PArtecipazione e COnflitto
http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco
ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)
ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)
PACO, Issue 14(3) 2021: 987-997
DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v14i3p987

Published 15 November, 2021

EDITORIAL/SPECIAL ISSUE

Collective Action Outcomes: Ways Forward for the Subfield

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ABSTRACT:

Given the growing interest in how collective action matters, this special issue seeks to push our understanding of collective action outcomes beyond the present state of knowledge and stimulate further developments. In doing this, it looks to improve and expand the theoretical and conceptual tools for studying the topic, suggest and explore methodological innovations to solve previous research problems and investigate new settings across various movements and countries.

KEYWORDS:

Collective Action Outcomes, Social Movement Studies, Processual Approach, Qualitative and Quantitative Methods, Area Studies

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1. Introduction

We had the honour, back in 2009, to write an introduction to a special issue about the outcomes of social movements for *Mobilization: An International Journal* (Bosi & Uba 2009). Already then, we noted an increasing interest in the topic among scholars of social movements and beyond. Today, eleven years later, it is clear that the number of articles, books and encyclopaedia or compendium entries about different consequences of social movements has quantitatively increased and qualitatively improved. And yet, there are

still several "blind spots" in the theoretical framework, methodological tools and empirical coverage of the topic. Hopefully, this introduction and particularly the articles in this special issue will provide some evidence and ideas of how the subfield on collective action outcomes can move forward.

We use the term "collective action outcomes" instead of "social movement outcomes" because we think that for the further development of the subfield, it is crucial to include the research which is not explicitly about social movements. Here we agree with Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani's agenda "to expand the field of social movement studies, opening up to recent developments in cognate areas of studies, within and beyond sociology and political sciences" (2015: 22). In addition to the well-known classics on social movements, one could find reference to collective action outcomes in studies of networks (Gould 1993), industrial relations (Snyder & Kelly 1976), psychology (Vestergren et al. 2017, Louis et al. 2020), gender (Taylor et al. 2009), political violence (English 2016), youth activism (Kirshner 2007), commons (Varvarousis et al. 2021), civil resistance (Chenoweth et al. 2011), revolutions (Goodwin 2001) rural development (Lizzo-Wilson 2021), environmental sustainability (Ostrom and Ostrom 2014), international law (Tsutsui et al. 2012), and possibly more. While this short introduction cannot include references to all essential studies in the subfield on collective action outcomes, we would encourage scholars interested in the topic to use the existing overviews in the recent Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements (Snow et al. 2019), Oxford Bibliographies in Political Science: Outcomes of Social Movements and Protest Activities (Giugni et al. 2020) or in other articles and books (e.g., Amenta et al. 2010, Bosi et al. 2016, Giugni 2008, Giugni 1998). As in every aspect of life, knowing where we come from is instrumental for understanding where we are at present and how we can move forward in the future. Therefore, we would urge early career and established scholars to build on existing knowledge and not forget that sometimes the seemingly original argument has already been proposed by another scholar, maybe even by a younger one from a geographically distant region.

This introduction is set up as follows. First, we start with a concise review of the existing scholarship, focusing on the conceptual and theoretical developments over the years, and point to a few methodological and empirical improvements in the subfield on collective action outcomes. Secondly, there is a brief introduction of the papers included in the special issue, and expectedly, we finish with a few thoughts about future research directions.

2. Where is the subfield today?

2.1 Concepts and theories

If we trace the development of social movement studies over the last decades (Buechler 2011), we also can see how the subfield on collective action outcomes has evolved. Still, where the field has shaped the development of the subfield, the reverse has hardly ever happened. Social movement scholars, over time, have brought emerging themes, concepts and perspectives to the study of collective action outcomes.

Collective behavioural scholars from the early 20th century sought to uncover how social change, capable of breaking typical social circumstances and responsible for producing feelings of uncertainty, shapes social structures producing spontaneous emergences of deviant behaviours, such as crowds, fads, mobs, protest and riots. Their arguments were premised on the impression that individuals change from rational to irrational behaviour when it comes to collective action. Starting from this reading, these scholars have shown no interest in studying how collective action matters because their main focus has been on how social change shapes collective action rather than being shaped by it.

As we know well today, the wave of mobilisation that has shaped the world during the 1960s and 1970s has also shaped the social movement field as young scholars close to or active in that cycle of protest started

progressively to question the concepts and perspectives used by collective behaviour scholars.[1] In doing this, they investigated protest and social movements as politics by other means, as actors seeking the most effective means to an end rather than deviating from normal rational behaviour. Resource mobilisation scholars stressed that aggrieved people do not mobilise protest or social movements on their own, but they also need the means to act. Consequently, their analysis of how collective action emerges focused on concepts such as the distribution of resources, organisational characteristics and forms of action strategies. The closeness of these scholars to the subject of study and their interpretation of collective action as driven by instrumentality was fundamental to trigger the investigation of how collective action matters. The subfield on collective action outcomes started then to focus on whether and which kinds of protests and social movements "succeed" or "fail" based on "movement-centred" accounts (resources, organisations and strategies) (Gamson 1975; Piven and Cloward 1979) or analysed different degrees of responsiveness of political system (Schumaker 1975). For contemporary discussions, it is essential to recall that both Gamson and Schumaker brought forward the importance of "third parties".

Scholars influenced by the political opportunity structure approach challenged these early works in the 1970s and 1980s, emphasising that movement-centred analyses are always underdetermined and do not take seriously enough the contexts in which protest and social movement operate and succeed or fail (context-dependent explanations). In the 1980s-1990s, with the further development of the political process approach, especially in response to the controversies it generated, scholars of collective action outcomes started to speak of "outcomes", "effects", "impacts" and "consequences" (Giugni 1998) rather than success and failure. The "movement centred" focus was merged with "context-dependent" explanations, and we got the "political mediation model" (Amenta et al. 1992) and the "join-effect model" (Giugni 2004). Thanks to the relevance of the political process approach, the field is dominated by research on "political" consequences of social movements and protest campaigns (Amenta et al., 2019).

In parallel, but sometimes in contrast and competition with the political process approach, the social movement field has seen the development of constructionist perspectives on social movements. These different approaches, relying on symbolic interactionism, have focused on identity, frames, emotions, cultural values and ways of living. These approaches and the concepts which emerged from those works have inspired scholars interested in collective action outcomes to investigate biographical (Passy and Mosch 2019) and cultural outcomes (Amenta and Polletta 2019).

With the turn of the millennium, social movement studies, despite its internal differences (strategic interactionism, contentious politics and field theories), have taken a processual turn that seeks "to reconstruct the dynamics and intertwined trajectories of episodes of collective action or of activists' lives, how they unfold in interactions shaped by strategy, conjuncture, and contingency, and as situated in their particular historical context, in social time and space" (Bosi and Malthaner forthcoming). Similar to previous developments, this turn has dramatically influenced the subfield of collective action outcomes. Scholars in the subfield started to focus on "processes" (Andrews 2001; Kolb 2007), "targets" (Luders 2010), "interrelated effects" (Bosi 2016), "relational accounts" (Auyero et al. 2019), "prosocial and antisocial outcomes" (Coley et al. 2020), "influences" (Lo Piccolo 2021) and "gains and losses" (Jasper et al. forthcoming). These works have expanded our view of looking at how collective action might matter, appreciating the dynamic interactions of multiple actors in arenas or fields rather than sole collective action in a static environment.[2]

[1] It is surely fascinating how the biographical outcomes of some of the activists of the 1960s and 1970s protest cycles have shaped the field of social movement studies with the emergence of new approaches (biographical outcome → cultural outcome).

[2] In presenting how the subfield on collective action outcomes has developed in theoretical and conceptual terms following the approaches that have shaped the social movements field of study, we were inspired from the work of Alessandra Lo Piccolo (2021).

2.2 Methodological developments

The subfield on collective action outcomes has also improved considerably thanks to advancements in methodological approaches used in social movement research. Still, methodological challenges and critiques about research design, measurement and method of analysis have primarily remained the same. Scholars repeatedly mention three issues: (1) defining, operationalising and measuring the collective action outcomes, (2) establishing causal links between collective action and eventual outcomes, and (3) the dominance of case studies rather than comparative designs, leading to a lack of accounting for contextual effects (e.g., Earl 2000).

The definition, operationalisation and measurement of outcomes vary depending on the scholarly interest in a particular outcome type, namely, intended or unintended and political, economic, cultural, biographical or institutional. As we suggested above, the analysis of "success" and "failure" had a binary focus while the research of different stages of responsiveness moved towards a more continuous measurement of outcomes. The binary evaluation of success and failure is still used, especially in research about the outcomes of civil resistance (Chenoweth et al. 2011) or revolutions (Goodwin 2001). Theoretical moves toward emphasising the contexts for collective action outcomes came along with introducing interaction effects in quantitative analysis and attempts to use more context-focused methods, such as qualitative comparative analysis (e.g., Amenta et al. 1992; McVeigh et al. 2003). The move towards more rigorous methods of estimating the effects of collective action on diverse outcomes, particularly the move from simple regression analysis towards more complex time-series, event history or multi-level models, reduced problems of spuriousness and causal inference. In qualitative studies, which more often examine biographical and cultural outcomes compared to quantitative studies, research methods have moved towards life-history interviews (Blee 2016) and creative archival studies (Fillieule et al. 2018) to trace longitudinal dimensions.

Improved quantitative measures of protest events and protest claims and increasing availability of public opinion survey data have allowed scholars to improve the statistical analysis of collective action effects and account for possible confounders. Still, clever methods do not compensate for poor research design or use of theory. While movement-centred studies are unable to account for the "dog that did not bark", that is, for social change absent collective action, an alternative research design that uses "change" rather than movement success or failure as the outcome or unit of analysis allows scholars to account for change without movements. However, contemporary research on collective action outcomes still deals with non-randomly selected movements or policies of interest, which eventually might mean overestimating movements' political impacts (Burstein & Sausner 2005, cf. for public opinion in Burstein 2006). Interest group research has tried to solve this problem by further improving research design, focusing on a large set of policy issues (Baumgartner et al. 2009), and introducing innovative quantitative text analysis tools (Klüver 2011). Another helpful lesson from interest group research is the value of collective development of public data (see the special issues devoted to data sources in Interest groups & Advocacy, 2020:9(3)). As many limitations of our research focus also relate to data availability, the social movement field would benefit from similar data publications.

2.3 Empirical coverage

Finally, previous overviews of social movement outcomes have repeatedly lamented over the narrowness of empirical focus within studies of collective action outcomes. Social movement scholars' early focus on left-wing movements affected the studies about biographical outcomes; focus on environmental movements in Western Europe and the U.S. impacted studies on political outcomes; focus on civil rights movements in the U.S. have had much impact on studies about biographical and political outcomes. Still, there is increasing interest in a broader set of issues, forms of action, and regions to study. The trend is particularly evident when one adopts a more general approach towards collective action and its outcomes. One can find studies about the policy impact of trade unions (Engeman 2021), about how alternative action organisations through direct social actions' forms of action have different types of effects on their beneficiaries (Bosi and Zamponi 2020), about how radical groups, through their use of violent forms of action affect the psychological well-being of their

targets or the larger society (McDevitt and Williamson 2003), about the contingency of radical flank effect (Ellefsen 2018), about how movement matter in shaping unintended consequences across professional fields (Chiarello 2018), about how artistic movements become influential across space and time (Guillen and Collins 201), or how social movements are capable of developing new technologies (Wisskircher 2018). From the perspective of geographical coverage, there are a great set of examples from countries in Latin America (Donoso and Somma 2019; Gibson 2017; Silva et al. 2018), Asia (Suh 2014; Almén and Burell 2018), Eastern Europe (Bilić 2012) and Russia (Tipaldou and Uba 2014), or the Middle East (Bishara 2021; Türkglu 2021, Hirsch-Hoefler and Mudde 2020).

Furthermore, there is also an increasing trend to cover similar movements across countries, see, for example, analysis of how different repertoires of women's activism impact earnings equality between women and men in 51 countries (Akchurin & Lee 2013), agenda-setting effects of protests in Western Europe (Vliegenthart et al. 2016), the impact of collective contention on democratisation process (Kadivar & Caren 2016), protest impact on social spending in 18 Latin American countries (Zarate Tenorio 2014) or government responsiveness to protests in crisis-affected Europe (Hunger & Schulte-Cloos 2021). Unfortunately, when we leave aside the cases from the U.S., there are fewer comparisons across time of similar movements in the same country, even though this would allow scholars to investigate how structural change shapes the effects of collective action.

In our *Mobilization* special issue years ago, we were calling scholars to study the outcomes of radical right movements. Few colleagues have definitively moved in this direction (Blee 2016; Tipaldou & Uba 2019; Mattson & Johannson 2019). Thus, there are clear signs of improvements in terms of empirical coverage of issues, geographical areas or periods of interest, but there are still possibilities for progress.

3. What is the contribution of this special issue to the subfield on collective action outcomes?

While all articles included in this special issue make several contributions to the field, we have grouped them to mirror the discussion above, emphasising innovations in terms of concepts and theories, methodology or empirical cases.

Our special issue hosts many papers for which the recent processual turn in the social movement field has been instrumental for proposing new concepts and theories to investigate collective action outcomes. **Elliott-Negri and colleagues** adopt the "players and arenas" strategic interactionists framework (Jasper 2006) and contribute to the field by proposing to study the *gains* and *losses* of social movements. Their approach does not aim to develop a new theory for understanding the conditions under which movement players can produce a specific outcome. Instead, they use an agency-centric approach that pays attention to activists, their targets, other players in the arena (business, labour movements and local politicians), and, more importantly, their strategic calculations and interactions. The authors use the empirical case of the Seattle minimum-wage efforts in 2014 to elegantly show how players' decisions while facing various dilemmas and trade-offs sometimes lead to specific patterns of "gains" and "losses". The multidimensionality of collective action outcomes is captured by analysing how activists and other players use arena creations as a means to gain bargaining power in policy processes.

Malamidis and **Halfmann,** in their respective papers, contribute to this special issue by extending how we approach outcomes beyond the institutional category of politics to identify diverse mechanisms of collective action outcomes. In doing this, Malamidis investigates social transformations through changes in boundaries of collective action outcomes. This boundary enlargement is illustrated with a detailed account of events in Greece since the economic crisis. Halfmann focuses on organisational changes, an under-researched type of movement outcome. The article investigates the creation and diffusion of new market organisational forms using the empirical example of the initiation of the American Abortion Clinic.

Challenging the short-term action-reaction logic respectively and the atemporal logic of policy outcomes studies, **Bidegain and Maillet,** and **Fischer,** respectively, adopt a processual perspective for doing this. Bidegain and Maillet introduce "chaining mechanism", a concept which links different waves of protests with

related policy outcomes within a mid-term perspective. The authors draw from their research on the Chilean student movement from 2006-2018 to distinguish between two types of chaining mechanisms - strategic and inertial. They show how to move beyond the short-term action-reaction logic towards theorising intertemporal connections between protest waves and their policy outcomes. Fischer looks at how collective action can trigger windows of opportunity that are consequential for policy change but were unintended nor initially addressed by collective actors. In her article, she emphasizes the temporality of collective action outcomes by carefully describing the events following the NoG20 Protests in Hamburg and introducing a Police Identification Statute.

Two articles use innovative computational methods for pressing the analysis of collective action further. **Ring-Ramirez and Earl** examine a rare case of "agenda spillover", a process in which goals of one movement are adopted by another movement in a serious or enduring manner. The authors introduce an innovative method for studying such spillover processes. Namely, they use an ensemble method, combining four diverse computational and social network methods to identify agenda spillover in the case of the protests in the U.S. from 1965 to 1995. **Cristancho** demonstrates how we could apply computational linguistics and Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques to data from Twitter, news-media and organisation manifestos to better understand cultural outcomes of the Spanish women's movement from 2000 to 2020. Such methods become important as digitalised data increasingly becomes available.

Digital media as a data source is also essential for the study by **Mattoni and Odilla,** who introduce new empirical cases of two anti-corruption mobilisations in Brazil to identify mechanisms of collect action impacts on policy. Demonstrating the benefits of creative case selection and in-depth interviewing, **Bonu's** analysis of Italian feminist activists shows how different paths lead to similar outcomes across three age-cohorts of activists in three types of feminist spaces in Rome. In doing so, her paper improves how gender and sexuality are discussed in terms of biographical outcomes. At the same time, it elaborates the time in movement and the generational aspects of biographical outcomes. **Parks** presents innovative ideas to study knowledge action repertoires and their role in environmental protection in local communities in South Africa and Argentina. Her article brings together insights about the importance of locally-rooted knowledge in environmental decision-making discussed extensively in scholarship on environmental politics with those of studies of collective action and its outcomes.

4. Where should the subfield go from here?

The papers in this issue already suggest some promising ways forward for the subfield. However, we encourage scholars to further learn from other fields where collective action outcomes are also discussed, for example, the previously mentioned psychology or interest-groups research. Concerning conceptual and theoretical frameworks, Bosi (2016) has already suggested that the boundaries between biographical, political or cultural outcomes are, in reality, blurred and mainly deserve analytical purposes. The articles by Elliott-Negri and colleagues and Malamidis in this issue also support this idea to broaden the boundaries of different types of outcomes. Maybe it is even time to leave this "old" typology aside; instead of discussing that a policy or public opinion or activist's life is changing as a result of collective action, we might want to focus on the content and character of change that results from collective action. One possible option is to discuss how collective action leads to short- or long-term changes for 1) individuals', organisations' and institutions' *everyday practices;* 2) some *substantive goals, values and ideas* these individuals, organisations, and institutions have; or 3) *procedures and structures* that guide relationships between individuals, organisations and institutions. Such an approach would allow adopting relational perspectives, examining how different collective action strategies relate to different outcomes and broadening empirical focus beyond policy change.

Another way to advance the subfield is to continue following the proposal by Coley et al. (2020) to investigate which collective action strategies, framing, and contexts are likely to lead to further societal polarisation, or, more importantly, reduce polarisation and eventually lead towards more vibrant and stable

democracies. There already are some studies discussing the outcomes of and possibilities for truly deliberative collective action strategies (Uba 2016, Holdo 2019), but more work is needed.

For methods and data collection, the relational turn brings further challenges for defining, operationalising and measuring collective action outcomes. Mixed-methods approaches would likely provide solutions here, combining both creative ways of collecting data and designing research. Other solutions may come from adopting advanced methods of big data analysis and thick descriptions based on life-history interviews.

Like before, we further encourage scholars to broaden the empirical coverage in terms of issues and geographical regions, especially those with different political institutions than the well-functioning democracies in Western Europe. Although some great studies examine protest outcomes across different levels of state power: legislative, executive and judicial (Gillion 2013), more such studies are needed to understand the role of collective action in judicial reforms. There is a similar need for more studies analysing the impact of collective action on bureaucrats (but see Gilad et al. 2018). The recent school strikes for climate certainly encourage further studies about the outcomes of such mobilisation (see already Budgen 2020), even though prior studies have not shown robust evidence of the long-term effects of the environmental movement (Rootes and Nulman 2015). Mobilisations related to Covid-19 restrictions and lock-downs (see also Pleyers 2020) also offer opportunities for cross-national comparative analysis, both in democratic and non-democratic states.

PS: We promise another update in ten years or so!

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Aknowledgments

We would like to thank all the colleagues who submitted their research to our call for papers, especially the authors of the articles in this special issue - it is all thanks to your hard work and positive reactions to the comments and criticism. We are equally grateful to all reviewers for their quick and constructive feedback during the process. Marco Giugni has provided valuable comments on this introduction, and Cassandra Engeman has courteously helped us with the formulations and language.

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