Mohammad Yaghi	Department of Political Studies, Queens University, Canada
Yang Zhang	School of International Service, American University, USA

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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Amanda D. Clark received her PhD in Political Science from Kent State University with a dissertation titled "Framing Strategies and Social Movement Coalitions: Assessing Tactical Diffusion in the Fight against Human Trafficking from 2008−2014." Dr Clark's research interests include social movements, community development, and the US policy process. She is also interested in the intersections of organizational theory and social movement strategy and has published co-authored book chapters on the nonviolent dynamics of the Nashville student sit-in campaign of 1960 and on community control in local organizing and development policy.

Patrick G. Coy is Professor and Interim Director of the School of Peace and Conflict Studies at Kent State University. His research has been funded by the National Science Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation, the Albert Einstein Institution, and the American Sociological Association. His many publications include a co-authored book, *Contesting Patriotism: Culture, Power and Strategy in the Peace Movement* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), edited books on *Social Conflicts and Collective Identities* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), and *A Revolution of the Heart: Essays on the Catholic Worker* (originally published by Temple University Press, 1988). He has published more than 35 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters on conflict analysis, social movements, nonviolent action, unarmed civilian peacekeeping, community mediation, and peace and conflict studies. He was previously a Fulbright Scholar in Botswana, working with the Research Centre on San (Bushman) Studies. He has served as the Series Editor of *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* since 2000.

Prentiss A. Dantzler is Assistant Professor of Sociology and Co-Chair of the Urban Studies minor at Colorado College. Dr Dantzler is also a Faculty Fellow through the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Associated Colleges of the Midwest. As an interdisciplinary scholar, his research and teaching largely focuses on urban poverty, race and ethnic relations, housing policy, and community development. Dr Dantzler is currently studying voluntary and involuntary residential mobility among housing assistance recipients. His work has been published in academic outlets including *The Urban Lawyer* (American Bar Association), the *Journal of Urban History* (Sage Publications), and *Urban Affairs Review* (Sage Publications).

Danielle N. Gage is the Program Coordinator for the College of Social Sciences Center for Research at the University of West Georgia. She holds an MA in Sociology from the University of West Georgia. Her research interests include social movements and community engagement.

Kathryn Gasparro is Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Stanford University and is also a Research Affiliate of the Stanford Global Project Center. Her research focuses on the governance and management of infrastructure projects and the impact they have in communities. Currently, she is working on a project that identifies innovative ways communities and other partners engage with local government during infrastructure delivery.

Michelle I. Gawerc is Associate Professor of Sociology and Global Studies at Loyola University Maryland. Her research interests lie at the intersection of social movement studies and peace and conflict studies. She is the author of *Prefiguring Peace: Israeli-Palestinian Peacebuilding Partnerships* (Lexington Books, 2012). Her research has also been published in numerous journals including: *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*; *Social Movement Studies* (Taylor & Francis); *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts, and Change* (Emerald Publishing); *Peace and Change: A Journal of Peace Research* (Wiley); *International Journal of Peace Studies*; *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* (Taylor & Francis); *Peace Review* (Taylor & Francis); and *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* (Wiley). Her current research focuses on Palestinian-Israeli peace and anti-occupation movement organizations and coalitions.

Piotr Konieczny is Assistant Professor at the Department of Informational Sociology, Hanyang University, South Korea. He has received his PhD degree from the University of Pittsburgh. He is interested in the sociology of the Internet and social movements, in particular in topics such as free culture, wikis and their impact on individuals and organizations, decision-making processes and organizational structure of Wikipedia, patterns of behavior among Wikipedia contributors, and relations between wikis and social movements.

Ashley E. Nickels is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Kent State University. Dr Nickels is an interdisciplinary scholar, whose teaching and research centers on issues of power, privilege, and democratic participation in the fields of urban politics, nonprofit and community-based organizations, and public administration. Her work is highly influenced by her years working in feminist community activism. Dr Nickels is Co-editor of two books: *Grand Rapids Grassroots: An Anthology* (with Dani Vilella; Belt Publishing, 2017) and *Community Development and Public Administration Theory: Promoting Democratic Principles to Improve Communities* (with Jason D. Rivera; Routledge Press, 2018). She also serves on the board of editors for the *Journal of Public Affairs Education* (NASPAA), and as Chair-elect of ARNOVA's section on Community and Grassroots Associations.

Alexandra V. Orlova is Associate Dean, Research and Graduate Studies (Faculty of Arts), and Associate Professor in the Department of Criminology at Ryerson University. She received her PhD in Law from Osgoode Hall Law School, York University, in 2004. She also holds a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) from Osgoode Hall Law School. Her main research interests focus on

international constitutionalism, human rights, and transnational organized crime and corruption. She has published widely in the areas of international law as well as traditional and non-traditional security threats. Dr Orlova provided expert opinions pertaining to organized crime and human trafficking to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Norwegian Refugee Council's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre as well as for lawyers representing victims of organized crime and human trafficking in Canada and the UK.

Nicolás M. Somma is Associate Professor of Sociology at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. He earned a PhD in Sociology from the University of Notre Dame. His research focuses on social movements, political sociology, and comparative-historical sociology. His work has appeared in several journals, including *Party Politics* (Sage Publications), *Comparative Politics* (Sage Publications), *Latin American Politics and Society* (Wiley), and *The Sociological Quarterly* (Wiley), as well as in several book chapters. He also co-authored the book *Vínculos, Creencias e Ilusiones. La Cohesión Social de los Latinoamericanos* (Links, Beliefs, and Hopes. The Social Cohesion of Latin Americans, Uqbar Editores, Santiago de Chile, Colección CIEPLAN, 2008). Currently, Nicolás is studying the social profiles, motivations, and mobilization trajectories of participants in eight demonstrations in Argentina and Chile through the use of structured survey questionnaires (following the *Caught in the Act of Protest* methodology). He is also exploring the political and economic determinants of collective protest in Chilean localities with the help of a protest events dataset based on several national and regional media.

Winston B. Tripp is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of West Georgia. He earned a PhD in Sociology from Penn State University in 2013. His research and teaching interests include social movements, environmental sociology, and community engagement.

Mohammad Yaghi holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Guelph, Canada. His research focuses on social movements, media and cultural, identity and citizenship, and the popular protests in the Middle East. Dr Yaghi taught at the Universities of Guelph and Toronto, and at Queen's University. He is the author of the article "Media and Sectarianism in the Middle East: Saudi Hegemony over Pan-Arab Media" (*International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* (2017), Vol. 13 Issue 1/2, pp. 39−56). He is also the author of the book chapters: "Neoliberal Reforms, Protests, and Enforced Patron-Client Relations in Tunisia and Egypt" (Routledge, 2018) and "Why Did Tunisian and Egyptian Youth Activists Fail to Build Competitive Political Parties?" (Edinburgh University Press, 2018). Currently, Dr Yaghi is Research Fellow at the German Konrad Adenauer Stiftung focusing his work on the Gulf States.

Yang Zhang is Assistant Professor in the School of International Service at American University, Washington, DC. His research covers the areas of political sociology, contentious politics, historical sociology, and social networks. Zhang received a PhD in Sociology from the University of Chicago. His

dissertation "Insurgent Dynamics: The Coming of the Chinese Rebellions, 1850–1873" won the 2017 Distinguished Contribution to Scholarship Dissertation Award from American Sociological Association's Section on Collective Behavior and Social Movements. Building upon this dissertation, Zhang's book manuscript examines the emergence and development of large-scale religious and ethnic rebellions in the Qing Empire of China during the mid-nineteenth century. In other projects, Zhang studies the interaction of state officials, ENGOs, and grass-roots activists in environmental movements in contemporary China.

INTRODUCTION

Patrick G. Coy

Although it is not always the case, social movements frequently sport a somewhat troubled relationship with the state. Some of that troubled relationship may be owed, in part, to the fact that much social movement activism is largely extra-institutional, occurring outside of the normal, routinized, and even codified mechanisms for doing politics.

Made up of individual actors and organizations that share some salient dimensions of collective identity who are working in a somewhat organized and sustained way over time toward a common goal of social, political, or cultural change, social movements don't just exhibit uneasy relationships with the state and its various manifestations on regional and local levels. The same often holds true for the dealings of social movements with other institutions beyond the state itself.

Social movements may target these other institutional actors in a secondary way, that is, attempting to enlist them as active and influential allies in a campaign that may be aimed at state-based change. And sometimes social movements and their organizations will also seek out allies within the state apparatus itself, working in cooperative and even collegial ways to change governmental policies, revise state structures, remove particular politicians from office, reform political parties, or even bring down governments.

One might be forgiven for thinking that social movements only or even primarily earmark the state for change given the locus of much of the historic scholarship on social movements; being forgiven, however, doesn't change the erroneous nature of the understanding. The fact is, social movements frequently target other institutions for significant change, including national or transnational corporations, local businesses, ecclesiastical or religious judicatories, universities and schools, and professional associations – such as the Academy of Motion Pictures and Sciences.

All of this is to say that the relationships that social movements and their organizations have with the state and other institutional actors are exceedingly complex and not easily reduced to flattened explanations or pithy formulations.

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In this volume of *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, we tackle some of these thorny issues with four chapters in the first section, titled, "Social Movements and Their Institutional Relations."

Too much of what we do know about the relationships that social movements have with institutional actors is drawn from studies conducted in the context of various manifestations of democracy in the global north and west. We know much less about the various sorts of roles that institutional actors and even allies may play with social movements operating in settings of authoritarian governance. Thankfully, in our lead chapter, "Allies in Action: Institutional Actors and Grassroots Environmental Activism in China," Yang Zhang tackles this issue with his thorough analysis of the Anti-PX Movement in the city of Xiamen, China, in 2007.

This major case of successful Chinese environmental activism against the location of a chemical plant provides an opportunity to uncover the complex ways that mass mobilization driven by grassroots activism in China may rely, at least in part, on support from state actors and agencies and social elites. This includes uncovering how and why these institutional actors may play supportive roles for oppositional movements in a political system that is largely averse to independent social activism, illustrating both their effects and their limitations.

Contributing to social movement theory-building, Zhang's careful detailing of the internally ambiguous and at times contradictory approaches of institutional actors includes presenting them as distinctive dimensions of the political opportunity structure in China. Zhang shows that in authoritarian settings, there is a rich interactive effect obtaining between non-violent yet transgressive grassroots mobilization and institutional activism, with the former creating opportunities for the latter. Based on 45 interviews conducted in China during two periods of field-based research, one of our reviewers noted that this chapter is likely the most detailed and well-researched account of this landmark Chinese social movement case to date. I think you will find that it is also carefully reasoned and theoretically rich.

In the second chapter, "A Tale of Two Bike Lanes: Consensus Movements and Infrastructure Delivery," Kate Gasparro turns our attention away from conflict movements and oppositional movements toward consensus movements in support of local infrastructure projects. A fairly robust literature has developed examining oppositional NIMBY or "not in my backyard" activism, which is generally focused on stopping projects of various sorts, sometimes including infrastructure developments. These NIMBY movements only infrequently enlist the support of state officials, which is one of the reasons why the Anti-PX Movement in China analyzed in our opening chapter is so significant.

Gasparro's research is based in the United States in the years immediately following the great recession of 2009. This is a matched-pairs case study about two protected bicycle lane projects in Denver, Colorado; it relies on document analysis and on interviews with activists, key stakeholders, and public officials from the two cases. Notably, consensus movement tactics and crowdfunding were used in one case, while the other relied on a more traditional top-down approach. Gasparro effectively interlaces social movement frameworks with an

urban planning case and usefully connects this to the still under-studied emergence of crowdfunded civic projects. Her analysis suggests that in activism focused on infrastructure delivery, relations with state-based allies are more critical than even in typical consensus movements since infrastructure delivery always involves the distribution of state resources. The fluid and contingent nature of the respective roles and relations that exist between social movement organizations, grassroots activists, institutional allies, and the state are made clear in this research in ways that move our understandings of consensus movements forward in important ways.

The first two chapters in this section demonstrate that at least in certain contexts and with certain movements and issue arenas, a fuzzy or indistinct line separates institutional politics from the work of many social movement activists and organizations. This raises the question as to whether this also holds true with regard to political parties' direct involvement in movement protests. After all, some social movements may eventually develop political party-like features. Equally true is the fact that some political parties may cross over into protest politics in the streets and elsewhere. As a result, this is a fecund area of research for political scientists and sociologists alike. These issues are particularly rich and relevant with regard to the Latin American region – where many countries emerged from authoritarian or military rule within the last two or three decades. It is to that region that we turn next with Nicolás Somma's chapter, "When Do Political Parties Move to the Streets? Party Protest in Chile (2000–2012)," on party protest in Chile from 2000 to 2012.

Using a dataset of 2,342 protest events during the 13-year period and relying on statistical regression, Somma finds that in only 6% of the cases in Chile did political parties take part. Equally important, he uncovers a complex and interesting set of political and geographic factors that influence, and seem to limit, the likelihood of political party protest activities. These findings suggest that perhaps the line of demarcation between institutionalized politics and social movement protests may be more pronounced than some scholarship has been suggesting.

The risks that social movement activists face and those that their institutional allies encounter are not alike; they often differ dramatically, and for a variety of reasons. Those reasons have to do with the political and economic context, the degree of contention, the tactics used by the movement, and the issue arena. It is also true that the risks individual grassroots activists face are not the same across a movement. This is owed to the nature of the movement activist's relationship to the state, and this in turn may be tied to the activist's ethnicity, their nationality, their citizenship, and the differential treatments thereby accorded to them by the state. So for this section's final chapter, entitled "Building Solidarity across Asymmetrical Risks: Israeli and Palestinian Activists," we move to the Palestinian West Bank, occupied by Israel, where Michelle Gawerc interrogates this particularized dimension of the broader question of how social movement organizations and their activists relate to the state, and consequently to each other within the movement.

Gawerc has been doing sustained field research for many years in the region on various aspects of collective identity, including with Combatants for Peace.

This is a joint Israeli-Palestinian peace organization that has had to maneuver nimbly amidst radical asymmetries in a protracted ethnic conflict in order to build solidarity. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and 34 in-depth interviews with both the Israeli and the Palestinian activists, the author convincingly demonstrates that solidarity can be built in even deeply asymmetric contexts, provided activists face those risk asymmetries in an open and honest fashion, thereby building trust within the asymmetries. More specifically, Gawerc argues that solidarity in such contexts requires a clear commitment to shared goals, a demonstrated willingness to support and defend one another, and some deference to each other's respective risk boundaries, broadly conceived. Although significant in its own right, the generalizability of the findings about Combatants for Peace is bolstered further by Gawerc critically applying them to the joint non-violent resistance in the Palestinian village of Bil'in. Future scholarship on the dynamics of differential risks in social movement activism will likely pay close attention to this chapter.

The second section of the volume, "Frames and Discourses in Conflicts and Social Movements," consists of three chapters linked by the use of frame and discourse analysis to interpret the work of various movements in Tunisia, the United States, and Russia. It opens with Mohammad Yaghi's insightful chapter, "Frame Resonance, Tactical Innovation, and Poor People in the Tunisian Uprising," on the 2011 non-violent revolution in Tunisia, one of the few uprisings within the so-called Arab Spring that brought lasting change and increased openness and democratization. The research is based on fieldwork conducted in Tunisia, 81 interviews with participants from various movement organizations, analysis of 19 statements from movement organizations, and examination of 181 slogans used by the movement and drawn from videos posted on the internet. Yaghi argues that the movement's careful attention to frame resonance within collective identities, the use of imaginative and inventive tactics and discourses, and locating protests within poor neighborhoods all contributed to movement outcomes.

The frame transformation strategies of the three founding women of the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States is the focus of our next chapter, "Black Lives Matter: (Re)Framing the Next Wave of Black Liberation," authored by Amanda Clark, Prentiss Dantzler, and Ashley Nickels. The data sources include a qualitative analysis of 37 newspaper and magazine print articles about the three founders and speeches by them, as well as 23 video interviews with them about Black Lives Matter during the two-year time period of October 2014 to October 2016. The authors suggest that the Black Lives Matter movement includes not just a continuation of past struggles for racial justice by the civil rights movement and the black power movement, but ultimately a reframing and a transforming of the struggle for black liberation in the US. Notably, they show convincingly that this transformation includes an intentional fusing of the movement with a commitment to intersectionality so that it is clear that all Black Lives Matter – irrespective of gender, age, sexual orientation, and so-called criminality.

The third article in this section on framing and discourses takes us to Putin's Russia where both corruption and the everyday violence of the state may seem to many to be so endemic as to close off meaningful avenues of resistance. Not so, says Alexandra Orlova whose chapter, "Challenging Everyday Violence of the State: Developing Sustained Opposition Movements through Anti-corruption Protests, examines how discursive anti-corruption norms and contentious activism can be birthed even in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian settings that repress dissent. Orlova rightly notes the steep hill that Russian oppositional movements encounter. This hill includes significant repression, a sense of futility, robust informal networks coupled with corruption that permeates Russian society, and state manipulation of narratives as a tool to quell the emergence of opposition movements. Nonetheless, using various data sources about Russian politics, Orlava patiently builds an argument that carefully constructed anti-corruption discourses, joined with relatively small-scale campaigns, and protest actions that concentrate on political corruption instead of on the Putin regime specifically, has potential to coalesce and eventually develop into a more overt political challenge in Russia.

The third and final section of the volume, "Activist Start-up and Withdrawal," is comprised of two research projects that bookend critical issues associated with the beginning point and the ending point of movement participation by an individual activist.

The first chapter, "Volunteer Retention, Burnout and Dropout in Online Voluntary Organizations: Stress, Conflict and Retirement of Wikipedians," by Piotr Konieczny, focuses on the dynamics of burn-out and drop-out by volunteer Wikipedia editors who were heretofore comparatively active editors. The research is based on the results from a survey of contributor motivations sent to 300 (with a response rate of 41%) of the most highly active Wikipedia English editors (the largest of the Wikipedia projects) who have decreased their activity or stopped contributing altogether as editors. Konieczny's findings show that the experience of recurring interpersonal conflict during the volunteer editing is a salient factor. Insofar as Wikipedia is the largest voluntary organizations in the world, this study furthers our understandings about the sometimes complicated dynamics of volunteerism and its intersections with conflict. Moreover, as volunteerism is something which greases the wheels of most social movements and even their formal organizations, this study's findings will serve well future research on the broader question of how a non-profit organization maintains a volunteer workforce, particularly in an increasingly digitized age.

We close the volume with a close look into the other end of participation, asking why do some people become active in social movement protest for the first-time in mid-life, so-called late bloomers. Winston Tripp and Danielle Gage's chapter, "Late Bloomers: Differential Participation among First-time, Mid-life Protesters," runs counter to the long-held yet faulty presumption that most first-time protestors are young, and by extension, idealistic. Based on survey data, this time from the Youth Parent Socialization Survey, a panel study that surveyed individuals four times over a 33-year period, the chapter's findings build on and contribute to an emerging body of work that examines those

factors that contribute to the trajectory of individual participation over time, including why protest participation begins when it does for mid-life late bloomers, and what these activists may hold in common.

Now, if you might allow me a more personal note … I took on the series editorship of *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* almost 20 years ago, in 1999. The first volume I personally edited was Volume 22, which appeared in 2000. During my tenure, the RSMCC series and I have been fortunate to have had eight volumes guest-edited; all of those colleagues were a joy to work with and they each produced an important collection that moved data-driven research scholarship in the tripartite foci reflected in the series' title forward in significant ways. This book, Volume 42, is now the 11th volume of the *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* series that I have personally edited, and it will be my last.

The next volume of the series, Volume 43, will be thematic in focus and will be guest-edited by Lisa Leitz and Eitan Alimi. Titled "Bringing Down Divides" it will be dedicated to the principles that animated the scholarship of Gregory Maney, a peace and conflict and social movements scholar whose work has inspired many of us, and who passed on last year, far too early.

I could not be more pleased to announce that the new series editor of *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* is Dr. Lisa Leitz, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Peace Studies at Chapman University in the U.S. A new chapter in the august history of this 41-year old series, originally founded by Louis Kriesberg, will soon commence under Lisa's capable direction. Lisa's deep knowledge of the social movements and peace and conflict studies literatures, and her critical consciousness complimented by a warm and compassionate collegial spirit will ensure that the series will not only continue to prosper but grow in new and exciting directions as well.

It has been my honor and indeed privilege to work with so many researchers doing ground-breaking research, and with so many good-hearted reviewers who have selflessly provided constructive commentary, and with so many helpful editors and publishers at JAI Press, Elsevier, and now Emerald Group Publishing. I offer my sincere thanks to all.

SECTION I
SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THEIR INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

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ALLIES IN ACTION: INSTITUTIONAL ACTORS AND GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM IN CHINA

Yang Zhang

ABSTRACT

Institutional actors are critical allies for grassroots movements, but few studies have examined their effects and variations within the non-democratic context. This chapter argues that while institutional allies are heavily constrained and unlikely to give open endorsement to grassroot activists, some institutional activists indirectly facilitate movement mobilization and favorable outcomes in the process of advancing their own political agendas. Drawing upon in-depth interviews conducted in 2008 and 2012, I illustrate this argument by examining the Anti-PX Movement – a landmark grassroots environmental movement against a chemical plant – in Xiamen, China. I find that the environmental institutional actors were constrained and divided, yet some still fostered opportunities for movement mobilization and in turn exploited the opportunity created by the protesters to pursue their policy interests, thus facilitating positive movement outcomes. As long as the claims are not politically subversive to the authoritarian rule, this type of tacit and tactical interaction between institutional activists within the state and grassroot activists on the street is conducive to promoting progressive policy changes.

Keywords: Environmental movements; grassroots protests; elite allies; institutional activism; political opportunities; movement outcomes

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INTRODUCTION

Institutional actors are valuable allies for movement activists, because they provide political opportunities and mediate the relationship between the protest and movement outcomes (Amenta, 2006; Meyer & Minkoff, 2004). While their values in democracies have been clearly identified (e.g., Gamson, 1990; McAdam, 1996; Stearns & Almeida, 2004; Tarrow, 1994), their roles within stable authoritarian contexts are less obvious and understudied. Furthermore, little is known about variations among institutional allies within such societies. Given the limits on their political action, do these actors matter for facilitating movement mobilization and desirable outcomes? If they do, why is this so and how do they provide assistance? In this chapter, I take "allies in action" as my central concern and explore whether and how institutional actors support grassroots activism.

This chapter uses the case of the Anti-PX[1] Movement in the city of Xiamen, China, to illustrate the limits and effects of institutional allies in facilitating grassroots mobilization and favorable outcomes under strong authoritarian regimes. Notably, China's deteriorating environment has now become a central target of citizen activism and has triggered vibrant social protests. Of these, the Xiamen Anti-PX Movement is regarded as the most influential environmental protest of the past decade. On June 1 and 2, 2007, approximately 20,000 citizens marched along Xiamen's main streets and demonstrated in the Municipal Hall to convey their grievances with the construction of the PX plant. In contrast to previous environmental movements, which often lacked street confrontations (e.g., Tong, 2005; Xie, 2009), the Anti-PX Movement in Xiamen marked a milestone in China's environmental activism. This was due to its high-level citizen participation, unusual protest size, and favorable outcomes – including, but not limited to, the relocation of the PX plant.[2] The movement had significant modular effects: it was followed by a series of subsequent Anti-PX Movements in several cities between 2008 and 2015, although their achievements were much smaller than the initial movement's.

Based upon two rounds of fieldwork in China, this chapter provides the most detailed account of this movement to date. Rather than presenting a comprehensive survey of factors contributing to the movement, such as internet activism, it focuses on the relationship between grassroots activism and its (potential) institutional allies, including: officials in the national environmental agency, officials in the local environmental agency, environmental NGOs (ENGOs), and sympathetic scientists and journalists. Through in-depth interviews with key actors in this campaign, I find that these institutional actors were politically restricted and divided, providing little open endorsement of grassroots activism. Yet, even the limited presence of elite allies facilitated grassroots mobilization and outcomes as the unintended results of promoting their self-interested agendas. The mediating effects of elite allies are further illustrated by comparison with those subsequent and less successful Anti-PX Movements during 2008–2015, in which the institutional activists were almost inactive.

This research contributes to the social movement literature in three ways. Above all, it examines the practice of elite allies in the movement under strong

authoritarian regimes – something that has not been given enough consideration in previous studies (but see Chen, 2012; O'Brien & Li, 2006; Schock, 2005). Second, my research advances the long debate over the relationship between institutional resources and disruptive tactics (Almeida & Stearns, 1998; Gamson, 1990; McAdam, 1982; Piven & Cloward, 1977) by revealing an interactive effect between grassroots and institutional activism: certain kinds of transgressive, but not necessarily violent, contention can open an opportunity window for elite allies to realize favorable outcomes (O'Brien, 2003). Third, echoing a recent call to employ the intersection and interaction approach (e.g., Banaszak, 2005; Böhm, 2015; Fligstein & McAdam, 2011; Meyer, 2005), my research highlights a reciprocal relationship between institutional and grassroot activists and their iterative interplay in driving progressive policy changes.

The chapter proceeds as follows: the section "Institutional Allies in Social Movements" offers a theoretical discussion of elite allies in social movements, underscoring their limitations and effects in authoritarian contexts. Next, I describe the data and method, and provide background for the Xiamen Anti-PX Movement. After introducing the major institutional actors involved in China's environmental governance, I examine how these players were restricted, but also able to play a critical role in the movement. I then compare this case with the subsequent Anti-PX Movements to demonstrate that the absence of institutional activists resulted in different outcomes. The chapter's conclusion extends my findings to popular protests in China and addresses general issues in social movement literature.

INSTITUTIONAL ALLIES IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Social movement scholars have long noticed that elite allies are valuable resources for movement actors, because they provide political opportunities for mobilization (McAdam, 1996, p. 27; Meyer & Minkoff, 2004; Tarrow, 1994, p. 76; Tilly, 1978) and mediate the relationship between the protest and movement outcomes (Amenta, 2006; Amenta, Caren, Chiarello, & Su, 2010; Cress & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1990, pp. 64–66; Stearns & Almeida, 2004). Like other sociological concepts, institutional or elite allies are defined in a variety of ways (e.g., Banaszak, 2005; McAdam, 1996; Pettinicchio, 2012; Santoro & McGuire, 1997; Tarrow, 1994).[3] Such "allies" can refer to a narrowly delimited group of institutional actors with stronger ideological sympathies who directly participate in social movements (Santoro & McGuire, 1997, p. 503). "Allies" can also be defined more broadly to include "individuals who affect change (from changing organizational norms to policy reform) from within organizations and institutions" (Pettinicchio, 2012, p. 501). In this chapter, I take the latter approach. Generally speaking, institutional actors have greater access to political, organizational, and media resources and can exert larger influence over policy making than grassroot activists.

Elite allies include both state and non-state actors in terms of their institutional status (Amenta, 2006; Banaszak, 2005; Stearns & Almeida, 2004). Composed of fragmentary administrative units and geographically nested governments, the

modern state is replete with cross-cutting political splits, and thus contains many allies critical for movement activists (Santoro & McGuire, 1997; Stearns & Almeida, 2004; Suh, 2011). For example, state-movement allies have been found to be vital for realizing desirable outcomes in Japan's environmental movements (Almeida & Stearns, 1998; Stearns & Almeida, 2004). Non-state institutional actors, including labor unions, NGOs, scientists, and media, can also be important allies for grassroot activists.

Beyond their *institutional* variations, this chapter focuses on elite allies' involvement in *practice* from the angle of "allies in action." For taking elite allies as an overall favorable factor obscures their possible variations: they may be tied to the same movement in varying degrees, and support certain kinds of contentions but not others. Furthermore, their support may come from ideological sympathy without the push from outsiders, or from opportunistic reasons or external rewards (Pettinicchio, 2012, p. 502). Furthermore, this motivational difference is further blurred in practice: activists who have a certain ideological sympathy for environmentalism may still behave in strategic ways as a means to protect themselves and/or advance their own policy agenda when an opportunity is present. These often understudied behavioral variations become salient in social movements under authoritarian regimes, where elite allies turn out to be more precious resources while being more politically restricted. Therefore, their support for oppositional movements varies to a greater degree. It is true that elite allies often play critical roles in the democratization process in transitional regimes when elites themselves begin to split (Brockett, 1991; Schock, 2005; Tong, 2005), but this is less evident for strong authoritarian regimes with a robust repressive capacity.

In authoritarian regimes, not only are social movement actors controlled and suppressed, but institutional actors' participation in movements is also restricted (Osa & Corduneanu-Huci, 2003; Tarrow, 1994, pp. 79–80). Unlike cases under transitional regimes, political elites in stable authoritarian states have not yet become overtly rebellious or politically split. Accordingly, few elites openly support oppositional movements or challenge the legitimacy of the ruling order. Furthermore, oppositional parties, the courts, and labor unions, which often serve as important movement alliances in democracies (Amenta, 2006; Böhm, 2015; Burstein & Linton, 2002; Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, & Giugni, 1995; Stearns & Almeida, 2004), play smaller roles in non-democratic societies, because they are either absent or function poorly due to tight authoritarian control (Schock, 2005). Overall, in a closed system, institutional activists are fewer in number and have less political space to ally themselves with protesters.

In addition to restrictions placed by the regime as a monolithic totality, elite allies are further constrained by their institutional opponents, given that the authoritarian states are as fragmentary as, if not more so than, democratic states (Migdal, 2001). Even in democracies, institutional activists are often weaker administrative agencies or less powerful societal forces than their opponents, who own more political and economic resources (Amenta, 2006; Stearns & Almeida, 2004; Tarrow, 1994). In Japan's environmental campaign,

for example, institutional obstacles to environmental governance included the entrenched party, industrial corporations, and powerful economic agencies, especially the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) (Stearns & Almeida, 2004, p. 479). Cases in authoritarian regimes are similar. In China, environmental activists' primary institutional opponents are: (1) economic agencies, especially the powerful National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) – the counterpart to Japan's MITI, (2) business establishments, including both state-owned enterprises and resourceful private enterprises, and (3) provincial and municipal governments, which often put economic development ahead of environmental protection in China's decentralized, developmental state (Economy, 2010; Xie, 2009). It is well recognized that these groups possess far greater power than environmental protection agencies or other environmental institutions.

Given these limitations, I argue that the presence of elite allies in grassroots movements is restricted and internally divided under stable authoritarian regimes. Most institutional allies are conformist and cautious, and thus are more willing to involve themselves in modest rather than transgressive movements. When facing confrontations, many potential elite allies become passive, divided, and even antagonistic to these contentious movements. Even those actual allies who do side with the movement seldom overtly support a confrontational protest so as to protect themselves – unless they see support as an opportunity to further their own agendas. They are opportunistic in choosing whether and when to step in, as the goals of institutional and grassroot activists are merely overlapping, but not congruent. In short, many factors hinder the potential for elite support of grassroots movements.

On the other hand, it is precisely because of their weak institutional status that some reformist allies have (even greater) incentives to seek alliances with social movement sectors as a means to advance their policy agenda (Amenta, 2006, p. 24; Schock, 2005; Stearns & Almeida, 2004; Suh, 2011). Institutional activists in weaker administrations need certain forms/levels of collective action in order to increase their bargaining power within the state and strengthen their leverage against political opponents (Kingdon, 1995; Meyer, 2005). They thus may make greater efforts to support the movement, albeit in tacit and tactical ways, in an authoritarian context. Accordingly, although heavily restricted, elite allies' limited presence still plays a critical role in grassroots movements: they can facilitate the grassroots mobilization by creating unexpected opportunities for protesters, and/or help grassroot activists realize favorable substantive outcomes, especially when they take advantage of the movement to achieve policy goals that differ from those grassroot activists initially sought.[4]

Finally, institutional and grassroot activists mutually reinforce each other in a reciprocal relationship (Banaszak, 2005; Böhm, 2015; Fligstein & McAdam, 2011; Meyer, 2005). They provide "opportunities" for one another and "mediate" their respective effects in shaping movement/policy mobilization and outcomes. In particular, institutional activists can be empowered or activated by protesters in bottom-up processes and become effective in pushing their policy agendas within the state.

Environmental campaigns in China offer ideal cases for the theoretical development of the role of institutional allies in grassroots movements. Despite its strong authoritarian regime, the current Chinese state is broadly understood as functionally fragmented and geographically decentralized rather than monolithic (Landry, 2008; Lieberthal & Lampton, 1992; Mertha, 2008). Accordingly, "there is not one unitary, national opportunity structure, but multiple, cross-cutting openings and obstacles to mobilization" (O'Brien, 2008, pp. 13–14; also see O'Brien & Li, 2006, pp. 28–38, 51–54). Previous studies have underscored that this fragmented authoritarian state offered two types of political opportunities to social (and especially environmental) movement participants. First, the cleavage between environmental and economic agencies and the differing policy priorities held by central and local governments offer protesters opportunities to make claims through channels such as collective petitioning with upper-level authorities who are more concerned with the environment (Chen, 2012; Mertha, 2008; Sun & Zhao, 2008). Second, some reformist environmental officials made open alliances with non-state elites such as NGOs to promote their common agenda in non-confrontational campaigns (Sun & Zhao, 2008; Xie, 2009; Yang, 2005).

Joining these works' efforts to disaggregate the Chinese state, I contribute two new points to the study of environmental activists. First, while extant research contends that the internal split within the authoritarian state often unexpectedly facilitated the movement's development (Chen, 2012, pp. 13–19; Shi & Cai, 2006; Sun & Zhao, 2008), I find that the contradictions within environmental protection institutions can also become obstacles to movement mobilization. Second, whereas extant research on environmentalism focuses on open alliance among institutional actors – environmental agencies, ENGOs, and the media – in worldview environmental movements where street-level confrontations are almost absent[5] (Hildebrandt, 2013; Matsuzawa, 2011; Mertha, 2008; Sun & Zhao, 2008; Tong, 2005; Xie, 2009), I find and elaborate upon a tacit interactive dynamic linking central environmental agencies and grassroots protesters.

This second point echoes a few recent works that pay close attention to the new dynamics at play in several NIMBY protests in China (e.g., Bondes & Johnson, 2017; Li & Liu, 2016; Steinhardt & Wu, 2016; Sun, Huang, & Yip, 2017; Wong, 2016; Zhu, 2017). These studies have identified two types of interactive dynamics: first, local ENGOs played a brokering role in connecting national ENGOs and making alliances with local activists (Steinhardt & Wu, 2016; Sun et al., 2017; Wong, 2016); second, some local officials colluded with social elites to encourage popular protest as a means of pursuing their common interests or goals (Li & Liu, 2016). While neither of the two dynamics appeared in the Xiamen Anti-PX Movement, this case presented another dynamic – here the tacit collaboration and mutual support among central ministry officials, local social elites, and grassroots protesters. The Xiamen case was characterized neither by a state-ENGO coalition nor by an ENGO-protester alliance but instead featured interactions of central ministry activists and grassroots protesters, despite that the two actors were remote in terms of physical locations and status positions. While this finding is not entirely new in China studies, my