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Mario Quaranta

# Political Protest in Western Europe

Exploring the Role of Context  
in Political Action



Springer

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# Preface

At the beginning of this project, I realized that the literature on political protest often looked at either the characteristics of the participants, or at the contextual features that would ease or hinder the action of social movements. The study of political protest seemed, in my eyes, divided in two, non-communicating fields: that interested in the individual factors linked to the engagement of citizens in protest politics, and that interested in the characteristics of social movements and their interaction with the broader structural features of political systems. Although the two approaches have yielded very relevant insights for the understanding of contentious politics, my goal was to complement them, to investigate how contextual characteristics might be related to individual participation in protest actions, and how these contextual features might interact with the individual characteristics associated with protest.

This idea became a book. Here, I argue that contextual characteristics should be taken into account to explain engagement in political protest at the individual level. Indeed, individual characteristics do not provide a full account of the reasons why citizens get involved in political protest. Individuals live in larger contexts, which provide different opportunities and incentives for protest. For this reason, institutional and political contexts could be important to understand citizens' political behaviors. This volume connects different theoretical perspectives to analyze political protest in a comparative perspective. It presents an overview of the individual characteristics that are more relevant to understand political protest, and it emphasizes the role of personal resources, dissatisfaction, organizations, political values and attitudes. Moreover, it analyzes how different contextual factors might account for the cross-country variation in the levels of political protest in Western European countries, and how these factors might account for the cross-country variation in the association between individual characteristics and protest participation using comparative survey data.

Although the interest in the relationship between political behavior and contextual and institutional configurations is not new in the field of political science, this volume tries to further explore it. Certainly, protest is quite a relevant phenomenon.

Several scholars have emphasized the importance of protest politics in democracies, as it works as a vehicle of change and as a form of non-electoral representation. In the end, I hope that this book will contribute to the field, providing an additional look at how engagement in protest works.

This volume originates from a long journey, which started during my PhD at the “Istituto Italiano di Scienze Umane” in Florence, Italy (now “Scuola Normale Superiore”) and continued in the Department of Political Science at LUISS “Guido Carli”, in Rome, Italy, where I had the opportunity to carry on my research as a post-doctoral fellow. I would like to thank Leonardo Morlino, who has been a dedicated mentor and strongly persuaded me to write this volume. Arlo Poletti as well constantly motivated me to pursue this path. I would also like to thank Claudius Wagemann, who has always been a great guide. During my stay at the “Center for the Study of Democracy” of the University of California–Irvine, USA, Russell Dalton provided me with generous advice and commented on some ideas that later would become part of this book. I am really grateful for that. I am also indebted to Bernard Grofman, who accepted me as a visiting fellow at the Center. This volume also benefitted from the comments, suggestions, and criticism provided by the many attendees of the various conferences where parts of this volume were presented.

Sections of this book are partially based on previous articles, for which I would like to acknowledge the publishers’ permission to use them. Chapter 2 re-analyzes and integrates an article that appeared in the *European Political Science Review* (2013, *Measuring Political Protest in Western Europe: Assessing Cross-National Equivalence* 5(1), 457–482). The theoretical sections of Chaps. 4, 5, and 6 are based on some ideas presented in other articles. Yet, these chapters provide new and updated analyses. Sections 4.2 and 4.3 are drawn from an article published in the *Journal of Civil Society* (2014, *Collective and Private Resources and the Inequalities of Non-violent Political Protest in European Countries* 10(3), 294–316). Sections 5.2 and 5.3 are based on an article published in the *International Political Science Review* (2013, *The Impact of Institutional Decentralization on Protest in Western Europe* 34(5), 502–518). Sections 6.2 and 6.3 derive from an article published in the *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica/Italian Political Science Review* (2014, *Political Dissatisfaction and Political Protest in Western Europe: What is the Role of Party Systems?* 44(2), 115–145).

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