

Collective Mobilization and Social Protest

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Summary

The social psychology of collective mobilization and social protest reflects a long-standing interest within this discipline in the larger question of how social change comes about through the exercise of collective agency. Yet, within this very same discipline, different approaches have suggested different motivations for why people protest, including emotional, agentic, identity, and moral motivations. Although each of these approaches first tended toward development of insulated models or theories, the next phase has been more integrative in nature, giving rise to multi-motive models of collective mobilization and social protest that combined predictions from different approaches, which improved their explanatory power and theoretical scope.

Together with this first development toward integration, a second development has also clearly left its mark on the field. This development refers to the rapid internationalization of the field, with studies on collective mobilization and social protest being conducted across the world, leading to very diverse participant samples and contextual characteristics. These studies typically also vary methodologically, including survey, experiment, interview, longitudinal, and other methods. This second trend—toward diversity—fits well with the first integrative trend and will lead to more in-depth and integrative understanding of the social-psychological workings of collective mobilization and social protest. However, this will require innovative conceptual and empirical work in order to map the structural (particularly, political and cultural) conditions under which different motivations matter with respect to mobilization and protest.

Keywords

- [mobilization](#)
- [protest](#)
- [identity](#)
- [relative deprivation](#)
- [anger](#)
- [efficacy](#)
- [moral conviction](#)
- [embeddedness](#)
- [activism](#)
- [collective action](#)

Subjects

- Social Psychology

Introduction

Collective mobilization and social protest are important social-psychological phenomena that can have significant consequences for individuals as well as societies (e.g., Klandermans, [1997](#)). Indeed, mass demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins, and petitions can put pressure on the powers that be to change existing policies and thus shape how societies deal with social issues (e.g., McAdam, [1982](#)). At the same time, being involved in mass demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins, and petitions is not just a means toward change or an individual behavior to be predicted, but also a type of behavior that may change individuals themselves (e.g., becoming an activist; Drury & Reicher, [2009](#)). Social protest thus has the potential to change society and individuals alike.

Social psychologists have mainly focused on why people engage in forms of protest deemed normative and legitimate within the larger societal system, thus asking what it is that *motivates* individuals to mobilize together and engage in mass demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins, and petitions (for a meta-analysis, see van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, [2008](#)). Although some of the main theories in this field have a structural component (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, [1979](#); see also Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, [2012](#)), such components are hardly ever taken into account in social-psychological *studies* of collective action.

By contrast, scholars outside this field have asked and studied whether and how social change actually comes about through those mobilization efforts (see Louis, [2009](#)). Thus, social psychologists tend to focus more on the former question about *motivation* and have left the second—about *social structure*—more to sociologists. Nevertheless, the two questions seem very much related in the broader social psychology of collective mobilization and social protest, as it is typically assumed that motivating individuals for mobilization and protest will make social change more likely.

Against this backdrop, historically two key developments in the last two decades have shaped the field. The first is a change in focus from theoretical and empirical fragmentation to a focus on theoretical and empirical *integration* (van Zomeren & Iyer, [2009](#)).

This particularly concerns the different motivations that individuals can have to engage in social protest. The second development is one of *internationalization*, which has led to more empirical diversity in terms of the many different contexts, groups, samples, and methods used in research (van Zomeren, [2013](#)). These two trends combined reflect a strong potential to take both motivation and social structure seriously in explaining collective mobilization and social protest. Specifically, researching the same phenomenon within different social structures forces scholars to ask how motivation is *embedded* within different cultural and political systems, and

how this affords or poses important barriers to collective mobilization and social protest. However, such questions are relatively new in the field, as the discipline has had a major preoccupation with motivation. For this reason, that question will be revisited only at the end of this article. It starts with discussing the different motivations for collective mobilization and social protest that social-psychological research has uncovered.

Different Motivations for Collective Mobilization and Social Protest

There are at least four core motivations for collective mobilization and social protest, which are emotion, agentic, identity, and moral motivations (van Zomeren, [2013](#)). It is important to note that those refer to *classes of explanations* and sometimes include a number of specific psychological variables within the same class of explanation (for instance, *moral motivation* can include values, moral convictions, moral obligation, and so on). This diversity in terminology reflects the fragmentation and segregation of the field in earlier times and sometimes poses something of an obstacle to theoretical and empirical integration. The notion of core motivations is therefore meant as an *umbrella* that differentiates classes of explanation that may include different yet related psychological variables. Similarly, the notion of “collective mobilization and social protest” is meant as an umbrella for a range of actions that are typically studied in the field (e.g., participation in demonstrations, signing a petition; mostly those that are considered normative and legitimate in society), and that can be defined as any action that individuals undertake as group members to achieve group goals such as social change (see van Zomeren, [2016](#)).

A *first* class of explanation of why people participate in such actions revolves around feelings of anger based in perceived unfairness, which are typically associated with relative deprivation theory (e.g., Runciman, [1966](#); Smith et al., [2012](#); Walker & Smith, [2002](#)). A *second* class of explanation revolves around agentic beliefs (Bandura, [1997](#)) that may include perceptions or estimates of costs and benefits, which are typically associated with rational choice models of individual decision making (e.g., Olson, [1967](#)). A *third* class of explanation revolves around individuals’ subjective identification with a group or social movement, which is typically associated with social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, [1979](#)). The *fourth* and final class of explanation revolves around individuals’ moralization of certain issues or principles that leads them to defend those when violated, which is typically associated with value protection models (e.g., Tetlock, Kirstel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, [2000](#)).

In the social psychology of collective mobilization and social protest, all these core motivations have been found to be relevant predictors. Before discussing how they are connected, they are first discussed separately.

Emotional Motivation

Historically, social psychologists emphasized the *subjectivity* and *relativity* of perceiving and feeling oneself as being worse off than others (or as one's group being worse off than another group). This perception and feeling of being worse off is called *relative deprivation*, a concept at the heart of relative deprivation theory (Runciman, [1966](#); Walker & Smith, [2002](#)). This theory states that group-based, or fraternal, relative deprivation is most likely to motivate people to engage in social protest. In contrast, individual-based, or egoistic, relative deprivation is most likely to motivate people to blame themselves for their lot.

For this reason, specific feelings of resentment or anger target those responsible for the group's disadvantage (Klandermans, [1997](#); Solak, Jost, Sümer, & Clore, [2012](#)). This motivates action rather than inaction because anger is an approach emotion (Carver & Harmon-Jones, [2009](#); van Zomeren, Leach, & Spears, [2012](#)), which reflects the *emotional* experience of relative deprivation that has been found to be predictive of social protest (Abrams & Grant, [2012](#); Shi, Hao, Saeri, & Cui, [2015](#); Tabri & Conway, [2011](#); Tausch et al., [2011](#); Zhou & Wang, [2012](#); for a meta-analysis, see Smith et al., [2012](#)). Thus, relative deprivation is an important predictor of social protest when it is group based and emotionally experienced, particularly as anger.

Agentic Motivation

Human beings have the faculty of forethought, based in the ability to anticipate the consequences of their actions (Bandura, [1997](#)). This relates directly to the notion of instrumentality, which has its roots in rational choice models of decision making. This "rational actor" approach suggests that the perceived effectiveness of social protest will be key in motivating or demotivating individuals from deciding to join it (Klandermans, [1984](#)). Unsurprisingly, individuals should become motivated the more they perceive that the protest will be effective (in achieving its goals).

However, the so-called collective action problem is that individuals may be demotivated to protest because they believe other people will do the protesting for them (i.e., free-riding; see Olson, [1967](#)). Because efforts expended are individual efforts, and benefits acquired are collective benefits, Olson's "logic of collective action," as his influential book was entitled, suggests that perceived effectiveness may be a deterrent for single

individuals to decide to join a protest. It explains individual *inaction* better than it explains collective action (Klandermans, [1997](#)).

For this reason perhaps, social psychologists have focused more on the agentic notion of *group efficacy* beliefs, which reflect beliefs about whether the group is able to achieve group goals through, in this case, social protest (see Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, [1999](#); van Zomeren et al., [2008](#)). Group efficacy reflects a particular form of self-efficacy, which generally refers to the motivation to exercise agency through the faculty of forethought (Bandura, [1997](#)). Believing that the group can achieve its goals through social protest is motivating, whereas the extent to which this seems unlikely or even impossible is demotivating (Bandura, [1997](#); Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Saguy, & van Zomeren, [2014](#)). Thus, a second important predictor of social protest is individuals' belief in the group's efficacy (to achieve group goals through social protest).

Identity Motivation

A third important motivation for social protest lies in the self-relevance and meaning of the group individuals are part of (Tajfel & Turner, [1979](#); Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, [1987](#)). Derived from social identity theory, the notion of social identity reflects individuals' subjectively internalized group memberships, which entails that they self-categorize as a member of that group (e.g., I see myself as a psychologist). *Group identification* then reflects the extent to which individuals subjectively attach themselves to that social category, with stronger identification being related to a stronger perception and emotional experience of the social world in terms of that group membership (e.g., the more one identifies as a feminist, the more one will see gender discrimination in the world).

For this reason, individuals' *group identification* has been found to be a reliable predictor of social protest (for a meta-analysis, see van Zomeren et al., [2008](#)), particularly when it concerns individuals' identification with *action-oriented* groups (Simon et al., [1998](#); van Zomeren et al., [2008](#)). For instance, those who identify with a social movement will be more likely to become active on behalf of that movement because they feel an "internal obligation to participate" as the political has become personal for them (Stürmer & Simon, [2004](#); Turner-Zwinkels, van Zomeren, & Postmes, [2015](#)). Thus, group identification is a third important motivation for social protest, which relates to a different class of explanation than feelings of unfairness and agentic beliefs.

Moral Motivation

Fourth and finally, there is a difference between experiencing something as unfair, or as immoral. Indeed, individuals who moralize the issue at hand seek to protect the underlying moral principle (e.g., gender equality in the case of gender discrimination) through engaging in social protest. Different indicators of such a moral motivation have been identified in recent years, focusing on ideology and moral conviction (Van Stekelenburg, Klandermans, & Van Dijk, [2009](#); van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, [2012](#)). *Moral conviction* is the psychological variable that seems most distinct from feelings of unfairness because it reflects individuals' moralized attitude on a topic, which means that it is a subjectively absolutist judgment about right and wrong (Skitka, [2010](#)).

For instance, one can have a moral conviction against abortion, which would mean that one is against abortion in any place, at all times. As such, moral conviction is argued to be qualitatively different from a strong attitude on an issue, or from feelings of unfairness. Moral convictions reflect an individual's moral basis. Unsurprisingly, moral convictions (on the relevant issue) have been found to strongly predict engagement in social protest (van Zomeren et al., [2012](#); see also Zaal, Van Laar, Ståhl, Ellemers, & Derks, [2012](#)).

Thus, whereas other motivations for social protest refer to the group, the emotional experience of injustice, and the belief in achieving group goals through social protest, moral conviction refers to the moral motivation that individuals experience when they feel that a moral principle is violated on a particular issue. As such, different lines of thought reflect different classes of explanation with regard to why people protest or mobilize collectively. All four core motivations (as coined by van Zomeren, [2013](#)) refer to distinct social-psychological aspects of social protest that individuals can become motivated by. However, "distinct" does not necessarily imply "isolated." Indeed, the next phase of theory and research on collective mobilization and social protest has focused on *integrating* those different classes of explanation.

Integration of Core Motivations

A list of four core motivations is useful in order to communicate which key predictors should be relevant to any study of social protest (van Zomeren, [2013](#), [2016](#)). Put differently, such a list communicates the "usual suspects" that are likely to be important when studying social protest. Systematic research can thus make use of such a list in order to document which motivations are relevant in which contexts. The list itself, however, does not tell us much about the conceptual and empirical interrelationships

between those different motivations. It does not tell us *when* which specific motivations should be relevant for social protest and collective mobilization. Historically, researchers seem to have been interested first and foremost in explaining additional variance in social protest participation. For instance, two-motive models of social protest typically posited additive effects of relative deprivation and group identification (Abrams & Grant, [2012](#); Kawakami & Dion, [1995](#)), with a positive relationship assumed between them. Similarly, three- and four-motive models of social protest expanded on the two models by adding a third and fourth motivation (e.g., Mummendey et al., [1999](#); Van Stekelenburg et al., [2009](#); van Zomeren et al., [2008](#)). Although admittedly such models amount to somewhat more than a mere list of variables, they still remain fairly superficial and “flat” as they integrate different motivations by connecting them through a positive correlation.

Conceptually, integration seems to have occurred mainly on the basis of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, [1979](#)). For instance, one way to conceptualize a number of core motivations is to base them in individuals' view of themselves as a group member (rather than as a unique individual; Turner et al., [1987](#)). Group identification increases such self-perception, which enables beliefs about the group's efficacy to achieve group goals, and anger toward the outgroup or system responsible for group-based unfairness (van Zomeren et al., [2008](#)). The assumed meta-theory here is thus not one that revolves around individuals as “rational actors,” but around individuals as “psychological group members” (Turner et al., [1987](#); van Zomeren, [2014](#)) who view themselves as group members and seek to achieve group goals. This conceptualization suggests that if we are to understand collective mobilization and social protest better, we need to consider the group as internalized by the individual.

Two-Motive Models

One influential model focused on two classes of predictors of social movement participation. Simon et al. ([1998](#)) found that identification with the social movement (reflecting a psychological group member's approach) predicted such participation, independent of personal cost-benefit calculations (reflecting a rational actor approach). As such, this model assumes that there are group-based and individual-based motivations for social protest, with the former being driven by identification with the movement, and the latter by more instrumental rational choice concerns. In their studies of different social movements, these authors typically did not find any additional influence of relative deprivation or feelings of anger (see Stürmer & Simon, [2004](#), [2009](#)).

More recently, Abrams and Grant ([2012](#)) focused on relative deprivation and group identification as predictors of social protest in the context of Scottish independence. They found that the two predictors were positively related and independently predicted social protest. However, in these studies personal cost-benefit calculations or group efficacy beliefs were not assessed and thus it remains unclear how this agentic class of explanation is related to those in this two-motive model. In sum, different two-motive models have focused on different combinations of the four core motivations for social protest, but have not included all four.

Three-Motive Models

Mummendey and colleagues ([1999](#)) were among the first to integrate three different motivations into one conceptual model, which was tested in the context of the German unification. Their model included the emotional experience of group-based relative deprivation, group identification, and group efficacy beliefs. Their findings showed that this model fit the data of East Germans well, suggesting that group identification predicted relative deprivation and group efficacy, which in turn predicted social protest. van Zomeren et al. ([2008](#)) meta-analytically tested for the average effect size of these three predictors and found that all three have, on average, medium-sized effects, confirming the validity of their presence on the list of usual suspects for theory and research on collective mobilization and social protest.

Furthermore, and somewhat different from Mummendey et al. ([1999](#)), their findings suggested that group identification typically has both direct and indirect positive effects on collective mobilization and social protest. Specifically, the direct effect seems driven by individuals' identification with an *action-oriented* group (such as a social movement) and the action-oriented norms they bring along. The indirect effect means that a stronger sense of group identification makes it more likely that individuals emotionally experience relative deprivation and more strongly believe in the group's efficacy, both of which in turn positively predict collective mobilization and social protest.

Four-Motive Models

Most recently, three-motive models turned into four-motive models, thus completing the list of four core motivations for social protest. Both van Zomeren et al. ([2012](#)) and Van Stekelenburg et al. ([2009](#)) added a predictor that revolves around the moral motivation to participate in social protest. Whereas Van Stekelenburg et al. ([2009](#)) suggested that ideology provides a motivation to express one's opinion, van Zomeren et al. ([2012](#)) connected the notion of moral motivation to theory and research on moral conviction (Skitka, [2010](#)), which suggests that once individuals have moralized their

attitudes on an issue, then they also have a strong motivation to defensively protect their morals from encroachment.

According to van Zomeren et al. (2012), including moral conviction in multi-motive models of social protest is important for two reasons. First, perceived violations of one's moral convictions seem to "energize" the other motivations for social protest. Thus, stronger moral convictions seem to go hand in hand with stronger identification with the relevant group, stronger group-based anger, and, although less consistently so, stronger group efficacy beliefs. As such, the power of moral convictions to motivate collective mobilization and social protest can be explained through the other three core motivations.

The second reason is that moral conviction does not depend on group membership, or already existing group identities. For example, those who are part of the *advantaged group* may also perceive their moral convictions to be violated and thus become motivated to act in solidarity with the disadvantaged group. Indeed, van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears (2011) imply that moral conviction may be a *precondition* for motivating solidarity-based action among the advantaged, and an *amplifier* for social protest among the disadvantaged. Put differently, moral motivation may be *optional* for motivating social protest among the disadvantaged, but *required* for the advantaged (as protest may reflect acting against one's own group's interests).

In sum, integrative models have become more prominent in the field, seeking to connect the dots with respect to the four core motivations that people can have to mobilize and protest. This search forces scholars to consider bigger questions about motivation, and it also forces them to engage with the sociological elephant in the room: social structure.

Integration of Social Structure

Social-psychological theory and research on mobilization and protest has not only become more integrative but also more diverse. This development refers to the rapid *internationalization* of the field, with studies on collective mobilization and social protest being conducted across the world, leading to very diverse participant samples and contextual characteristics. These studies typically also vary methodologically, including survey, experimental, interview, longitudinal, and other methods. This second trend—toward *diversity*—fits well with the first integrative trend and will, in time, lead to more in-depth and integrative understanding of the social-psychological workings of collective mobilization and social protest.

However, this will require innovative conceptual and empirical work in order to meaningfully connect the dots.

Indeed, over the last two decades studies have been conducted in “Western” countries such as (but certainly not limited to) the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Italy, Spain, Australia, and The Netherlands, but also in “non-Western” countries such as Lebanon, South Africa, Iraq, Indonesia, and Chile (e.g., Cakal, Hewstone, Schwär, & Heath, [2011](#); Tabri & Conway, [2011](#); van Zomeren, Susilani, & Berend, [2016](#)).

Research has employed different methods as well, ranging from experimental studies that frame a situation in different ways to observe its effects on motivations for protest (e.g., Zaal et al., [2012](#)), to interviews with activists that have tied themselves to trees to prevent them being cut down to facilitate the construction of a new highway (e.g., Drury & Reicher, [2009](#)). Furthermore, other studies have tracked individuals longitudinally to study changes in motivation (Turner-Zwinkels et al., [2015](#)), and yet other studies have surveyed members of different social movements (Stürmer & Simon, [2004](#)). All of this reflects a stronger diversity of research findings on the topic of what moves and motivates individuals for protest.

This trend toward internationalization and diversity poses a considerable challenge to integrative models of multiple motivations for social protest because it shows the need for innovative conceptual and empirical work in order to map the *structural* conditions under which different motivations matter (van Zomeren, [2016](#)). Indeed, it seems clear that the big question to be answered is about how social psychologists will integrate their notion of the “motivated protester” with a conceptualization of social structure. This includes questions about *when* to expect collective mobilization and social protest to arise in the first place (McAdam & Boudet, [2012](#)), which barriers to participation are important to remove (Klandermans, [1997](#)), when and how social protest will change social structure (see Louis, [2009](#)), and how individuals cope with any motivation for social protest in contexts where this seems impossible or even unimaginable (van Zomeren et al., [2016](#)).

As such, the diversity in contexts requires a conceptualization of social structure. Two aspects of social structure refer to the political and cultural system that moves beyond the traditional focus on situations in social psychology (i.e., situationism; van Zomeren, [2014](#)), reflecting political and cultural systems of meaning. Such a system- and meaning-based definition of social structure is in line with Giddens’s ([1984](#)) broad notion of social structure as “rules and resources . . . , organized as properties of social systems” (p. 25), including but not limited to political or societal system features, norms, and cultural frameworks of meaning and relationships between individuals and groups.

Indeed, a problem with many social-psychological studies of protest is that they provide mere “snapshots” of one particular situation in which protest is already feasible, likely, or even ongoing (van Zomeren, [2013](#)). As such there is little need, and thus little emphasis, for looking beyond the situation that one studies. As a consequence, social-psychological studies of collective mobilization and social protest typically provide us with insights into the many motivations that lead individuals to participate in such action, but do not tell us much about the social structure that embeds that situation of mobilization and protest (van Zomeren, [2016](#)).

Put differently, this does not tell us much about the meaning systems in which they take place, be they political or cultural, which may afford specific motivations or raise significant barriers to participation. It is important to note that social-psychological research has focused much less on barriers than on motivation, which makes this an important avenue for theory and research in this field. To this end, political and cultural systems are discussed next.

Political Systems

One way to differentiate meaning systems across studies of collective mobilization and social protest is to examine the *political* structure in which they are embedded. Theory and research in sociology and political science may be helpful here because they at least provide possible dimensions to ground such a taxonomy (see van Zomeren, [2016](#)). For instance, McAdam ([1982](#)) and Tarrow ([1994](#)) developed the notion of *political opportunity structure*, which is defined as “dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure” (e.g., Tarrow, [1994](#), p. 85). Operationalizations of this notion include changes in the political system, such as the emergence of a new political party, a split in the political powers that be, or the state’s capacity for repressing protest.

To make this more concrete, Corcoran, Pettinicchio, and Young ([2011](#)) found in an intriguing analysis of World Values Survey data that, across a variety of countries, an efficacy measure explained the relationship between a number of characteristics of the political system and individuals’ engagement in political action. Specifically, they found that “efficacy increases collective action, that certain political institutions increase efficacy, and that the effect of efficacy on collective action is partly conditional on the inclusiveness of a country’s political institutions” (Corcoran et al., [2011](#), p. 575).

This inclusiveness reflects a more “open” political opportunity structure, as indicated by a diverse range of democratic political parties and group interest representation. According to these authors, Sweden was found to be a good example of having an open political opportunity structure (with corresponding high levels of social protest), and Zimbabwe a good example

of a closed opportunity structure (with corresponding low levels of social protest). This illustrates how different meaning systems (in this case political) enable the translation of, in this case, agentic motivation into collective mobilization and social protest.

Cultural Systems

The rapid internationalization of the field has also forced scholars of social protest to consider a different type of meaning system in which it is embedded, namely, the *cultural system*. A cultural system is defined here subjectively as the shared beliefs about what is valid and valuable in the world, which are transmitted through individuals that are embedded in networks of social relationships (van Zomeren, [2016](#)).

In this relational view of culture, systems of meaning are shared by individuals in social networks through their attempts to regulate the relationships in which they are embedded. Indeed, one important aspect of a cultural meaning system is how individuals are supposed to regulate their relationships, for instance, with family, friends, colleagues, and authorities (van Zomeren et al., [2016](#)).

Scholars have suggested a number of core cultural dimensions on which individuals as well as groups and societies can differ, such as collectivism-individualism (Hofstede, [2001](#)). Collectivism, defined as whether individuals are generally interdependent on others and loyal to their in-groups, thus reflects a meaning system that defines how individuals should regulate their relationships and also seems to fit with the idea that mobilization and protest come about through identity and network dynamics. However, there are more cultural dimensions to consider, such as power distance (defined as whether those low in power legitimize, accept, and respect intergroup power relations; Hofstede, [2001](#)).

Indeed, van Zomeren et al. ([2016](#)) found a rare null relationship between group identification and social protest intentions in the cultural context of Indonesia, which scores relatively high on collectivism and power distance. This particular cultural system of meaning thus implies that individuals tend to rely on others and the networks and groups they are part of, yet also accept social inequalities. As a consequence, even if individuals' group identification is high, social protest will be very unlikely. This illustrates how different meaning systems (here in terms of the cultural system) hinder the translation of, in this case, identity motivation into collective mobilization and social protest.

It is not difficult to see, then, how cultural political systems of meaning afford or inhibit individuals' particular motivations to engage in social protest, and by implication whether collective mobilization and social

protest occurs. Yet, by focusing on studying social protest in contexts where it is already ongoing or very likely to occur, the field has developed a blind spot for the many situations in which social protest does *not* occur (van Zomeren, [2013](#)). What is needed, then, is for future theorizing and research to make use of the internationalization and diversification of research on social protest to better understand which cultural and political systems, and which aspects of those systems, afford or inhibit what moves and motivates individuals to mobilize and protest.

Toward Understanding Embeddedness

One implication of seeking further integration is that a focus on how individuals' motivations for protest are *embedded* in broader systems of meaning, be they cultural or political, reflects a broader view on the social psychology of mobilization and protest than any of the core motivations combined would reflect.

The notion of embeddedness moves beyond rational actors or psychological group members, as it points to the importance of social relationships and how individuals regulate them in their social networks, which are in turn embedded in broader systems of (cultural and political) meaning. As such, understanding embeddedness is an important challenge and focus for theory and research on collective mobilization and social protest, because it is through embeddedness that people relate and connect to, and thus potentially change, the social structure (van Zomeren, [2014](#), [2016](#)). Indeed, embeddedness in activist networks is a key predictor of collective mobilization and social protest (Schussman & Soule, [2005](#); see also Klandermans, Van der Toorn, & Van Stekelenburg, [2008](#)).

Embeddedness in such networks affords people with the *structural availability* of being asked by others (and asking others in turn) to mobilize or protest. Particularly in the modern age of social media (Alberici & Milesi, [2012](#)), such networks may no longer be restricted to physical locations—one can be embedded in online networks that extend across the globe. Thus, a clear avenue of future theory and research is to start thinking in terms of political and cultural systems as part of the social structure that individuals seek to change through collective mobilization and social protest.

Conclusion

The social psychology of collective mobilization and social protest suggests that social change may come about through joint action. Different approaches have suggested different motivations for why people protest, including emotional, agentic, identity, and moral motivations.

Together with a first development toward *integration*, a second development toward *internationalization* has also clearly made its mark in the field, leading to very diverse participant samples, contextual characteristics, and methods used. This increasing diversity promises a more in-depth and integrative understanding of the social-psychological workings of collective mobilization and social protest, but also signal the need for innovative conceptual and empirical work in order to map the structural (particularly political and cultural) conditions under which different motivations matter with respect to mobilization and protest.

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