



## Book Review: Dynamics of Contention

\*Benjamin Akwei, PhD

Adjunct Assistant Professor, International Relations & Comparative Politics of Government (Africa) Marist College,  
School of Liberal Arts 3399 North Road, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601

Submission Date: 11<sup>th</sup> March 2022 | Published Date: 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022

\*Corresponding author: Benjamin Akwei, PhD

## INTRODUCTION

In *Dynamics of Contention* (2001), Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly develop an innovative theoretical framework based on comparative analysis to identify and explain causal mechanisms and processes of contentious politics for democratization, nationalism, revolution, ethnic conflict, and social movement. The authors, critical of the classic social movement agenda static, single actor models of explaining events such as revolutions and social movements present alternative explanations to these events by breaking these events into smaller episodes and identifying recurrent mechanism and processes within them. The authors examine and compare fifteen contentious episodes drawn from different parts of the world since the French Revolution, probing them for consequential and widely applicable mechanisms. In examining other episodes in contemporary times, the authors spell out the implications of their approach for explanation of revolutions, nationalism, and democratization by laying out a more general program of study of contentious episodes wherever and whenever they occur.

In the first chapter the authors clearly lay out their agenda for their explanatory mechanisms and processes of contentious politics defined as episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimant) by demonstrating how the 1789 events leading to the French Revolution not only make sense but helps explain and examine two variants of contention- contained and transgressive. The authors refer contained contention to “those cases of contention in which previously established actors employ well established means of claim making. It consists of episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or party to the claims, (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants, and (c) all parties to the conflict were previously established as constituted political actors.” (p.6). Transgressive contention to consist of episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims, (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants, (c) at least some parties to the conflict are newly self-identified political actors, and/or at least some parties employ innovative collective action as they intersect in major episodes of struggles. The authors show how different forms of contention- social movements, revolutions, strikes waves, nationalism, democratization, amongst others result from similar mechanisms. McAdam et al postulate that mechanisms are a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations. They define processes as regular sequence of such mechanisms that produce similar (generally more complex and contingent) transformations of those elements. The authors as part of laying out their agenda of explanatory mechanisms and processes of contentious politics different from the classic social movement agenda use of variables such as opportunity, threat, mobilizing structures, repertoires, and framing to explore combinations of mechanism and processes with the aim of identifying similarities and differences, pathways and trajectories across a wide range of contentious politics-not only revolutions, but also strike waves, wars, social movement, ethnic mobilizations, democratization, and nationalism. On the two variants of contention, the authors focus their attention on contentious episodes involving transgressive contention. As a departure from classical social movement agenda static analysis to their dynamic explanations of contentious politics, the authors’ state:

*“Social processes, in our view, consist of sequences and combinations of causal mechanisms. To explain contentious politics is to identify its recurrent mechanisms, the ways they combine, in what sequences they recur, and why different combinations and sequences, starting from different initial conditions, produce varying effects on the large scale”. We will quickly discover that mobilization is not an isolated process: It intersects with other mechanism and processes-such as creation and transformation of actors, their certification or decertification, repression, radicalization and the diffusion of contention to new sites and actors in complex trajectories of contention.” (p.13)*

In the second chapter, McAdam et al examine dynamic processes through which new political actors, identities, and forms of action emerge, interact, coalesce, and evolve through complex episodes of contention. The authors analyze these processes by examining the mobilization of people into movements; from there to the formation of collective actors and identities; and from there to the trajectories of contention in which these processes occur. In doing so the authors deploy evidence from three comparative historical cases of the events leading to the 1789 French Revolution, the American Civil Rights Movements, and the Italian Protests Movements of the late 1960s and early 1970's. In their analyses of the processes involved in these episodes (define as continuous streams of contention including collective claims making that bear on other parties' interests) the authors propose their dynamic model of the mobilization process by showing how mechanisms attached to actors, identities, and actions intersect with mobilization. Furthermore, the authors also examine some mechanism associated with trajectories of contention to suggest how mobilization and actors, identities and actions can transform during episodes of contention. The authors present their "Dynamic Mobilization Model" by identifying mechanisms in the case of Mobilization in Montgomery which transformed political opportunities structures to attribution of threat and opportunity, mobilizing structures to social appropriation, strategic framing to social construction, and transgressive repertoires to innovative collective action. The authors use the events of the French Revolution to reveal the relationship between the coexistence of actors (carpenters, parishioners, spouses, amongst others) in the formulation of identities by arguing that actors are not neatly bounded, self-propelling entities with fixed attitudes but are rather socially embedded and constituted beings who interact incessantly with other beings and undergo modifications of their boundaries and attributes as they interact. Furthermore, the authors use the 1967-68 Italian cycle to show that the episode is one of contained contention and illustrates the checklists of mobilization in which a new student identity was formed, and new actors emerged. The authors stress their Dynamic Model of Mobilization as a substitute to the classical social movement agenda of the mobilization by identifying the processes and their constituent mechanism that constitute different dynamics of contention stating:

*More generally, the challenge of substituting dynamic interactive explanations of contention for the static, single-actor models that have prevailed over much of the field generates a whole series of new adventures. First, we must dig deeper into mobilization, action, and trajectories in order to detect the continuous negotiation that goes on within each of them. Second, we must examine the interplay among mobilization, actors, and trajectories rather than treating them as three independent phenomena. Eventually, indeed, we will dissolve these conventional distinctions in favor of seeing them as different abstractions from the same continuous streams of social interaction. Third, we must recast the analytic problem as the identification of robust, consequential mechanism and processes that explain crucial features of contentious episodes. (p.71)*

In the third chapter the authors argue that none of the existing approaches- Rationalists introduction of dynamism into their models by treating contentious episodes as iterated strategic games; culturalists and collective behavior theorists plumbing of consciousness; and structuralists specification of large scale processes of social change efforts have yielded the dynamic, interactive account of contention called for by such episodes as the Parisian revolution of 1789, American civil rights struggles, and postwar Italian conflicts. The authors rather shift their search away from general models that purport to summarize whole categories of contention towards the analysis of smaller-scale causal mechanisms that recur in different combinations with different aggregate consequences in varying historical settings. In doing so the authors search for mechanisms that appear in these forms of contention which begins with causal analogies: identification of similar causes in ostensibly separate times, places, and forms of contention. The authors emphasize the examination of cases since 1800, on contentious phenomenon that vary with respect to place, period, scale, duration, unity, political regimes, types of actors, and forms of contention to avoid mistaking historically specific features of Western polities of contention to see how far it is possible to extend concepts and explanations across distinctively political settings without bending those settings out of shape. They emphasize this stating:

*Clearly, we have not assembled a random sample of the world's contentious episodes since for examination-whatever such a sample might contain. We have instead sought out instructive contrasting chunks of contentious politics for which substantial scholarly analyses already exist. We have fashioned paired comparisons around them, comparisons aiming to isolate key mechanism in the context of substantial differences. (p.75)*

In the fourth chapter the authors seek to identify important mechanisms that play significant causal parts in a wide variety of mobilization and demobilization by investigating the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya in the 1950's and the Yellow revolution of the Philippines in the 1980's. In their investigations, the authors show that identical causal mechanism occurred in both cases with emphasis on how the attribution of threat and opportunity, social appropriation, and brokerage contributed immensely to mobilization. On the similarity of the causal mechanisms of the historical changes in Mau Mau revolt and The Philippines Yellow Revolution, McAdam et al identified changes affecting the internal economy of Kenya in the postwar period and the general trend towards decolonization following World War II. While in the Philippines they emphasize the unfolding personal and political competition between Ferdinand Marcos and Benigno Aquino; and Marcos' initial conformity and then break in what Anderson terms "cacique democracy". On the attribution and opportunity in both cases, the authors argue that the postwar trend towards decolonization and the wave of nationalist

movements helped Kenyan nationalists to see these events as opportunity for independence that culminated into increased popular mobilization, whereas in the Philippines, the death of Aquino presented the leftist opposition the opportunity to oust Marcos from power. The authors identify social appropriation and brokerage mechanisms in Mau Mau from two geographical perspectives; temporal origins-through the spread of Olenguruone radical oath and commitments to grass roots struggle in the mid-1940 and in Nairobi in 1950. In the Philippine Yellow Revolution, the authors argue that the oppositional organizations such as the New Nationalist Alliance (BAYAN), KASMA, BISIG, and BANDILA amongst others served as important agents of social appropriation and brokerage. The authors conclude their identification of the similarities of causal mechanisms of mobilization and demobilization as case studies that can be applied everywhere stating:

*The same mobilization mechanism-collective attribution, social appropriation, and brokerage-appear in the two distinctly different episodes of contention we have compared. Considered separately and immediately, those mechanisms produce the same effects everywhere. Collective attribution, for example, always makes available new definitions of the possible and the probable, and thereby alters strategic choices. Yet overall trajectories and outcomes of mobilization by no means follow the same patterns everywhere. (p.120)*

In the fifth chapter, the authors search for concepts to discipline any inquiry and identify a handful of recurrent causal mechanisms that help answer questions about the complexity of identities of contentious politics. Tilly et al focus on the actors who make claims, and why they do so, how these actors perceive and are perceived and what forms do their claim making take and why? The authors seek not to offer total explanations but to offer useful and partial simplifications of social interaction as the basis and locus of contention. In doing this the authors compare the construction and politicization of Hindu-Muslim conflict and its implications for mobilization and trajectories with similar mechanism and processes in South Africa. On the Hindu-Muslim Conflict in India, the authors argue that the Dhaka episode and the Hindu-Muslim Conflict in Panipur reveal that actors do not consist of individual but of networks deploying partially shares histories, cultures and collective connections with other actors and maintain that all identities have a political side. McAdam and his colleagues identify four mechanisms: brokerage (defined as the linking of two or more currently unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relation with each other and/or with yet another sites by creating new boundaries and connections among political actors), category formation (consists of a set of sites that share a boundary distinguishing all of them from and relating all of them to at least one set of sites visibly excluded by the boundary by affecting the identities in the name of which participants in contention interact), object shift (means alteration in relations between claimants and objects of claims by producing new allies, enemies, and audiences for otherwise similar sets of claimants, and certification (refers to the validation of actors, their performances, and their claims to external authorities by giving weight to an organization or a network of leaders). They highlight their intersection in South Asia's Hindu-Muslim conflicts. The authors explain how these mechanisms as they operated in far different circumstances in different combinations, and with different outcomes can explain the South Africa's experience 1980-1995 which led to the ANC decision to negotiate settlement with de Klerk's Apartheid government instead of pushing to escalate the crises of defeating the apartheid regime. Stressing the similar mechanisms that altered actors, actions and setting in both cases:

*Close scrutiny of recent South Asian and South African experiences, then, show us similar mechanisms altering actors, actions, and identities in both settings. Similarities end there, however. While in South Asia we witness an increasing tendency of nationally defined categorical divisions between Hindus and Muslims to preempt other bases of conflict and cooperation, in South Africa we see evidence of massive realignment in identities and their relations over a short period. More generally, both the environments in which they operate, and their particular concatenation obviously make a large difference to the political outcomes of identity-affecting mechanisms. That similar causes and effects are working in disparate settings and forms of contentious politics by no means guarantees that they will produce similar structures and sequences on the large scale. (p.157)*

McAdam et. al in the sixth chapter examine identities transformation and mobilization by going beyond how collapsing elites' consensus which was a crucial variable in the breakdown of the Antebellum Polity of America's antislavery, and the construction of a new elite consensus which was critical to the Spanish transition to democratization are seen as mechanisms that engaged elites and non-elites in both countries turning point of their respective conflicts. The authors argue that in America, the switch from the logic of a protest cycle to that of a revolutionary spiral can be traced through the formation of sectional mirror-image identities; through the growth of brokerage (cleavages lines that divided supporters and oppositions) arrangements among antislavery activists, nativists, and western settlers; and through (a) radicalization of the views of North and South as the conflict approached and (b) convergence between moderate and radical forces on both sides. The author also show that in Spain great identity shifts (alteration in shared definitions of a boundary between two political actors and of relations across the boundary), new brokerage arrangements, and cleavages within the camps of regime and opposition, radicalization (increasing contradiction between prevailing claims, programs, self-descriptions, and descriptions of others across such a boundary) was balanced by convergence (in which increasing contradictions at one or both extremes of a political continuum drive less extreme political actors into closer alliances) while contention was institutionally contained.. The authors argue that the comparison between these two different

episodes placing them within historical contexts can help explain why some episodes end in civil war or revolution while others take a different circumspect route resulting in a protest cycle stating:

*In both cases, institutional elite politics were the visible evidence of sea changes beneath the surface. Those changes can only be understood by looking as well at the actions of social movements and the social actors. In both cases, what began as weak and inchoate movements of minorities converged with changes in elite and institutional politics to produce major episodes of contention and essentially new polities-inclusive but decentralized in Spain, and in the United States a strong federal system rather than one dominated by the states. (p.187)*

In the seventh chapter, McAdam et al focus their attention on the processes that shape the fate of revolutionary contenders and deal with crucial interactions within contentious politics that result in new alignments, new identities, and the collapse of oppressive regimes. The authors' claim what happens within a revolutionary trajectory can be understood as the result of the intersection of several causal mechanisms. They use a paired comparison of the Nicaraguan Revolution (1979) and the Chinese student rebellion (1989) to zero in on one process in particular: the defection of significant elements from a dominant coalition. The authors center their interests in regime defection (defined as a sustained process which significant elements of a previously stable ruling coalition align with the actions programs of revolutionary or other opposition groups) that link allies with broadly based oppositions to be most involved in successful revolutions. The authors establish three revolutionary mechanisms-Infringements of elite's interests, suddenly imposed grievances, and decertification (withdrawal of validation by key certifying agents) in revolutionary contention in Nicaragua. Two of these centers on the effects of Somoza's actions in driving Nicaragua's elites and middle strata into an uneasy revolutionary partnership with the Sandinistas. On the 1989 Chinese student rebellion, the authors focus on the interaction of elites and mass contention by examining the links between elite factional conflict and mass mobilization (The April 5<sup>th</sup> Movement, the Democracy Wall Movement, Beijing, December 1986. This allows investigation of the role played by coalition politics (Beijing, Spring 1989) and places the 1989 events in the context of the broader history of factional conflicts (Party Struggle and Mass Action) that followed the restoration of Deng Xiaoping in 1973 and the series of movements that preceded the 1989 student actions which gave rise to the Student Movement. The authors emphasize how the 1979 elite exasperation with the Sandinista regime and Carter's decertification of Somoza led to a successful revolution, while the Chinese Party elite's hesitation to use repression during the Sino-Soviet Summit by creating an appearance of divided sovereignty, encouraged ever widening circles of popular support and time for conflicts to develop among the students led to a revolutionary failure. Analyzing the similarities in mechanism in which resulted in different outcomes the authors' state:

*But even brief reflections on our two cases show how similar mechanisms can yield very outcomes when they combine with other mechanisms. Consider radicalization, a mechanism that we have seen in many of our episodes. The exasperation of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie combined with regime decertification by Washington that allowed a powerful cross class coalition to emerge with the lower-class-based Sandinistas. But In China, in the absence of decertification, the radicalization of a portion of the Tiananmen demonstrators weakened the coalition and helped a revolutionary situation into a revolutionary failure. (p.224)*

In Chapter eight Tilly, Tarrow, and McAdam focus on the apparently contrary processes of national unification and national disintegration, using two large, portentous, dissimilar episodes- nineteenth-century Italian unification and twentieth-century Soviet disintegration- to identify mechanisms and processes of contention that recur in a wide variety of national and ethnic settings. The authors establish how similar mechanisms combine differently in different contexts of elite formation with combinations of opportunity spirals, identity shift, competition, and brokerage and work in contradictory processes in Italy's unification in the 1860s and Soviet disintegration in 1989. The authors argue that Italy unification were the result of a combination of political and military maneuvering, class conflict, and a variety of forms of contentious politics. In Italy's unification, the authors emphasize how the opportunity offered by the uprising in Sicily in April 1860 (which led to Garibaldi invasion), the changes in Cavour's policy, the land occupations of the Sicilian peasants, the rallying of autonomists to annexation all demonstrated the mechanism of shifting and expanding opportunity. On identity shift, McAdam et al stress that a process of transformation of identities and affiliations was triggered by the dramatic events of April and May 1860. On competition, the authors' stress that political competition between the moderates and democrats pushed Cavour and Victor Emmanuel toward a more aggressive policy. Moreover, the authors assert that the implicit deal that the Piedmontese moderates made with Sicilian elites in exchange for their support for annexation set a pattern of clientalistic brokerage that would govern North-South relations for decades. In the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the authors' argue that internal threats and external opportunities figured more prominently but the same similar mechanisms of opportunity spirals (demands for autonomy protection from Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Kazakhstan and outbreaks of nationalism to the behavior of elites and managers), identity shift (Communist control backing off from identification with the Party), competition (attempts to gain external economic and political support, and brokerage operated but rather led to a once-monolithic party-state's disintegration. Stressing the similarity in the mechanisms which resulted in different outcomes of nationalism, national disintegration, and contention in the Italian unification in 1860 and Soviet disintegration in 1989, the authors' state:



*In the first case a regional power with poor legitimation integrated a diverse set of regions into a weak but centralized state through conquest, contention, and brokerage, and avoided separatist nationalism for most of its unified history; in the other a strong state that had exercised apparently strong hegemony over a far-flung empire for seventy-four years disintegrated rapidly. (p.262)*

In the ninth chapter McAdam, Tilly and Tarrow identify some broad processes (combinations and sequences of mechanisms) in their analysis of the role of contentious politics in democratization pointing to some paradoxes and tipping points that help to explain democracy's detours. The authors specify two broad paths of democratization- a weak state path and strong state one, illustrating the two in cases of Switzerland and Mexico and finally focus on the processes that help explain the dynamics of the two paths and compare their contrasting outcomes. The authors theorize on democracy by combining breadth, equality, consultation, and protection into a bundle of variables called protected consultation which requires the institution of citizenship. The authors stress that democracy means any net shift towards citizenship, breadth of citizenship, equality of citizenship, binding consultation, and protection. McAdam et al argue that since democracy is not a finite and linear process, the outcome of contingent interactions and contending claims and counterclaims produce grids of relationships that can combine to produce protected consultation. The authors iterate that contentious politics can also combine to detour politics from democratization, not only because some people oppose democracy itself but also and probably because some claims made in the name of democracy threaten vested interests. In their examination of the processes and mechanisms towards democratization in Switzerland and Mexico, they authors identify- the effects of changes in trust networks and categorical inequality on the extent and character of protected consultation. McAdam et al stress that the combination of (a) trust networks becoming involved in the polity and (b) insulation of categorical inequalities from the state but not necessarily their reduction help to produce democratization. McAdam et al argue that both countries came closer to democracy and citizenship at three crucial sites: (a) at the interface of inequality and public politics, (b) at the interface of trust networks and public politics, (c) within public politics itself. In their concluding analysis of contentious politics in the democratization in Switzerland and Mexico the authors' state:

*Democratization is not sui generis phenomenon- to be analyzed alongside contentious forms of politics and only touching base with them at rare and dangerous moments of transition. Nor is democratization a simple matter of elites deciding for a society when and how it should be more democratic, as some scholars of democratization seem to believe. That was what happened in Mexico in the 1930s, with the democratic detour we have seen resulting. Democratization occurs through the same kinds of mechanism we found in social movements, cycles of contention, revolutions, and nationalism. (p.304)*

### **Normative Perspective**

McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow do not layout a distinct alternative normative perspective in their research but draw on numerous intellectual resources on social movements. But the authors clearly state their attraction for the structuralist analyses of social movements which impute interests, and capacities to whole collectivities-communities, classes, sometimes even those vague collectivities call societies. They emphasize their attraction to structural analyses stating:

*Structural analyses in their purest form, impute interests and capacities to whole collectivities-communities, classes, sometimes even those vague collectivities people call societies. They then explain the behavior of individuals and groups primarily through their relation to the collectivities in question. (p.21)*

The authors as part of their normative perspective present a program of inquiry centered on detection of robust mechanisms and processes move away from the static standard agenda for the study of social movements, with its bias toward treating one actor at a time. They have a negative view of the Eurocentric and North American Classic Social Movement Agenda explanations of resource mobilizations. The authors argue that scholars reacting to the structuralist, culturalist, and rationalist approaches to analyzing the origins and mobilization of contention, the approaches tend to have difficulties separating mobilizing structures from collective action. These approaches McAdam et al emphasize are static, individualistic, and often reified character of previous analyses.

*In the case of contentious action, analysts of the subject clearly need new formulations that capture and help explain the fluid, strategic, and interactive operation of actors, and forms of collective action. Structuralists, rationalists, and culturalist approaches do not provide sufficient means for the task at hand. In all of them, reification and individualization block the way to dynamic, interactive accounts of contentious action. (p.73)*

### **Ideological Perspective**

The authors in developing their study of recurring phenomenon in contentious politics by identifying similarities and differences, pathways, and trajectories across wide range of contention-not only revolutions but also strike waves, wars, social movements, ethnic mobilizations, democratization, and nationalism kept their political ideology out of their explanatory agenda to present unbiased analyses and even taint their work. The authors present a non-institutional political ideology by drawing upon systematic attention to interactions which are outside the politics of established institutions. They pay credence to the institutions of democracy and support for popular mobilizations. In identifying the

role of contentious politics to the path of democratization, the authors assert that democracy entails high levels of protected consultation which requires the institution of citizenship. In identifying three working definitions and criteria of democracy: substantive (emphasizing qualities of human experience and social ties), constitutional (emphasizing legal procedures such as elections and referenda, and political- process (emphasizing the interactions among constituted actors), the authors favor the political- process. The authors' state:

*We prefer such a political-process definition on the grounds that (a) it captures much of what theorists of democracy from Aristotle onward have been trying to describe without the usual inconveniences of substantive and constitutional definitions, (b) it locates democracy within a casually coherent and more general field of variation in characteristics and practices of regimes, (c) it clarifies causal conceptions between popular contention and democratization, a much misunderstood but crucial relationship. (p.265)*

The authors in developing their non-institutionalized political ideology of mechanisms for popular mobilizations examine the events that precede and accompany social mobilizations. The authors identify a dynamic mechanism that brings the social classic movement variables-political opportunities, mobilizing structures, frames, and transgressive forms of action into relation with one other and other significant actors. Emphasizing their popular support for popular mobilization, the authors focus on the origins of episodes of contention in which previously inert people mobilize into action by focusing on the mobilization process.

## Theoretical Framework

On their theoretical model laid out in their explanatory study of identifying similar and different phenomena in contentious politics, the authors emphasize that they develop their relational persuasion theoretical from a structuralist tradition. In developing their relational persuasion theoretical model from the structuralist tradition, the authors argue that the contentious politics that concerns them is episodic rather than continuous. By episodic, the authors stress the contentious politics that occurs in public, involves interaction between makers of claims and others, is recognized by those others as bearing on their interests, and brings in government as mediator, target, or claimant. They present their theoretical framework of episodic and contentious politics- social movements, revolutions, and similar phenomena from less viable episodes of institutional contention. In identifying the similarities and differences, pathways, and trajectories across a wide range of contentious politics in their theoretical framework, the authors focus on transgressive contentious politics, by identifying actors in contentious politics, their claims, the objects of those claims, and responses to claim making.

The authors on page ten illustrate the Classical Social Movement Agenda which presents the static conception of the political settings of social mobilization in which contention occurs. In figure 1.1, the authors show regimes, as schematized there, consist of governments and their relations to populations falling under their claimed jurisdiction. In that diagram, the authors single out political actors by distinguishing between collective political actors (those that have names, internal organization, and repeated interactions with each other in the realm of public politics. McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow on page forty-five move away from the static Classical Social Movement Agenda for explaining contentious politics by developing a dynamic, interactive framework for analyzing the origins of mobilizations in contentious politics. In figure 2.1, the authors show the onset of contention as a highly contingent outcome of an interactive sequence involving at least one set of state actors and one insurgent group. In developing their dynamic, interactive theoretical frameworks of the origins of contentious politics, the authors argue that interaction among mechanisms of contention is continual and recursive. Mobilization, the authors argue can be understood in part as a function of their interaction and mobilizing structures can be preexisting or created during contention but in any case, need to be appropriated as vehicles of struggle. McAdam et al in their theoretical model stress that opportunities and threats which are the some of the defining characteristics of the classic social movement agenda are not objective categories but depend on the kind of collective attribution that the classical agenda limited to framing of movement goals. In their summary of the development of this dynamic and interactive theoretical model for analyzing the origins of mobilizations in contentious politics, the authors' state:

*More generally, the challenge of substituting dynamic and interactive explanations of contentious for the static, single-actor models that have prevailed over much of the field generates a whole series of new adventures. First, we must dig deeper into mobilizations, action, and trajectories in order to detect the continuous negotiation that goes on within each of them. Second, we must examine the interplay among mobilization, actors, and trajectories, rather than treating them as three independent phenomena. (p.71)*

## Methodology

On methodology, the authors explore their explanatory method of identifying similarities and differences, pathways, and trajectories of contention across a wide range of contentious politics by using the comparative analysis utilizing mechanism and processes in contentious politics. McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow draw upon comparative historical analysis by examining fifteen major episodes of contention, and component mechanisms of those processes. The authors present their strategies of paired comparative analysis of episodes by assessing what they term "Most different system analyses"-

these are mainly quantitative analyses of multiple cases selected to represent variations across a whole universe and “Most similar system analyses-treatment of two, or few cases chosen to narrowly maximize comparability, employing configurative, historical, and qualitative methods. In their use of paired comparison between contextualized cases based on largely qualitative evidence of mechanisms and processes from a historical comparative analysis, the authors emphasize the important implication of their methodology by singling out (a) simultaneous downgrading and upgrading of contentious episodes as objects of study; (b) reorientation of explanations from episodes to mechanisms and processes; (c) better operational specification and integration of cognitive, relational, and environmental mechanisms; (d) reconciliation of contingency with explanations. The authors place these methodological implications in comparative historical context by arguing under simultaneous downgrading and upgrading of contentious episodes as objects of study that events that we call revolutions, social movements, wars, and even strikes take shape as retrospective constructions by observers, analysts and as a matter of fact, they do not have essences, natural histories, or self-motivating logics. However, they also argue that episodes for example also require upgrading by stressing that once we recognize that we have snipped them from their historical and social contexts, we must make explicit procedures and criteria that mark their beginnings, ends, boundaries, and participants. These they argue call for the development of expertise in delineating comparable events. McAdam and his colleagues stress the method they use in the explanatory model of contention stating:

*Our program starts from this perspective to explore a variety of areas of contention using the comparative analysis of mechanisms and processes to do so. (p. xvii)*

### Readability

Dynamics of contention is a well- researched book which focuses on episodes chiefly in which national states were direct participants or significant parties to claims being made. The text is dense and well organized. The authors stimulate the reader’s interests to understand their theoretical framework by drawing upon historical events and facts and they introduce new concepts and explanations with sufficient illustrations. In setting up the agenda of explanatory mechanisms for contention, the authors enmesh the reader into their theoretical analysis by outlining and clarifying in the first chapter their position and perspective on the study of social movements to tease the reader’s interests. The text-book-like format allows for quick referencing, easy delineation between concepts, and the logical flow of the authors argument to the reader’s comprehension. The authors in their desire to draw analytical parallels from other theoretical framework delineate their concepts with tables, charts, and figures to set their framework apart from others. The chapters are presented in a more concise and easy way but challenges the reader to pay close attention to their explanations and use of new concepts and methodology on where they differ from prevailing schools of thought on those issues. The authors in presenting their explanatory theoretical framework makes it easier for the reader to understand the reasons why they moved away from other theoretical models. The authors address the readability of the book:

*The present book is no research monograph. Despite its innumerable examples and its sustained presentation of cases, it works with its evidence primarily to advance and illustrate ways of thinking about contentious politics. For this reason, it often features schematic summaries of episodes rather than deep explorations of their foundations. Never, never, do we claim to have provided comprehensive explanations of the contentious events the book examine. We seek to establish illuminating partial parallels and use them to identify recurring causal processes. We hope to inspire new ways of studying contentious politics. (p.35)*

### Main Argument

The authors present their major argument of causal mechanism that occur in a wide variety of contention that produce aggregate outcomes by first drawing upon relations among mobilization/demobilizations, actors, and trajectories that have dominated Western scholarships. The authors commence one of their explanatory models with an analysis of the distinctive mobilization patterns by comparing revolutionary processes and their successes and failures in late twentieth century Nicaragua and China. In examining the trajectories in both revolutions, the authors show interest in regime defections that link regimes allies with broadly based opposition groups. In Nicaragua, the authors argue that because of nearly five decades of brutal, corrupt rule by the Somoza family, the regime by 1972 found itself confronting a broad opposition movement composed not only of elements of the traditional left-students, labor unions, peasants, and the vanguard FSLN but also of the country’s Catholic hierarchy, the mainstream press, and much of the business elites. The revolutionary situation the authors argue begun on December 23, 1972, after the earthquake leveled the capital city, Managua. The Somoza clan exercised monopolistic control over the rebuilding efforts. The unwillingness on the part of the Somoza clan to share the windfall profits created by the crisis precipitated to the first serious and visible cracks in the ruling alliance. The two serious main organizations representing elite business interests (Superior Council of Private Initiative or (COSIP) and the Nicaraguan Development Institute (INDE) had assumed strong policy positions in opposition to the Somoza regime. In the same year, a third major organization (UDEL) under the leadership of the charismatic founder Joaquin Chamorro, appeared and soon established itself as an even stronger opposition force than either COSIP or INDE. But despite the clear rift that had developed the regime and key elements of the traditional ruling class, none of these organizations were prepared to call for revolution as none of the three viewed the FSLN as an ally.

But three more years of notorious outrages at the hands of the regime, including Somoza's imposition of a uniquely savage brand of martial law in December 1974, pushed the regime's elite opponents ever leftward. By 1977, the third year of Somoza's state of siege, the rift between the regime and its former allies had become a chasm, especially with the imposition of new business taxes and the removal of a host of tax exemptions in the same. The defection of the group of Twelve who established business links with the FSLN among them industrialist Emilio Pallais, lawyer businessman Dr. Chamorro, supermarket magnate Felipe Mantica and international banker Arturo Cruz Porras escalated the polarization of Nicaragua's ruling class. The murder of Pedro Joaquin Chamorra on January 10, 1978 marked the point of no return for many in the bourgeoisie. As a result, COSIP, INDE, and a host of other private sector organizations took an active role in a succession of nationwide strikes and business shutdown designed both to protest Chamorra's assassination and to force Somoza from office.

In China, the authors examine the link between elite factional conflict and mass mobilization by focusing on the interaction of elite and mass contention. The authors argue that the interdependence of party-state relations and the extraordinary degree of the party-state apparatus between elite and popular contention in PRC reinforced Chinese political and social life. McAdam et al examine the factional conflicts between the ruling elites and public expression of protests beginning with the events of 1976-1988. The authors stress that the period 1973-1977 was marked by a tense war of nerves as Deng, Premier Zhou Enlai, and other Party pragmatists struggled at all levels to regain control of the party-state from the Maoist Zealots especially the so-called Gang of Four who had gained ascendancy during the Cultural Revolution. The author stress that the control of the Gang of Four appeared to have been solidified in the internecine warfare set in motion by Zhou Enlai's death in January 1976. The shabby treatment accorded to Zhou's death, a second only to Mao in the Party pantheon of revolutionary heroes which was crystallized on March 25, 1976, when the official Shanghai daily, Wenhui Bao, attacked Zhou as a capitalist. This attack generated elite and popular content and anger among student, workers, and others. Deng's faction struck back with students and workers in Nanjing taking to the streets the day after the attack and sustained protest for nearly a week. Events unfolded a bit later in Beijing facilitated by the portentous approach of Qing Ming, China's traditional festival honoring the dead. Though there were official pronouncements barring workers from taking part in any unauthorized morning ceremonies, the first day of the festival, April 4, saw hundreds of thousands of demonstrators take to Tiananmen Square in outpouring of grief and affection for Zhou and, as the day wore on, increasingly open opposition to the Gang of Four. The episode escalated dramatically on April 5, 1976, following overnight removal by security forces of the wreaths and tributes the demonstrators had laid at the foot of the Monument to the People's Heroes the previous day. Angered by the action, a crowd of perhaps 10,000 to 15,000 demanded the return of the wreaths and tributes, and then defied repeated orders to disperse, forcing the Public Security Bureau to clear the square through a series of pitched battles that stretched well into the evening. Official reaction to this first Tiananmen Incident was quick, reflecting in unmistakable terms the close connection between popular contention and the struggle for control of the Party and Chinese State. In a carefully worded statement issued on the night of April 5, Beijing's headline mayor identified Deng Xiaoping as the black hand behind the protest. Within days of the incident, Deng was once again stripped of all his official posts. Barely a month after Mao's death, the Gang of Four were arrested and subsequently tried in connection with their actions during the Cultural Revolutions. Following the events of the Tiananmen protests, On November 15, 1978, the Party after freeing scores of prisoners jailed by the Gang of Four and rectifying the position of the protesters in the wake of Zhou Enlai's death resolved that:

*A wholly revolutionary action of the masses against the Gang of Four. For the first time since 1949 the Party had given its blessing to a spontaneous popular action free of official control. Long Live the people were the headline of the People's Daily Editorial.... The April fifth...[protesters], wrote the editors, had prevented China from being turned into a fascist state manipulated by a handful of ambitious leaders. Yesterday's bad elements became today's heroes. (p.211)*

Party Pragmatists against an embryonic democratic movement set in motion by Deng's reforms and his opportunistic embrace of popular protest marked the beginning of yet another conflict dubbed the Democratic Wall Movement. The anti-Maoist climate was further escalated four days after the November 15 People's Daily editorial, when a wall poster appeared in the Xidan area of Beijing daring to criticize Mao himself for errors committed in his later years. The brazenness of the poster and the unusual restraint shown by authorities in dealing with the criticism ushered in an extended period of public debate and dissent. Posters proliferated at Xidan. On November 27, 1978, demonstrators occupied Tiananmen Square for two days of wide-ranging debate and public speech-making. Popular contention developed for a second time in late 1980 following Deng's announcement of his Gengshen reforms.

## Sources of Evidence

The evidence of the Nicaraguan and Chinese revolutions supports the authors' argument. The earthquake produced unprecedented corruption and the exercise of monopoly power in Nicaragua, and in China Hu Yaobang's death placed severe constraints on the regime's social control options. These responses the authors stress triggered mobilization- first through threat and the second through opportunity. The actions of the Somoza to crackdown support for his regime which led to the defection of Nicaraguan bourgeoisie and the Chinese Party elite's hesitation to use suppression according to the authors triggered mass action. The authors argue that Nicaraguan bourgeoisie's exasperation combined



with regime decertification by Washington allowed a powerful class coalition to develop with the lower-class Sandinistas that led to the revolution. But in China, they stress, in the absence of decertification, the radicalization of a portion of the Tiananmen demonstrators weakened the coalition and helped turn a revolution situation into a failure.

### Devil's Advocate/Reinterpretation of the best Evidence

The authors state “We cannot emphasize enough how important this methodological challenge of using comparative analysis utilizing mechanisms and processes in contentious politics as an ultimate viability to their project. Absent clear and consensual empirical markers for any given mechanism, the program risks degenerating into the same kind of exercise in plausible, post hoc storytelling that has too often afflicted the analysis of contention” (p.310-311). Considering this assertion, how can one use the authors’ comparative analysis utilizing mechanisms and processes in contentious politics to arrive at a different outcome in the Nicaragua revolution given the fact that the Somoza regime had catered to the whims of the bourgeoisie class? The Somoza regime will in this case not infringe upon the bourgeois elites’ interests and the cracks in the ruling alliance will not occur. Hence the implementation of the martial law in December 1974 which pushed the regime’s elite opponents leftward will not happen thereby maintaining the coalition and sustaining the mutual recognition and support for each other’s interests. This will also mean that elite’s defection from the coalition will be minimal and the opposition Sandinista movement quest for a revolution could be curtailed if not prolonged. Somoza regimes’ ability to sustain the interests of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie will limit the voice of the opposition and the external forces: the Carter Administration and the regional neighbors will not decertify but validate the actions of the regimes. In the long run, Somoza regimes’ ability to limit the outspokenness of the insurgency will deescalate their actions, minimize any viable opposition to the Somoza regimes and limit the generation of any political crisis. This will have averted the Nicaraguan revolution just as in China where elite-mass solidarity failed to emerge.

### New Facts/Interpretations

The authors present a well-defined concept of democracy. The authors reveal new facts on democracy by present working definitions based on three overlapping categories: substantive, constitutional and political process. The authors present their political-process definition stating “A regime is democratic insofar as it maintains broad citizenship, equal and autonomous citizenship, binding consultation of citizens at large with respect to governmental activities and personnel, as well as protection of citizens from arbitrary action by governmental agents. The authors also examine variations in regimes based on breadth, equality, consultation protection and argue that when these variables are combined then we have protected consultation. The authors further stress that when protected consultation reaches its highest levels with special alteration in public politics then one can begin to speak of democracy. McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow based on these assertions then states:

*Democratization means any net shift toward citizenship, breadth of citizenship, equality of citizenship, binding consultation, and protection. (p.266)*

### Connections

Dynamics of Contention makes a substantive connection to the work of James C. Scott’s *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985). Scott’s work reveals amongst other things struggle over the appropriation of symbols, a struggle over how the past and present shall be understood and labeled, a struggle to identify causes and assess blames, a contentious effort to give partisan meaning to local history between the rich and poor in Sedeka. Dynamics of Contention can also be connected to the work of Theda Skocpol’s *States and Social Revolutions: A comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (1979). Skocpol presents in her book explanations to the causes and outcomes of social revolutions with emphases on how transnational relations contributed to the emergence of revolutionary crises in France (1787), Russia (1917-1921), and China (1911-1949).

McAdam, Tilly and Tarrow use of comparative analysis and recurring mechanisms and processes based on relational persuasion by drawing on the structuralist tradition of the classic social movement agenda by adopting Most different system analyses and Most similar systems analyses are closely related to Skocpol’s comparative historical analysis theoretical framework in which she premises her argument on the structuralist perspective theoretical and political-conflict approach to social revolutionary struggles. Skocpol in her explanation of comparative historical method of establishing valid associations of potential causes with a common given phenomenon adopt the Method of Agreement- establishing that several cases having in common the phenomenon one is trying to explain also have in common a set of causals of factors, although they vary in other ways that might have seemed causally relevant. Skocpol also uses the Method of Difference- contrasting the cases in which the phenomenon to be explained and the hypothesized causes are present to other cases in which the phenomenon and the causes are both absent, but which are otherwise as similar as possible to the positive cases.

### Significant Scholarly Contribution

The work of McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow work in Dynamics of Contention is a departure from the North American and Eurocentric Classic Social Movement Agenda (SMT) which concentrated on social movements, and then assimilated

other forms of contention to prevailing explanations of social movement. The downside of the SMT is that it focused on social movements without many regards to other forms on contentious politics such as episodes of democratization and strikes waves and unfolding revolutionary situations in other regions of the world which do not bare resemblance to their culture and participants. The alternative model presented in *Dynamics of Contention* is very exhaustive and the comparative analyses of recurring causal mechanisms and processes in contentious politics of episodes at national states were direct participants or significant parties to the claims being made. The authors focus on the national states as opposed to local or regional contention open the window of opportunity to students of contentious politics, social mobilizations, and international relations to conduct research on regional or local level.

## REFERENCES

1. McAdam, D., Tarrow S., Tilly, C. (2001). *Dynamics of Contention*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, UK
2. Scott, C. J. (1985). *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale University Press. New Haven, CT
3. Skocpol, T. (1979). *States & Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia & China*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, UK