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Movements, Countermovements, and the Structure of Political Opportunity¹

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Movement-countermovement interaction is an ongoing feature of contemporary social movements and, indeed, of contemporary politics. Yet the interplay of contending movements is understudied and undertheorized. This article begins to remedy this deficit by arguing that new work on political opportunity structure provides important insights and significant theoretical leverage for this study. Through a review of the literatures on countermovements and political opportunity, this article argues that this interaction increases when states enable but do not satisfy challengers. This article presents a general framework of theoretical propositions for understanding the interplay of movements and their opponents to animate and guide subsequent research.

The Army of God assembles at 5:30 A.M. in the Melodyland parking lot. Cars wear the bumper sticker "Be a Hero, Save a Whale; Save a Baby, Go To Jail." . . . When we arrive [at the abortion clinic], about 200 prochoicers are waiting in the front and the back of the one-story, brick building, waving blue-and-white signs that read "Keep Abortion Legal," stamping their feet on the ground as they yell, "Not the Church, not the state, women must decide their fate!" . . .

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The main back door has been secured by the prochoicers and about 30 rescuers are sent to sit in front of them. And so on and so on until there is a kind of club sandwich of political views—Keep abortion Legal, then photographs of bloody fetuses, Keep Your Hands Off of My Body, then bloody fetuses, then coat hangers. (Kathy Dobie, *Village Voice*, April 11, 1989)

This scene from a 1989 confrontation in Los Angeles (described by a journalist posing as a “rescuer”) has become a familiar one in the battle over abortion in the United States. Since its inception in 1988, the militant antiabortion group Operation Rescue has staged a series of demonstrations at abortion clinics across the country. Moreover, the direct-action wing of the antiabortion movement has expanded beyond Operation Rescue to include other organizations as well as loosely affiliated individuals engaging in protest activities that range from peaceful demonstrations to disruptive, sometimes violent, confrontations (see Blanchard 1994). As antiabortion activists attempt to shut down abortion clinics and turn away their clients, abortion rights demonstrators gather in large numbers to confront their opponents and defend women and clinics. Each side offers slogans and images for the mass media in an effort to impose its own symbolic frame on the issue of abortion and to mobilize supporters inside and outside of government.

These face-to-face confrontations are part of a larger conflict between two opposing social movements. The antiabortion or “pro-life” movement has grown over the past two decades in response to the successes of the abortion rights or “pro-choice” movement, notably legalization of abortion in 1973. The abortion rights movement has remained vital in response to new militance and gains by antiabortion activists. Thus, movement and countermovement engage in sustained interaction with one another and not just the state. Because most empirical and theoretical work on social movements focuses on movement challenges to the state, the phenomenon of ongoing interactions between opposing movements demands a revision and extension of our theories of social movements and social change.

Authorities, to be sure, are important: In the case of the Operation Rescue events in the United States, for example, police and local authorities must mediate between the opposing movements and may favor one side over the other in their management of the protest. The courts have ruled on the legality of tactics and the penalties to be imposed on offenders, and Congress has passed legislation dealing with abortion clinic protests.² Most recently, the murders of health care providers by antiabor-

² The Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act, passed by Congress in 1993, prohibits violence and blockades against clinics and threats of violence against doctors and nurses who perform abortions.

tion activists, together with the demands of abortion rights advocates, have forced the federal government to help protect clinics. These actions by authorities are critical, but it is interactions between movements and countermovements, including both discrete events and ongoing relationships, that shape state responses.

Direct and indirect interactions between movements, in which the state may be only an occasional actor and target, are increasingly common. In the United States, movements and countermovements have mobilized to fight over abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment, gay rights, animal rights, gun control, cigarette smoking, marijuana use, busing, racism, pornography, school textbooks, language rights, nuclear power, and environmental policies. Moreover, movement-countermovement struggles are not limited to the United States. In Central America, movements of the left and right often engage in combat in which the state is at most a marginal player, acting at times on the behalf of one side or the other. In Western Europe, neofascist nationalist movements have been countered by antiracist movement campaigns, with both camps claiming allies within mainstream political parties and the state. And in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the small but critical independent human rights campaigns of the late 1980s have been confronted with new nationalist and religious movements while the states have often been weak and divided.

Any social movement of potential political significance will generate opposition. It is the apparent increase in the use of social movement forms to oppose movements that presents theoretical as well as political challenges. Advocates of particular causes employ social movement forms when they believe, first, that such forms are necessary to pursue their goals and, second, that they are potentially efficacious. Large numbers of people do not protest if they believe either that their efforts will be for naught or that the government will represent their concerns effectively without such efforts. States bound the political arena in which political activists operate. That groups increasingly choose movement forms to express their opposition to other movements suggests that states are open to challenges but that they cannot resolve conflicts definitively.

Despite the growing prevalence of countermovements as significant political phenomena, analysts have been slow to move beyond single-movement case studies to examine movement-countermovement interactions. Social movement theory and research has advanced greatly in the past decade, but the growing importance of countermovements poses a new challenge to analysts of protest politics. We need to expand existing theories beyond a focus on single movements versus the state; recent work developing the concept of "political opportunity structure" provides a helpful analytical tool for this purpose.

In this article, we begin by reviewing existing analyses of movement-counter movement interactions and the emerging literature on political opportunity structure. We then explore two major sets of issues regarding movements and counter movements: (1) the conditions under which counter movements emerge in response to movements; and (2) the dynamics of movement-counter movement relations once a counter movement has arisen. In doing so, we identify major research questions related to these issues and offer theoretical propositions for future research. This analytic synthesis of existing work can serve as a guide for subsequent work (see McCarthy and Zald 1977). To develop this synthesis, we use examples drawn primarily from the abortion conflict in the United States. In examining the long history of the American abortion struggle, we are able to address a wide range of issues associated with movement-counter movement interaction and to provide the basis for a coherent analysis of that conflict. We also use examples from other conflicts to raise issues pertaining to different types of movement-counter movement interactions. The propositions that we advance suggest the need for various types of comparative empirical work: comparisons of movements that generate counter movements with those that do not; comparisons of different movement-counter movement conflicts; and cross-national comparisons of movements and counter movements.

MOVEMENTS AND COUNTERMOVEMENTS

The social movement as we know it came into being with the growth of modern nation-states and developed into a familiar means of pressing claims (Tilly 1984). Analysts have employed various definitions of social movements, emphasizing the collective identity of challengers, the mix of institutional and noninstitutional tactics, and sustained dynamic interaction with mainstream politics and culture (see Diani 1992). We adopt Tarrow's (1994, pp. 3–4) relatively economical definition: a social movement consists of "collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities." A "counter movement" is a movement that makes contrary claims simultaneously to those of the original movement.

The notion of a counter movement was formulated as scholars recognized that opposition to the movements of the 1960s often took the form of similarly organized social movements. Theorists initially viewed these reactive movements as an entirely different phenomenon than the initiating movements they opposed, as "a particular kind of protest movement which is a response to social change advocated by an initial movement . . . a conscious, collective, organized attempt to resist or to reverse social change" (Mottl 1980, p. 620). In this view, counter movements are

essentially reactionary and directed more at state and society than at the precursor movement (see Useem 1980). Lo (1982) questioned this focus on conservative oppositional movements, arguing that a countermovement may be either progressive or reactionary; its defining characteristic is that it is dynamically engaged with and related to an oppositional movement.

Zald and Useem (1987) built on Lo's view, tracing countermovement emergence to movement development and claims. For them, the countermovement's dependence on and reaction to an initiating movement, be it of the left or right, is the critical characteristic, one that makes countermovements an increasingly prevalent form of social change advocacy. According to Zald and Useem (1987, pp. 247–48), "movements of any visibility and impact create the conditions for the mobilization of countermovements. By advocating change, by attacking the established interests, by mobilizing symbols and raising costs to others, they create grievances and political opportunities for organizational entrepreneurs to define countermovement goals and issues. Movements also have a 'demonstration effect' for political countermovements—showing that collective action can effect (or resist) change in particular aspects of society."

Movements thus create their own opposition, which sometimes takes countermovement form. Once a countermovement is mobilized, movement and countermovement react to one another. Zald and Useem (1987, p. 247) characterize the ensuing interaction between movements and countermovements as "a sometimes loosely coupled tango of mobilization and demobilization." Movement and countermovement interact in a conflict in which the state may occasionally intervene on one side or the other or governments and subgovernments may intervene on behalf of opposing sides (Zald and Useem 1987, pp. 252–53). In some instances, "a countermovement may in turn generate a counter-countermovement that is different from the original movement" (Zald and Useem 1987, p. 249).

Our view departs from this linear image of movement-countermovement combat. We think of countermovements as networks of individuals and organizations that share many of the same objects of concern as the social movements that they oppose. They make competing claims on the state on matters of policy and politics (see Gale 1986) and vie for attention from the mass media and the broader public. The emergence of one movement may precede that of its opponent and, early in such a conflict, it is appropriate to speak of the original movement and its countermovement. Indeed, some conflicts never progress beyond some preliminary challenges by an emerging countermovement. Often in contemporary politics, however, the struggle is prolonged, and it then makes sense to think of the initiating and responding movements as *opposing move-*

ments. In this conception, opposing movements influence each other both directly and by altering the environment in which each side operates. The opposing movement is a critical component in the structure of political opportunity the other side faces.

POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

Although scholars have long recognized the importance of political context in shaping the emergence, development, and ultimate impact of social protest movements, systematic attention to the concept of “political opportunity structure” is recent. For Peter Eisinger (1973), the political opportunity structure consisted of the static institutional variables he used to explain that riots were most likely in those U.S. cities with a combination of “open” and “closed” governmental structures. Because potential dissidents were brought into open city governments while those with completely closed structures repressed dissent, the relationship between opportunity and extrainstitutional activity, Eisinger noted, was curvilinear. Activists chose protest when they believed it was both potentially effective *and* necessary. Charles Tilly (1978) applied Eisinger’s ideas to nations, showing how states can repress or facilitate collective action by altering the relative costs of particular tactics. Of critical importance here is the recognition that movement development, tactics, and impact are profoundly affected by a shifting constellation of factors exogenous to the movement itself.

Building on this work, other scholars have taken the concept of political opportunity structure and used it to refer to stable aspects of governmental structures that explain the differential outcomes of social movements across nations (e.g., Kitschelt 1986). Studies of movements in single countries have examined the more dynamic processes that alter the costs and likely outcomes of collective action. Thus, Doug McAdam (1982, p. 41), in his work on black insurgency, explains that “any event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations on which the political establishment is structured occasions a shift in political opportunities.” McAdam distinguishes between situations of generalized political instability and situations in which one contender is better positioned to engage in effective collective action on particular issues (1982, p. 44).³

In looking at this more dynamic model of political opportunity, we find

³ There are two components to such opportunities. One component is openness within government to action on a particular set of issues, what Kingdon (1984) terms an “open window.” The second is the prospect for political mobilization outside government.

that the relevant aspects of opportunity are a function of the particular challengers and issues under concern. Studies of the American women's movement point to public policies and government actions regarding women that encouraged women to mobilize on their own behalf (see Costain 1992; Duerst-Lahti 1989; Freeman 1975). Jenkins and Perrow (1977; also see Jenkins 1985), writing about farmworker movements, emphasize the importance of allies within government to staging successful protest and activating third parties. In seeking to explain the ebbs and flows of antinuclear weapons activism in the United States, Meyer (1990, 1993*b*) finds that a lack of government receptiveness to arms control partisans, in conjunction with more aggressive and expensive foreign policies, created conditions favorable for peace activism. For some challengers, increased political openness enhances the prospects for mobilization, while other movements seem to respond more to threat than opportunity.

Gamson and Meyer (1996) argue for an analytic distinction between relatively stable aspects of political opportunity, such as traditions and institutions, and more volatile elements of opportunity, such as public policy, political discourse, and elite alignment. Political opportunity is not just a fixed external environment that insurgents confront, but also something activists can alter (see also Tarrow 1993). The more stable aspects of political opportunity bound the possibilities for change and political action that activists define in conjunction and competition with other actors.

Within these constraints, movements can affect the political opportunity structure in a number of ways: Social movements can influence policy, alter political alignments, and raise the public profile and salience of particular issues. Movements can also create collective action frames, demonstrate the efficacy of various means of political action, and draw media attention that activates balancing norms in mainstream media. Finally, social movements can create or magnify critical events, to which their opponents can respond.

That social movements have become more common forms of representing interests is a function of previously successful social mobilization (see Quadagno 1992). The cumulative impact of the political mobilization of interests in the 1960s in the United States and indeed throughout the world increased the attractiveness of social mobilization and political advocacy as a form of organization and political participation. As Neidhart and Rucht (1991, p. 448) argue, "The likelihood of emergence and stability of social movements is increasing with modernization" as citizens increasingly recognize both possibilities for substantive change and potential arenas for effective action (also, see Berry 1989; Kriesi et al. 1995; McCarthy, Britt, and Wolfson 1991; Meyer and Imig 1993; Minkoff

1994; Walker 1991). Social movements have altered the structure of political opportunity for subsequent challengers, including their own opponents.

Using a dynamic and interactionist model of political opportunity, we can view opposing movements as rival contenders not only for power and influence, but also for primacy in identifying the relevant issues and actors in a given political struggle. The political opportunity structure changes in response to the actions of both movement and countermovement. Although they are concerned with the same general issues, the political opportunities of movements and countermovements are different: each has its own allies and its own relationship to authorities, and each is a component in the political opportunity structure the other confronts. In the following sections we consider, first, the conditions under which movement opposition takes movement form and, second, the interplay of opposing social movements.

THE EMERGENCE OF COUNTERMOVEMENTS

Movements generate countermovement response to the degree that they put their issues of concern into play, suggesting the viability and necessity of countermobilization. We argue that three conditions promote the rise of countermovements: first, the movement shows signs of success; second, the interests of some population are threatened by movement goals; and third, political allies are available to aid oppositional mobilization. We discuss issues related to each of these conditions and derive theoretical propositions regarding them.

Movement Success

Movements generate opposition by creating political openness on their issues of concern. Movements that show signs of succeeding, either by putting their issues on the public agenda or by influencing public policy, are the most likely to provoke countermovements. By raising the public profile and salience of a particular set of issues, social protest can generate media interest, win the attention of policy makers, and more generally put an issue into play. Protest movements can open a "policy window" (Kingdon 1984), creating an opportunity for institutional action, which in turn encourages a wide range of actors to mobilize on the issue in different venues.

The relationship between movement success and countermovement emergence is curvilinear. Whereas movements that achieve some success are most likely to provoke countermovements, movements that are unable to suggest the possibility of *movement* on policy, are unlikely to

generate countermovements. This is because substantial numbers of activists are unlikely to view countermobilization, with its attendant risks and costs, as necessary. A movement that is able to win policy reforms decisively, limiting the apparent prospects for subsequent reform, is also unlikely to generate extensive and prolonged countermobilization that reaches into the political mainstream.

Whereas Eisinger (1973) and Tilly (1978) viewed protest mobilization as a response to partly open governmental structures, we can refine this essential insight to look at particular issues. Individual movements make political claims on limited sets of issues, responding to particular conjunctures of policies and political alignments. Advocates of specific policy alternatives adopt the form of a social movement when they believe that such approaches are potentially efficacious. During periods when the "relative openness" of state structures to dissent is generally stable, opportunities vary across issues over time in response to changes in public policy (Meyer 1993*b*). When aggrieved groups or movement entrepreneurs perceive that change is possible in a particular policy area, they are likely to try to mobilize activism. When an issue is "closed" and there is little or no opportunity to effect change in current policies, movements and countermovements are unlikely to form.

Policies on cigarette smoking in the United States provide an example of an issue area in which there is little likelihood that a strong smokers' rights countermovement could emerge to overturn antismoking measures, despite the best efforts of threatened interests. Numerous restrictions on smoking now enjoy widespread support, even among smokers.⁴ Although the tobacco industry has tried to stir up smokers' rights sentiments, opposition has largely been confined to the efforts of the industry itself, and citizens' groups, whether industry affiliated or not, have generally remained small and ineffectual. In this case, changes in attitudes and laws regarding smoking are so extensive that few believe a reversal in policy is possible.

Issues rarely become "closed" with a single outcome such as new legislation, the recommendation of a government agency, or a court ruling. In the case of cigarette smoking, U.S. policies did not change immediately after the surgeon general's first report on smoking was released in 1964 but were the result of years of lobbying by antismoking forces (see Troyer and Markle 1983). In the American abortion conflict, the Supreme Court ruling that legalized abortion throughout the country in 1973 would seem to be an example of a decisive victory, but it spurred

⁴ Gallup polls in the United States show that most smokers consider current restrictions fair and that a majority of both smokers and nonsmokers oppose total bans on smoking in public places (see McAneny 1994).

the growth of an antiabortion countermovement rather than foreclosing protest. In this instance, the change was sudden and both proponents and opponents of legal abortion had difficulty believing it had really occurred. Moreover, antiabortion activists could fight the Court action by shifting to other arenas such as Congress or state legislatures. Movement victories that are truly decisive preclude the possibility of countermovement action in alternative arenas.

State structures and state capacity.—Whether or not a movement can affect policy reforms and foreclose the possibility that oppositional action will undo them is to no small degree influenced by the nature of state structures. Indeed, the development of the social movement as a form is closely tied to the development of the state as a political form (Tarrow 1994; Tilly 1984). Movements' capacity to close policy and protest windows is a function of state capacity to settle conflicts.⁵ States that cannot decisively resolve controversial policy issues are most likely to be encumbered by sustained movement and countermovement challenges. States that successfully adopt and implement policy reforms may face challenges from social movements, but the state itself will preclude the emergence of countermovements by holding up their end of the political battle.

PROPOSITION 1.—*Movement-countermovement conflicts are most likely to emerge and endure in states with divided governmental authority.*

States with federal structures, such as the United States, Canada, and Germany, are more likely to face movement-countermovement battles than unitary governments, such as Britain and France. In unitary states, the government can make and implement policy without serious challenge from internal opponents. In a federal state like the United States, political authority is divided, both among branches of government and among national and subnational governments, so that policy advocates on both sides of an issue are likely to encounter a mixture of governmental support and opposition from different levels and branches of government.⁶ Additional levels of government provide political allies to aid mobilization and venues in which to press claims.

⁵ Although Kitschelt's (1986) operationalization of state capacity is crude, the insight underlying it is critical.

⁶ This also suggests a way to look at protest and politics in nonliberal or transitional states. In the former Soviet bloc states, particularly in Eastern Europe, political opposition sometimes took the form of social movements that unified a broad spectrum of antistate opinion on human rights claims (Meyer 1994). Closed states repressed or tolerated the movements, generally preempting the development of autonomous countermovements by doing the countermovement work themselves. In contrast, since the end of the Cold War, the emergent states in Eastern Europe have been unable to develop the policy-making and implementation capacity needed to focus, much less respond to, movements. Rather than broad challenging movements, these states have been faced with diffuse and shifting alliances of claimants and attendant social disorganization.

Critical events.—Movements sometimes succeed in forcing public attention on issues by creating or exploiting critical, often unexpected, events. Various types of events can focus attention on issues and provide impetus for social movement mobilization (Staggenborg 1993). Such critical events include government actions, like the announcement of a new policy or a Supreme Court decision; unplanned events such as accidents (Molotch 1970; Walsh 1981); or movement-generated events like large demonstrations. Movement activists not only generate some of these critical events, but they also play a large role in creating the climate in which certain events are deemed momentous. For example, the nuclear reactor accident at Three Mile Island was seen as pivotal to the development of nuclear power in the United States, but a similarly threatening nuclear accident at the Fermi Laboratories near Detroit in October 1966 passed largely unnoticed; the difference was that antinuclear power activists succeeded in laying the groundwork in mass culture and mainstream media for a critical reception to Three Mile Island (Gamson 1988). By creating or amplifying critical events, movements alter political opportunities. Some events signal a receptiveness on the part of government, and some enlarge or constrain the tactical options of movements and countermovements even in the absence of a change in government policy. Events critical to one side are almost invariably critical to their opponents.

PROPOSITION 2.—*When movements effectively create or exploit events, they are likely to encourage countermovement mobilization at the same time that they advance their own causes.*

For example, when animal rights campaigners documented abuse of laboratory animals in mainstream media, they both mobilized their own supporters and alerted scientific researchers who opposed them (Jasper and Poulsen 1993). Because animal rights activists demonstrated the effectiveness of movement activity, their opponents have tried to create a countermovement. We would expect movement activists on all sides of an issue to view the same events as critical.

Movement Threats to Existing Interests

When a movement shows signs of success, others may see its gains as threats to their own interests. A policy response from the government intended as a concession to one group may threaten another and, at the same time, provide an opportunity to mobilize those alarmed by the change. When the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion with its *Roe v. Wade* ruling in 1973, opponents of abortion who had not previously joined antiabortion groups flocked to the countermovement (Luker 1984; Staggenborg 1991). After civil rights movement challenges to school seg-

regation resulted in court-ordered busing in American cities, northern working-class whites, generally bystanders to the earlier wave of civil rights conflict, joined the fray as they saw their own interests directly affected by this policy change (Useem 1980). In the case of American environmentalism, policies aimed at preserving wilderness areas and public lands have resulted in the mobilization of “wise use” and “property rights” countermovement organizations. Thus, policy success for one side, or the appearance of likely success, produces new threats and grievances for opponents.

Intuitively, it would seem that protest organizers would prefer not to arouse countermovements, but most movements generate opposition of some type, if not countermovements. As McCarthy and Wolfson (1992, pp. 273–78) note, “consensus movements,” which enjoy widespread support and virtually no opposition, are typically local, geographically bounded, and short-lived (see also Lofland 1989). The more familiar national movements are generally “conflict movements,” which face organized opposition. However, the nature of the opposition aroused by movements varies; not all opposition results in the mobilization of a countermovement similar in form to the original movement. Moreover, countermovements vary in size and scope and some, such as the pro-nuclear power movement (Useem and Zald 1982), are initiated by elites and remain dependent on elite resources rather than developing genuine grassroots constituencies.

Different types of threats are likely to produce different types of countermovements. Some countermovements are based on a limited interest, such as the desire to log a particular forest area, whereas others are based on issues symbolic of larger values and broader social changes (see Markson 1982). When movement issues seem to symbolize a whole set of values and behaviors, they are likely to threaten a broader range of constituencies who will be attracted to countermovement action for different reasons. Abortion, for example, has been used to symbolize social changes in sexual behavior and gender roles; the antiabortion movement in the United States includes both liberal Catholics, many of whom are strictly concerned with abortion as a religious issue, and fundamentalist Christians and others who oppose abortion not only because of the practice itself, but also because they see it as symptomatic of a decline in “family values” (see Luker 1984; Klatch 1987; Staggenborg 1987).

PROPOSITION 3.—*The likelihood that opposition to a movement will take the form of a sustained countermovement is directly related to the opposition’s ability to portray the conflict as one that entails larger value cleavages in society.*

We have seen, for example, that the movement against abortion, an issue that symbolizes a broad range of value differences, has been sus-

tained over a long period of time at both elite and grassroots levels. In contrast, countermovements based on issues framed in more limited, often economic, terms face more obstacles in initiating and sustaining grassroots activity. Countermovements initiated by elites, such as the pro-nuclear power movement, the smokers' rights movement, and the antienvironmental movement, often remain weak and dependent on elite resources.

In some instances, however, a countermovement that originates as a defense of economic interests or narrowly defined concerns may take on greater significance as the issue becomes symbolic of a broader range of rights and cultural values. If this occurs, the countermovement's capacity for mobilization will be enhanced. Zald and Useem (1987, p. 255) argue that the American antiabortion movement began with a narrowly religious opposition to abortion from Catholic doctrine that "was not capable of mobilizing individuals and groups outside the church. Only with the development of an ideology about the relationship of abortion to family life and the role of women in society was the antiabortion movement able to draw on a broader constituency." In the controversy over logging in North America, the issue appears to be taking on symbolic significance in that it is increasingly framed as a conflict between status groups (see Gusfield 1966). In Canada, thousands of opponents of the environmentalists protesting logging in Clayoquot Sound, British Columbia, held a festival designed to celebrate the "timber culture" that they felt was threatened by the protests (Cernetia 1994). In the United States, battles over logging and ranching are increasingly defined as pitting rural Americans against "yuppies" and big government (see Kriz 1994; Clifford 1994). Each side has an obvious interest in framing its demands in terms of larger social values.

Movement demands and frames.—Movement demands, and the way in which they are framed, may be more or less threatening to existing interests and values. Some movements manage to moderate their demands to avoid antagonizing existing interests and to avoid frames that lead to symbolic conflicts. For example, drunk driving has not become symbolic of the lifestyles of competing status groups in the way that temperance once was (Gusfield 1966). The contemporary movement against drinking and driving, in contrast to the earlier Prohibition movement, has not provoked a countermovement, partly because it has avoided antagonizing liquor interests by making the drunk driver, rather than alcohol itself, its target (cf. Gusfield 1981; McCarthy 1994). McCarthy and Wolfson (1992) argue, however, that the movement against drinking and driving is gradually shifting from a movement of "consensus" to one of "conflict" as the focus of the movement shifts from drunk drivers to laws dealing with drinking age, seat belts, alcohol advertise-

ments, and other such issues. As local groups begin to advocate changes that threaten the interests of the alcohol and automobile industries (McCarthy 1994, p. 159), we can expect these elites to try to generate countermovement activity.

For issues such as abortion and gay liberation, it would seem much more difficult if not impossible to avoid arousing opposition insofar as the behavior in question itself offends the values of existing groups. Activists can frame these issues in ways that are less confrontational and movement actors could choose an assimilationist rather than militant strategy, as did the homophile movement during the 1950s (see D'Emilio 1983; Adam 1987). Two conditions make this extremely difficult. First, as movements grow and diversify, there are likely to be competing frames put forward by various groups within movements. More moderate groups within a movement may suffer from a "negative radical flank" effect (see Haines 1988) insofar as the presentation of the issue by more radical groups provokes a countermovement that opposes the whole movement. Second, movements are limited by the political contexts in which they arise; during a "cycle of protest" in which many protest movements mobilize, a "master frame" may dominate the rhetoric of collective actors (Snow and Benford 1992). Individual movement organizations, the primary actors in many social movements, may have little influence over the way in which the issue is framed by other organizations and individuals within the movement (Benford 1993; Mansbridge 1986).

PROPOSITION 4.—*When movements arise during periods of heightened collective action, movement organizations are least able to control the use of frames and demands that threaten powerful existing interests.*

In the case of the abortion issue, some early advocates of change in the abortion laws sought noncontroversial frames for the issue, presenting abortion as an extension of contraception, which was by then highly acceptable. However, the abortion movement arose in the cycle of protest of the 1960s in which "rights" discourse dominated (Snow and Benford 1992; Tarrow 1994). Other social movements in the protest cycle, notably the women's movement with its advocacy of abortion as a "woman's right," had a strong influence on the abortion movement of the 1960s (Condit 1990; Staggenborg 1991). Abortion law reform advocates who tried to avoid confrontation could not prevent women's liberation groups from making radical claims for "free abortion on demand."

When movements make radical claims, they also facilitate countermovement emergence by invoking balancing norms within mainstream media (Gamson and Meyer 1996). Contemporary journalistic standards of fairness mandate a mechanistic "balancing" by which media present "both" sides of a controversy. Reporters covering demonstrations look for counterdemonstrators; activists' quotes on policies are counterbal-

anced by those of their opponents. The balancing norm leads to coverage that emphasizes conflict, rather than content, and that often suggests an equivalence between opponents on a particular issue (Gitlin 1980, pp. 47–48). Although this balancing may not serve well the information needs of the larger public, it is an asset and automatic opportunity for counter-movement activists, encouraging and magnifying their activity.

PROPOSITION 5.—*Mass media coverage encourages the emergence of a countermovement as journalists seek out opposing interests in response to movement claims.*

The early years of the American abortion conflict provide an illustration of this process. For much of the 20th century, there was little public discussion of abortion, even though many abortions were performed. In the mid-1960s, advocates of decriminalization struggled to bring the issue out into the open, to focus public attention on the problem of illegal abortion and the need for safe, legal abortions. They found that they could gain easy access to media forums if they were willing to debate opponents of abortion; as the abortion issue made its way onto the public agenda, local radio and television stations were eager to stage confrontations between proponents and opponents of legalization. By providing these opportunities for publicity, media organizations helped to mobilize antiabortion forces.

Elite Allies and Sponsors

The availability of elite support is one important aspect of a favorable political opportunity structure (see Tarrow 1994). Elites, including government authorities and other powerful interests such as businesses, may remain uninvolved in response to movement challenges or they may aid or repress a movement in a more or less unified fashion. In some instances, elites may find ways to thwart a movement without mobilizing a countermovement. In other instances, elites may sponsor or heavily support countermovements. When a movement succeeds in posing a real threat to a powerful interest, some elites may conclude that the social movement form is a highly effective political tool and so try to foster a countermovement.

In her analysis of the history of the U.S. labor movement, Voss (1993) shows that in response to the successes of the Knights of Labor, employers formed powerful employers' associations. Using these organizational forms, along with their financial resources to counter the efforts of unions, industry elites were able to devastate the labor movement. The U.S. government allowed this to happen by either taking a neutral stance or intervening against strikers (Voss 1993, p. 204). Thus, powerful elites may effectively counter a social movement without actually mobilizing a

mass base, particularly when the movement lacks allies among other elites.

Elite decisions to support or initiate countermovements, and their differential success in doing so, are based on the positions of other elites, the routes of possible action, and the likelihood of success. Both the nuclear power and tobacco industries in the United States determined that there were advantages to the social movement form and initiated countermovement organizations (Useem and Zald 1982; Troyer 1989), but they have met with limited success, in part because their opponents gained access to elite allies of their own. In the American abortion conflict, the Catholic church helped to generate an antiabortion movement and continued to provide significant support over the years. In Canada, however, antiabortion activists have been bitterly disappointed by the lack of institutional support from the Catholic church, which is apparently the result of the relationship between the church and other religious denominations as well as the Canadian government (Cuneo 1989).

Both movements and countermovements generally need allies among elites and when elites generate or support an effective countermovement, such as the American antiabortion movement, the countermovement may prolong a conflict for many years rather than put an end to movement challenges. Both sides will seek support from elites and attempt to exploit divisions among elites. Elite allies of movements and countermovements may eventually find that the conflict is no longer in their interest and try to withdraw their support. In the 1990s, for example, some members of the Republican Party may want to find a way out of the abortion conflict, and, insofar as significant numbers withdraw from alliance with movement activists, we can expect the conflict to ebb as the antiabortion movement finds it harder to find elite support.

PROPOSITION 6.—*When countermovement initiatives clash with elite interests, elite support will be withdrawn and countermovement activity will decline.*

MOVEMENT AND COUNTERMOVEMENT INTERACTION

When conflicts between a movement and countermovement endure for a number of years, the opposing movements create ongoing opportunities and obstacles for one another. As a conflict between movements develops, we expect the nature of interactions to change. Having discussed the factors that give rise to countermobilization above, in this section we explicitly consider the ongoing dynamics of opposing movements. We begin by examining the ways in which movement activities and their outcomes affect the ability of the opposing side to survive and grow. We

then consider how the strategies and tactics of opposing movements affect one another.

The Ebb and Flow of Movement and Countermovement

What explains why a movement thrives at some times and its opposition flourishes at others? How are the activities of opposing movements spaced over time in relation to one another? Why do some movement-countermovement conflicts seem interminable while others are short-lived? To answer these questions, we need to look at how the outcomes of movement and countermovement activities affect each side's growth and decline.

Zald and Useem (1987) suggest that movements mobilize, demobilize, and remobilize in discrete instances of tactical combat with countermovements, and they use the American abortion conflict as an empirical example of this pattern. In contrast, Staggenborg (1991) argues that mobilization of the abortion rights movement was continuous, partly because countermovement activities maintained a threat that kept the movement mobilized (cf. McCarthy 1987). Legalization of abortion by the Supreme Court in 1973 provided a strong impetus for the antiabortion movement; while it was easier for antiabortion forces to mobilize after the abortion rights victory, this countermobilization kept abortion rights forces alert. When the antiabortion movement won its first major victory, passage in 1976 of the Hyde Amendment prohibiting Medicaid funding of abortions, abortion rights forces received a boost; at the same time antiabortion forces were encouraged by their own victory (see Staggenborg 1991). Because countermovement activities prevent movement demobilization, the counter-countermovement scenario suggested by Zald and Useem is both theoretically unlikely and empirically unsupported.

Existing research on the relationship between policy outcomes and political mobilization points to the need to specify the conditions under which favorable or unfavorable policy reforms are stimuli for protest mobilization. McAdam (1982), for example, notes that positive decisions from the Supreme Court and other favorable actions from government spurred civil rights mobilization, creating a spiral of reform as government responded to dissident protest. In contrast, in looking at cycles of anti-nuclear weapons protest, Meyer (1993*a*, 1993*b*) notes that unfavorable policy and political alignments drove extrainstitutional protest. Reforms stifled rather than stoked mobilization. To reconcile such disparate findings, we need to look at the effects of policy outcomes on tactical options and on countermovement mobilization. In general, we would expect partial victories to encourage movement growth by providing tactical opportunities and the hope of further success. Defeats, provided

they are not completely devastating, also mobilize supporters by creating outrage or a sense of threat, while conclusive victories have a demobilizing effect. Both threats and opportunities can mobilize activism; the critical factor is the degree to which they create openings for countertactics. In a federal state, where there are numerous institutional sites for making policy, movements often respond to a defeat in one venue by protesting in an alternative arena.

Movement-countermovement dynamics complicate matters. Opposing movements ebb and flow in response not only to policy, but also to each other. Just as the relationship between movement success and counter-movement emergence is curvilinear, the relationship between the success of one side and the ability of the other to flourish is also curvilinear. When one of the opposing movements achieves little success and does not appear very threatening, it is difficult for the other side to mobilize much support. More successful movements, which present real threats, generate more support for an opposing movement. When a movement wins decisive victories, with little possibility of reversal, it becomes difficult for the opposing movement to maintain itself indefinitely. In a federal system, however, conflicts can be prolonged for a very long time as switches in venue make it very difficult for one opposing movement to vanquish the other.

The history of the American abortion conflict reveals how victories and defeats affect opposing movements in a federal state. In 1973, when abortion rights forces won in the courts, antiabortionists shifted the battle to Congress, where they worked to pass a human life amendment and cut off federal funding of abortions, and to state and local governments, where restrictions on abortion as well as funding cutoffs were enacted. After 1983, when the Supreme Court essentially reaffirmed *Roe v. Wade* by striking down a number of state restrictions on abortion, and after several attempts to outlaw abortion through Congress failed, the abortion rights movement experienced a sharp decline as supporters concluded that the battle was over. However, countermovement groups took the battle to the realm of public relations with tactics like the antiabortion film *The Silent Scream* and later to the streets with campaigns like Operation Rescue (see Staggenborg 1991) to keep the conflict alive. In 1989, a Supreme Court reconstituted by Reagan appointees opened the way for state-level restrictions on abortion with its *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* ruling. This decision proved to be a critical event for both of the opposing movements. In *Webster* the Court allowed important limitations on abortion services, such as a ban on the use of public facilities for abortion counseling, and seemed to invite further challenges to *Roe v. Wade*. This gave antiabortion forces the hope that, by passing state antiabortion laws, they might generate a court case that would

reverse the 1973 decision. Consequently, the *Webster* decision galvanized antiabortionists and, at the same time, led to an unprecedented growth in the abortion rights movement as supporters feared that abortion would once again be made illegal. Thus, a policy opportunity for one side was both a threat and a mobilization opportunity for its opponent.

In 1992, the Supreme Court ruled in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* that key restrictions on abortion rights in the Pennsylvania law would be allowed unless they were shown to create an "undue burden" on the right to abortion. On the face of it, the *Casey* decision was not a decisive victory for either side. The Court did not overturn *Roe v. Wade*, as many abortion opponents had hoped, but permitted restrictions on access to abortion that were abhorrent to pro-choice supporters. Both abortion rights and antiabortion groups, recognizing the value of threatening outcomes, claimed the ruling was in fact a victory for the other side.

The *Casey* decision dashed antiabortion hopes of overturning *Roe* through the courts. The election of Bill Clinton as president later in the year further diminished opportunities for restricting abortion through national politics, either through legislation or by further appeals to a reconstituted Supreme Court. The Court ruling did encourage the strategy of limiting abortion by passing "reasonable" state laws, but for some antiabortionists this was an inadequate goal, and they looked to direct action as the only way to stop abortion. However, violence by antiabortion extremists has resulted in disillusionment with direct action groups like Operation Rescue among more moderate antiabortionists (Risen 1994) and the murders of personnel at abortion clinics have resulted in a government crackdown on antiabortion violence that, if sustained, is likely to further discourage antiabortion protests. Abortion foes were greatly encouraged by the addition of antiabortion allies with the 1994 election of Republican majorities in both houses of Congress (see "Abortion Foes" 1995) and, because of the importance of right-wing votes in the 1996 Republican primary, Christian conservative forces succeeded in bringing a number of antiabortion bills before Congress in 1995 (see "Issue of Abortion" 1995). Nevertheless, divisions among Republicans on the issue of abortion and the lack of public support for an extreme antiabortion agenda make it unlikely that more than limited antiabortion goals can be achieved in the national legislature.⁷ Few avenues of institutional action remain for the antiabortion movement. Through legislation

⁷ Antiabortionists gained the votes to achieve limited, albeit significant, goals such as the barring of abortion coverage in a national health care plan (Barnes 1994). Even during the Reagan administration, however, antiabortion forces had little success in Congress.

and police power, the state can restrict the availability of extrainstitutional venues for action as well (Koopmans 1993).

Losses generate support by creating alarm, but eventually they have a demobilizing effect as supporters give up hope in the absence of progress toward their goals. At what point this is likely to occur is an important question. As the ongoing battle over abortion shows, interactions between opposing movements may prolong conflicts and cycles of protest indefinitely. Of course, the opponents of the losing side will also decline unless they can generate other goals to motivate ongoing participation.

PROPOSITION 7.—*In the short run, a victory for one side will spur the other in a movement-countermovement conflict. In the long run, neither side can maintain itself without victories; the side that fails to win any victories over many years will decline.*

Movement and Countermovement Strategy and Tactics

A movement's strategies and tactics reflect choices about the venues of collective action, the forms of action employed, and the demands and collective action frames used. In looking at how the strategies and tactics of opposing movements influence one another, one of the key questions is how closely "coupled" movements and countermovements are. That is, to what degree are one movement's agenda, tactics, and the venues in which it operates determined by its opposition? To what extent are movements and countermovements forced to follow one another into various arenas of action? To what extent can they set their own tactical agendas? The greater the influence of one movement on another's strategic choices and claims, the more "tightly coupled" those movements are.

Shifting arenas of collective action.—We can start by assuming that activists seek the most direct means toward influence on policy, based on their socially constructed appraisals of their resources and social and political location (Downs 1957; Meyer 1993*a*, 1993*b*).⁸ Given this principle and the realities of organizational inertia, we would expect organizations generally to maintain the same strategic targets, that is, to continue to operate in the same venue, unless compelled for some reason to do otherwise. Following Schattschneider (1960), we would expect a movement suffering policy or political setbacks to shift its efforts to new arenas.

The political institutions of liberal polities, particularly those with federal structures, provide numerous venues for movements to press their

⁸ We do not want to suggest that tactical choices will necessarily meet any external test of rationality, merely that activists will choose the tactics and venues they believe to be most effective.

claims, enabling them to shift arenas in response to changes in political opportunity. Civil rights claimants unable to win policy reforms in majoritarian legislative bodies can appeal to the courts. Environmental activists stymied by a resistant presidential administration can target state and local governments, mobilizing to effect policy change in arenas that seem more accessible and hospitable. The choice of arena is influenced by activists' ideologies and resources and by their perceptions of openings in a range of social and political institutions. Ideology permitting, activists shift arenas with changes in political opportunities and resources. Changes in venue bring shifts in targets, be they mass media, influential outside elites, policy experts, or elected officials.

Opposing movements can alter political alignments for one another. The civil rights and antiwar movements in the United States in the 1960s brought new actors into the Democratic Party, changing substantially both the procedures and the claims of the national party. The mobilization of social conservatives in opposition to this national party led to a new Republican coalition that allowed the national party to win five of seven presidential elections since 1968 (Craig and O'Brien 1993; Edsall 1984). As social conservatives played an increasingly important role in the Republican electoral coalition, serious Republican presidential aspirants essentially had to adopt strong positions against abortion. Consequently, the abortion rights movement saw limited prospects for influencing the Republican Party and, during the Reagan and Bush administrations, had little chance of influencing targets such as government agencies staffed by Republican appointees. On the other hand, Republican-backed threats to abortion rights mobilized pro-choice support for action in other arenas such as electoral politics (Staggenborg 1991). Thus, elite allies of an opposing movement may block successful mobilization in one venue only to aid the movement's efforts to mobilize elsewhere.

PROPOSITION 8.—*The availability of additional institutional venues for action encourages movements suffering defeats to shift targets and arenas to sustain themselves.*

The curvilinear nature of political opportunity applies not only to particular issue areas, but also to specific venues. Organizers need not expend resources in arenas that are already completely favorable to their goals (e.g., where elite allies are advancing the movement agenda on their own). They try to choose venues in which they think they will have some advantages and to avoid those where they perceive no chance of success. However, an opposing movement may force a movement to abandon its concentration on the arenas that are most favorable and engage in arenas in which the opposition is making progress, thereby diluting its resources. When one side is victorious in a particular arena, the other side may seek out new arenas in which there is likely to be

greater opportunity. In the American abortion conflict, countermovement strategies have forced numerous shifts in venue for the abortion rights movement (see Staggenborg 1991). Based on perceptions of opportunity in the courts, abortion rights groups pursued a successful litigation strategy, resulting in *Roe v. Wade*. After the victory, opponents shifted their efforts to Congress, forcing the movement to follow. After 1983, when antiabortion forces stalled in Congress, they again shifted efforts to public relations, then to the sites of abortion clinics. Because they were forced to shift their attention to these other venues, abortion rights groups could not focus on new goals.

PROPOSITION 9.—*Once a movement enters a particular venue, if there is the possibility of contest, an opposing movement is virtually forced to act in the same arena.*

A movement's "organizational repertoire" (Clemens 1993) is constrained by the requirements of various political arenas, including the channeling mechanisms of federal regulations such as tax codes (McCarthy et al. 1991). When movement organizations respond to opportunities in specific arenas, they adopt structures that help them operate in those venues. Movements that use nonviolent direct action, for example, such as the civil rights movement of the 1960s (Morris 1984), the anti-nuclear power movement of the 1980s (Dwyer 1983), and the direct action wing of the antiabortion movement, develop flexible structures, whereas groups that prioritize challenge through the courts develop the specialization and professionalization necessary for litigation. Once in place, structures are difficult to change and constrain the development of tactical repertoires (see Freeman 1975, 1979).

A countermovement may shake up organizational inertia by creating urgent needs for tactical responses and, hence, structural changes. By shifting arenas, a movement can force its opponent to change structure. The National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL), for example, began to formalize its structure after 1973 when it was forced to lobby Congress (Staggenborg 1988). Typically, both sides will have multiple movement organizations battling in different arenas; as one side becomes more organizationally heterogeneous, the other is likely to do so as well. When contending movements engage in the same venues over a prolonged period of time, they are likely to develop similar organizational forms so as to be "combat ready" for effective action in those venues.

PROPOSITION 10.—*Opposing movements develop isomorphic organizational structures to the degree that they engage politically in the same venues.*

Tactical escalation and innovation.—Activists select tactics from a limited "tactical repertoire" (Tilly 1978, 1993) in response to both organizational needs and the larger political and cultural context. Movement

organizations take into account the ideologies of their constituents (e.g., preferences for direct action) and resource limitations. They also learn to conform to norms and practices associated with particular venues. Lobbying Congress, for example, requires the dissemination of information in a form useful to legislators while challenging laws through the courts entails filing legal briefs. Just as movements and countermovements develop similar structures when they engage in the same institutional venues, they also adopt parallel tactics, regardless of their organizational needs or demands.

Movement tactics may be institutionally oriented (employing established channels of influence) or extrainstitutional (using direct action methods of protest), and the latter may be more or less unruly. Movements are comprised of a range of actors, with different groups predisposed to particular tactics. In general, we expect that direct action is most likely when institutional means of redress appear ineffective and when activists believe protest could produce change. Belief in the efficacy of direct action is likely to be strongest at the height of a protest cycle, when many groups are engaging in direct action and social change seems to be occurring as a result. At the same time, activists are likely to engage in direct action at times when there is a lack of progress through institutional means but elite support is strong enough to suggest that protest might work. For example, antiabortion activists in the United States increasingly turned to disruptive, but generally nonviolent, tactics in the 1980s during the Reagan and Bush administrations (see Blanchard 1994) because they were blocked in arenas like Congress but encouraged by presidential support. Under President Clinton, antiabortion civil disobedience appeared less attractive. Among the antiabortion activists who remain committed to site-based action, some have increasingly turned to more confrontational, often violent, action. Political violence is most likely when institutional means of redress appear completely foreclosed (see Koopmans 1993, p. 655; Oberschall 1993, p. 172). By heightening the risks and diminishing the possibility of success through site-based civil disobedience, the state may have effectively discouraged this form of protest.

The stance of the government, and of various branches and subgovernments, is a critical influence on movement strategies and tactics. It is not just positions on policy matters that are important, but also government response to various protest tactics. By imposing heavy fines or other harsh penalties on civil disobedience, authorities may deter use of that tactic. Conversely, tolerating protest, authorities may effectively encourage certain tactics, such as mass demonstrations. Opposing movements seek to exploit divisions within the government, engage in actions in the

arenas that appear most favorable, and target vulnerable or sympathetic elites.

Opposing movements adjust their tactics in response to one another as well as to openings created by authorities. McAdam (1983) describes a process of tactical interaction whereby movements must innovate tactically as their opponents develop ways to counter their activities. Failure to innovate makes mobilization more difficult and is a precursor to movement decline. Gitlin (1980) suggests that movements must not only innovate, but must escalate their tactics in order to get media attention. Because conflict attracts media coverage, opposing movements are encouraged to engage one another in visible protest activities. Often, the tactics of opponents may force a movement to deemphasize action in a favorable arena in order to respond to opponents. For example, abortion rights activists, forced by their opponents to defend women seeking abortions at clinics, have sometimes reduced their activities in institutional arenas even though political conditions were favorable to such tactics.

PROPOSITION 11.—*Interactions between opposing movements prevent the complete institutionalization of tactics by either side.*

Movement demands and frames.—Movement organizations forge their claims in response to numerous influences, including organizational needs, constituency preferences, changing political circumstances, and the venues in which they operate. To make claims in particular venues, movement organizations have to alter their collective action frames; the bumper-sticker political slogans that punctuate mass rallies and electoral campaigns, for example, are unlikely to be successful in litigation. To sustain their organizations and maintain relationships with their constituencies, organizers need to frame their demands to appear significant enough to warrant collective action. Activists in anti-nuclear weapons movements, for example, frequently speak about the fate of the earth being in jeopardy in order to heighten political mobilization (Meyer 1990). Of course, rhetorical hyperbole, while powerful in short bursts, is a weak tool for longer-term mobilization. Antinuclear activist Helen Caldicott successively termed the 1982, 1984, 1986, and 1988 elections the most critical in human history; supporters' fatigue and cynicism is understandable in response to such persistent polemic overstatement.

Visible opponents help because they allow movements to point to a genuine threat. For example, the Republican victories in the 1994 elections, and the elevation of Newt Gingrich to the position of Speaker of the House, were immediately recognized by liberal organizations as an opportunity for growth ("Liberal Groups" 1994). Opposing movements are particularly useful to one another in this regard because, unlike other opponents with broader agendas, they maintain focus on the same issues

and provide an ongoing source of threats with which to mobilize supporters. Thus, countermovement mobilization provides an opportunity for social movement organizations to mobilize resources, train and politicize activists, and engage in tactics aimed at countering opposition strategies.

The threats created by opposing movements are, however, a mixed blessing. While they increase issue attention and provide tactical opportunities, they also limit the content of those opportunities. When a countermovement mobilizes successfully, the initiating movement may find itself trapped into reactive tactics aimed at defending the status quo rather than free to pursue proactive efforts to win new advantages (see Tilly 1978). In the face of powerful countermobilization, a movement may expend all of its resources reacting to its opponents' initiatives.⁹

A movement's capacity to make proactive demands will change over time in response to different policy outcomes. After a movement victory, opposing movements may become more loosely coupled and the successful movement may be in the best position to ignore its opposition. At the same time, constituent support often declines following victories as urgency diminishes. There may well be new issues that movement organizers want to tackle, but they need to find frames with which to convince supporters of their importance. Meanwhile, a movement's victory is its opposition's defeat and can spur reactive mobilization to which the movement must respond.

PROPOSITION 12.—Movements that face strong opposing movements will be unable to take advantage of favorable political conditions after victories because countermobilization preempts the development of new claims.

Countermovement activity also influences the way a movement presents its demands, as well as the demands themselves. As Lipsky (1968) points out, movement leaders are always faced with tensions stemming from the need to appeal to activists as well as to the public and third parties. The presence of an opposing movement makes these tensions more acute because there is greater pressure to move to a moderate position in order to compete for public support. Consequently, there are likely to be numerous "frame disputes" (Benford 1993) as leaders seek to moderate their rhetoric and limit claims in response to the opposing movement rather than to frame demands in a manner calculated to appeal to longtime movement supporters. Within the abortion rights move-

⁹ Of course, not all countermovements are equally significant, and some do not require a movement's full attention. For example, the antifeminist component of the "men's movement" is dwarfed by the women's movement, which has many concerns far more pressing than the men's movement's initiatives.

ment, for example, movement organizations like the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL)¹⁰ have used focus groups to generate frames likely to appeal to the public. After the 1992 elections, however, NARAL and Planned Parenthood were criticized from within the pro-choice movement for adopting moderate frames to appeal to the public rather than waging an aggressively proactive campaign in response to the political opportunities created by the election of a sympathetic president (see Warner 1993). Within the antiabortion movement as well there have been comparable battles over the framing of demands. Groups working to present their demands as “reasonable” restrictions have competed with more polemical rhetoric from organizations like Operation Rescue. Thus, battles between movement and countermovement for public opinion and elite support might call for different frames than those that best mobilize grassroots constituents. And just as radical groups within a movement might hurt moderate groups by generating a countermovement, they might also create a negative radical flank effect by making it more difficult for the movement to frame issues in ways that appeal to public opinion.

PROPOSITION 13.—*Conflict between opposing movements exacerbates intramovement battles over collective action frames.*

Even as heightened conflict between movements can intensify intramovement disputes, it also encourages bystander publics to join in the conflict. Issues like abortion or gay and lesbian rights become symbolic of larger cleavages in society. Activists representing all sorts of claims group around these cleavages, trying to make use of the political attention generated by opposing movements. Organizers within a movement attempt to “accrete” (Mansbridge 1986) their preferred interpretation of relevant issues and answers to their side of the debate, using attendant social mobilization to put forward broader claims. For example, the New Right used opposition to abortion as a unifying issue to serve as a surrogate for its broader “profamily” agenda of social issues. Similarly, women’s groups also used abortion as a means to unify their constituents in a hostile political environment. As the utility of the abortion issue for mobilizing diminishes, groups on each side look for new unifying issues (Meyer and Whittier 1994; Ryan 1992).

PROPOSITION 14.—*As conflict between opposing movements heightens, coupling around certain issue areas, activists with a wide variety of claims cluster around each side.*

¹⁰ NARAL recently changed its name to the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (but retained the well-known acronym) so that the organization could focus on contraceptive use as well as abortion as part of its effort to appeal to the mainstream public.

CONCLUSION

Movement-countermovement interplay has become a veritable fixture in contemporary social movement challenges and, indeed, in contemporary politics. If contemporary Western societies are now “social movement societies” as Tarrow (1994) suggests, they are also ones in which challenging movements must contend with opponents besides the state. The same factors that allow one social movement to become a persistent presence in contemporary politics encourage its opponents to mobilize in similar forms. Modern liberal states are to varying degrees open to challenges, but they are often unable to resolve conflicts decisively, creating opportunities for countermovements. The “social movement organization” and a range of collective action tactics have entered the organizational and tactical repertoires of an ever-broader array of challengers, making the social movement an increasingly prevalent means of making claims within the modern “repertoire of contention” (Tilly 1993).

Despite the prevalence of opposing social movements, scholars have been slow to address movement-countermovement dynamics. Indeed, the problems that plague contemporary research on social movements are even more pronounced in the study of opposing movements. Scholars have long noted that academic studies of social movements have focused excessively on the origins of movements at the expense of understanding their organizational forms, development over time, interaction with more mainstream means of pressing political claims, and the full range of movement outcomes (e.g., McAdam 1983; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988; Snyder and Kelly 1979; Voss 1993). These specific deficits in our understanding of social movements are compounded in looking at the interplay of opposing movements, in which mobilization is continual, and each side affects the forms, development, claims, and efficacy of its opponent.

In this article we have argued that recent theorizing and research on political opportunity structure provides a rich framework within which to build theory and conduct research on the interactions among opposing movements and the state. Drawing from the literature on social movements and on political opportunity, we have shown the potential of this framework by generating propositions that we hope will inspire subsequent empirical research and theory building. Underlying our approach is the recognition that movement-countermovement conflicts are more likely to be ongoing than discrete instances of interaction. In this vision, movements engage in a variety of tactics over time, shifting venues in response to changing political opportunities. We emphasize that movements and countermovements themselves influence political opportunities and public policies, which are another critical element in the structure of political opportunity.

Given this framework, there is much work to be done. We have developed propositions related to, first, the emergence of countermovements and, second, the dynamics of ongoing conflict between opposing movements. To investigate the conditions under which countermovements emerge, we need comparisons across movements over time to show how different outcomes of movement actions and responses of the state generate or fail to generate countermovements. We need comparisons among movements based on different types of interests with different types of demands employing different types of collective action frames to show how these factors affect the emergence of countermovements. And we need to examine the differential roles of elites in creating opposition to movements.

To understand the influence of state structures on countermovement emergence, we need to look at differences in countermovement development among states, and, more importantly, at the ways in which states might repress, discourage, or institutionalize conflict within conventional politics. Cross-national comparisons of politics and protest over abortion, environmentalism, nuclear power, gay and lesbian rights, and other contested issues can help us understand why countermovements develop. With such comparisons, we can examine the relative civility, volatility, and scope of such conflicts as well as their incidence. We can determine the social and political conditions that lead challengers to moderate their claims and tactics, and conversely those that lead movements to frame their demands in terms of larger social and political cleavages. We would expect to find significant differences not only across nations, but also across different subgovernments, such as states and localities.

With regard to the ongoing dynamics of opposing movements, we need studies that extend the frame of reference from a discrete interaction to exchanges over time and across different national and subnational contexts. We have advanced arguments about how opposing movements are likely to respond to each other and to changes in political opportunity over time, but empirical work is needed to test, refine, and extend these propositions. The influence of state structures can best be seen by comparing conflicts over contested issues such as abortion in different countries. In addition to cross-national comparisons, we need studies comparing the ways in which different conflicts between opposing movements develop over time within particular contexts.

The dearth of scholarly literature on movement-countermovement interactions means that there is room for all kinds of useful work. Ginsburg's (1989) ethnographic study of the abortion conflict in a North Dakota town is one model of the type of microlevel study that can inform our understanding of the processes of building and maintaining opposing movements, but even this study looks at a relatively small portion of a

conflict that has spanned more than four decades. By extending such studies in time, we can see changes in the composition of each side and in their comparative responses to the same critical events or to changes in political opportunity. We can also see how the tactics of each side evolve, how alliances with other local and national groups shift, and how claims change over time, becoming more or less encompassing.

Such microlevel studies can help inform and frame larger studies of opposing movements in national contexts. Longitudinal studies of conflicts over time can reveal how opposing movements initiate actions and respond to one another. By tracking movement-generated events on each side of a conflict over time, we can see how changes in political opportunities and the efforts of opposing movements affect the growth and maintenance of each side. We can identify the circumstances under which conflict becomes more or less unruly (e.g., when both sides escalate their tactics at the same time) and the factors that lead to other shifts in strategies and tactics.

We expect researchers to use a range of methods to investigate these issues. Participant observation and intensive interviewing studies of on-going conflicts can uncover much about the processes of interaction between opposing movements. Quantitative analyses of event data coded from newspaper accounts can show patterns of mobilization and collective action in movement-counter movement conflicts. Content analyses of the documents generated by opposing movements can reveal the centrality of particular issues and alliances, the articulated strategies, and activists' perceptions of their own opportunities. We can also see how opposing movements frame their claims in response to, and competition with, their opponents. By examining mainstream media accounts—both mass and elite—we can investigate the relative success of each side in influencing a larger public discourse. Because movement-counter movement dynamics are likely to play a continuing role in democratic politics in the modern era, we expect to see a great deal of work in this area in the coming years.

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