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Edited by Moisés Arce and Roberta Rice

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Protest Cycles in the United States: From the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street to Sanders and Trump

Ted Goertzel

Protest movements had a major impact on political life in the United States during the protest cycle that was triggered by the economic crisis of 2007–08, peaked in 2011, and shaped the presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump. The Occupy Wall Street and Tea Party movements framed the grievances of the key groups, and both had a significant impact on electoral politics. Both movements had an antiestablishment, populist cast—one coming from the left and the other from the right. This populism defeated the presidential ambitions of two well-established candidates for the presidency in 2016: Jeb Bush and Hillary Clinton.

Had the Republican Party establishment and its wealthy supporters been able to control the nomination process, Jeb Bush would have been the party's nominee in 2016, and perhaps the Bush dynasty would have had a third instatement. Hillary Clinton was primed to be the country's first woman president. But her feminist credentials, rooted in a protest cycle that peaked in the 1970s, were not enough to defeat Barack Obama in the Democratic Party primary in 2008. After serving as senator from New York and secretary of state, Hillary Clinton almost lost the party's nomination in 2016 to Bernie Sanders, an eccentric senator from Vermont who labeled himself a democratic socialist. Meanwhile, Donald Trump, a celebrity real estate developer and television personality, defeated a number of very well-funded Republican politicians to win the Republican nomination before defeating Hillary Clinton in the Electoral College, although not in the popular vote.

It was an era of declining confidence in the American political, economic, and journalistic establishments, engendered in part by the innovative use of social media by social movements and Internet innovators, including some in the Russian government (Weisburd, Watts, and Berger 2017). It was an era in which charisma trumped competence and nationalism trumped globalization. In 2016, the right emerged triumphant, at least in electoral politics, although leftist populism remains ascendant among the generations that will shape political life in the future.

The Economic Crisis of 2007–08

After a long period of improving economic conditions, the American people's expectations were suddenly dashed by the economic crisis of 2007–08. The triggering event was the collapse of a bubble in housing prices that had been stimulated by irresponsible banking practices and government policies. Investment bankers and mortgage brokers had bundled large numbers of questionable mortgages into financial packages and sold them to investors on the theory that they could not all go bad at once. But that is exactly what happens when a bubble bursts, and major investment banks and insurance companies were suddenly insolvent. Millions of people had borrowed too much money to invest in homes they really could not afford on the theory that housing prices would keep going up indefinitely. Their expectations were dashed and the economy went into a tailspin.

The financial crisis of 2007–08 was an example of what political scientist James Davies (1962; 1969) called the "J-curve of rising and declining satisfactions" (see chapter 1 in this volume). Davies's theory suggests that protest will break out when conditions suddenly worsen because people become angry and seek someone to blame for the disturbing course of events. They also seek a solution. But to do this, they need a theoretical "frame" to articulate their grievances and tell them who is at fault and what should be done about it (also discussed in chapter 2 in this volume).

Social movements compete to frame the events for their potential followers so they can mobilize them to pressure for change.

People's first reaction is usually to blame the president when the economy goes bad. As former president Harry Truman famously said, "the buck stops here." This is true even though the American Constitution severely limits the president's ability to regulate the economy. President George W. Bush was a conservative Republican whose inclination was to let the private sector take care of itself. When the crisis struck in 2007, he went so far as to allow one huge investment bank, Lehman Brothers, to go bankrupt. But his advisors persuaded him he could not let the whole financial structure collapse, so he authorized the government to buy up bad investments from several other huge investment banks and insurance companies. They were considered "too big to fail," because their failure would bring down the rest of the economy.

Protest from progressive activists was largely muted during this period, partly because President Bush was being forced by events to take many of the actions progressives would normally advocate, such as intervening in major financial institutions. In addition, President Bush's term was close to its end and many progressives put their energy into the campaign that elected Barack Obama in November 2008. President Obama, elected on a vague program of "a future you can believe in," continued many of the policies Bush had established to stabilize the financial system, and he added spending programs to stimulate economic revival. One of the most controversial was to have the government purchase shares in the General Motors and Chrysler corporations to keep them from going bankrupt. Many conservatives, including Mitt Romney, the former Massachusetts governor and likely presidential candidate, opposed this.

The J-curve hypothesis explains the upsurge in discontent following the economic crisis, but framing theory is needed to explain how the discontent was articulated into grievances that engendered a protest cycle. Unlike other protest cycles where one frame became predominant, this protest cycle was characterized by polarization between two competing frames. These were most clearly exemplified by two social movements: the Tea Party and the Occupy movement.

The Tea Party Movement

The first major social movement to emerge in this period was not a response to the crisis from the left, but a protest from the right against President Obama's anticrisis policies. This became known as the Tea Party movement (Wikipedia 2013a), in reference to the Boston Tea Party of 1773 that helped to spark the American Revolution. The movement's collective action frame was that the government, not bankers or mortgage brokers, had caused the problem, and that the less the government did about it the better. The spark that touched off the mass movement was a speech or "rant" on the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange on 19 February 2009 by Rick Santelli, a former hedge fund manager who was working as a reporter for a cable network. He protested President Obama's plan to help homeowners who were unable to keep up payments on their mortgages, exclaiming: "This is America! How many of you people want to pay for your neighbor's mortgage that has an extra bathroom and can't pay their bills? . . . President Obama, are you listening?" He called for a "Chicago Tea Party" to overthrow Obama's policy (Berg 2012; Skocpol and Williamson 2012).

Santelli's rant, which went viral on the Internet, touched a nerve with many conservative Americans who felt they were losing control of the country they loved. The phrase "Tea Party" became a "meme," a unit of cultural symbolism that takes on a life of its own (Canning and Reinsborough 2010). The meme concept was introduced by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (1976) as a sociological parallel to the concept of the gene in biology, a small kernel of information that shapes how an organism develops. A meme can be a slogan, a phrase, or a symbol; it becomes a meme when it spreads through a susceptible population like a virus "infecting" one person after another. Political consultants and specialists in public relations and advertising often work hard trying to invent memes that will catch on with their target populations. So do social movement leaders.

Social movement memes work best when they express a general feeling or mood or philosophy, not a specific policy proposal, although policies can be crafted to fit memes (Barnett 2011). The Tea Party meme symbolized the belief that too many of the American people have become soft and lazy and irresponsible, expecting the government to solve their problems for them. It symbolized the idea that we should cut social programs and taxes, let failed businesses go bankrupt, and wait for the private sector to revive the economy.

Many progressives thought that the Tea Party meme was a tool used by wealthy foundations and corporate interests to manipulate the public. And it is true that the Tea Party meme was promoted by right-wing organizations and mass media, especially Fox News. But it is also true that grassroots activism based on the Tea Party meme was impressive (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). Approximately a thousand chapters were organized around the country to protest President Obama's stimulus plan and especially his proposal to provide subsidized health insurance for low-income workers. Tea Party supporters tended to be Republican, white, male, married, and over forty-five. Many of them were small-business owners, few were public employees. A large number were senior citizens who were receiving Social Security and free single-payer medical care from the federal government. But their zeal for cutting government did not extend to ending these programs; they believed that they had earned them. They opposed extending medical and unemployment benefits to younger people.

The Tea Party meme was successful in mobilizing conservative Americans, but a majority of the population never adopted it. A *New York Times*/CBS News poll in April 2010 found that 18 percent of the population identified as Tea Party supporters. Tea Party activists realized that they were a minority and decided to adopt many of the tactics pioneered by progressive social movements during the protests of the 1960s and '70s. In their interviews with Tea Party activists, Skocpol and Williamson (2012) found that a surprising number cited the work of community organizer Saul Alinsky as a model for their organizational tactics, although their goals were largely the opposite of Alinsky's, who worked to improve the living conditions of the poor. The Tea Party followed Alinsky's lead in directing anger against programs that were unpopular with their constituency, rather than focusing on alternative proposals of their own.

Several Tea Party protests attracted large numbers of participants. Roughly 250,000 people participated in approximately 200 "Tax Day" rallies around the country in April 2009 (Berg 2012). A "Taxpayer March on Washington" on 12 September 2009 drew tens of thousands of participants.

These protests hammered away against government meddling in the economy in the interests of "undeserving" people. They argued that the Community Reinvestment Act, which had encouraged lenders to give mortgages to low-income people, was responsible for the wave of defaults that triggered the crisis. The solution, in their view, was to cut funds for government bureaucrats and "lazy" people dependent on handouts.

Because of its timing, the Tea Party acted as a backlash against the election of Barack Obama, although Tea Party leaders adamantly denied that Obama's race had anything to do with it. Tea Party spokespersons conceded that many of the policies they opposed—including heavy deficit spending—actually began under Republican administrations, and that they had not organized to oppose them then. But they thought they should have, and they were critical of both Republican and Democratic legislators. Instead of forming a third party, however, they thought it more effective to focus their efforts on the Republican primary elections in 2010. In so doing, they drove the Republican Party further to the right, nominating candidates who promised to end "Obamacare," President Obama's health-care reform, and cut federal spending without increasing taxes. Their efforts were rewarded in the 2010 midterm elections when there was a shift toward conservative Republicans in Congress and in state elections.

A cycle of contention often develops when heightened activism by a social movement generates intensified activism by social movements with opposing views. In this case, politicians elected with Tea Party support passed legislation in several states that provoked a militant response from activists with progressive, pro-labor views. These activists responded with demonstrations, marches, rallies, and other actions drawn from much the same repertoire of contention as that used by the Tea Party activists. This process was especially acute in several Midwestern states that had been strongly affected by the economic crisis.

Progressives Strike Back: Labor Rights in Wisconsin and Ohio

Conservative Republicans won several important state elections in 2010, including the governorship in the states of Wisconsin and Ohio. These newly elected leaders moved quickly to implement one of their key goals—weakening the role of organized labor, especially for state employees. Democratic state legislators fought these measures as best they could, sometimes using parliamentary maneuvers such as traveling out of state to deny Republicans a quorum. But they were outnumbered and were unable to stop the Republican majorities in the state legislatures.

In Wisconsin, the Republicans succeeded in passing a bill severely restricting the rights of public employee unions (Berg 2012; Kersten 2011; Nichols 2012). Protests were organized primarily by the labor movement in the state, with strong support from students at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and other progressive groups. Appeals were sent to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, which had a 4–3 majority of conservative judges. But one of the conservatives was up for reelection, which provided a political opportunity for protesters to organize to support his progressive opponent. They also organized a petition campaign to recall several newly elected Republican legislators and newly elected Republican governor Scott Walker.

Activism was most intense in the state capitol, which is located in Madison, next to the University of Wisconsin campus. On several occasions, the capitol mall filled up with protesters estimated to number 100,000 or more. Supporters came in from as far as New York City. Some of the protesters physically occupied the capitol building, setting up a sleeping area and information center and distributing food contributed by local businesses. Later, some protesters began living in tents around the capitol.

The Wisconsin protests were impressive, making it clear that there was strong opposition to antilabor policies. Their stated goal was not to make a statement, but to reverse the antilabor legislation. They could not persuade the governor or the Republican majority in the legislature to do that. They had only two practical options: to file lawsuits to reverse the legislation in court, or to file recall petitions to have the governor and recalcitrant legislators replaced. They tried both options, and won some legal victories over technicalities. The legislature reacted by correcting the technicalities and passing the legislation again. So the only definitive way to win was to file petitions for recall elections.

Under Wisconsin law a recall petition leads to a new election with candidates chosen by the political parties that had participated in the original election. The protesters succeeded in gathering more than enough signatures for recall elections against Walker and several state legislators. The other side responded by filing recall petitions against several Democratic legislators, on the grounds that they had abandoned their posts by leaving the state to avoid voting. But when it came to the actual recall elections, most of the legislators won reelection. A few Republican legislators were replaced, but not enough to change the balance in the legislature. In the most important election, Governor Walker won 53.1 percent of the 2011 recall election vote, slightly higher than the 52.3 percent that he had received when he won the office in 2010 (Wikipedia 2013a). Many Wisconsin voters felt that Walker had won his office fairly and that opponents should wait until the next regularly scheduled election to challenge him.

The political outcome was different in the state of Ohio, where newly elected Republican governor John Kasich and a Republican-dominated state legislature had passed similar legislation cutting the rights of state employee unions (Burstein 2012). Ohio provided a better political opportunity than Wisconsin, since it had a law that allowed opponents to file a petition to repeal the new laws without recalling the governor or legislators from office. This meant that the movement did not have to directly confront Governor Kasich, who was quite popular in the state. The protest organization We Are Ohio succeeded in framing the legislation as an attack on Ohio's schoolteachers, fire fighters, nurses, and police officers. The labor unions financed much of the campaign and mobilized many of the activists, but the campaign literature and advertisements did not emphasize labor rights or partisan issues. The Fraternal Order of Police generally supports Republican candidates, but it joined in the We Are Ohio effort. Organizers went out of their way to recruit Republicans in many communities to the campaign to protect local teachers, fire fighters, nurses, and police officers.

We Are Ohio gathered more than a million valid petition signatures to put reversing the legislation on the November 2011 election ballot. The measure won with 61.3 percent of the vote. This was a rare victory for the labor movement; struggles against "right-to-work" legislation were lost in the neighboring states of Michigan and Indiana. The success can be attributed to the movement's effectiveness in framing the issue as defending Ohio's teachers, fire fighters, nurses, and police officers. Cutting government spending is popular in the abstract, but not when it is framed as punishing respected, hardworking, and modestly paid local citizens.

Success and failure in social movements can be measured in different ways. Some movements focus on short-term policy objectives, others aim to raise issues and stimulate a process of cultural reevaluation and eventual change. The labor mobilizations in Wisconsin and Ohio had short-term policy objectives aimed at protecting workers' jobs. The We Are Ohio movement succeeded in doing this by carefully framing its slogans in such a way as to appeal to the widest possible base of support, taking advantage of the opportunity provided by Ohio law. The Wisconsin activists were not successful in doing this because the state constitution did not provide a way to put the issue itself on the ballot. They had to petition to recall individual politicians, a tactic that alienated some voters.

These state-level movements were very important for people in certain states, but the progressive movements needed to organize around broader issues. The Tea Party, after all, was focused primarily on federal budgetary issues, and progressives had very different views about federal policy. They wanted to use the federal government to address problems such as poverty, unemployment, and growing inequality by increasing spending on social programs and raising taxes on the wealthy. They needed a meme to crystallize their movement, much as the Tea Party meme had crystallized the opposition. They found it by focusing not on a policy goal, but on a tactic: occupying Wall Street.

The Occupy Movement

The Occupy Movement (Wikipedia 2013c; 2013d) was launched on 13 July 2011 with a blog post and a hashtag: #OCCUPYWALLSTREET (Adbusters 2011). Hashtags are simply words or phrases preceded by the number symbol (#). They are widely used on Twitter and other microblogging social networking sites as a way for users to self-organize an online discussion. Anyone can post a message that includes the hashtag and anyone can find the messages by searching for the hashtag. This method of self-organizing is especially appropriate for movements that favor egalitarian organizational structures where anyone can play a leadership role.

The use of the hashtag in this case was not accidental; it was posted by *Adbusters*, a magazine and organization that describes itself on its web site (www.adbusters.org) as "a global network of culture jammers and creatives working to change the way information flows, the way corporations wield power, and the way meaning is produced in our society." The *Adbusters* group is quite sophisticated about social theory, and makes heavy use of the meme concept (Lasn and Adbusters 2012). Kalle Lasn, the principal organizer behind *Adbusters*, observed that "*Adbusters* floated the meme of occupying the iconic heart of global capitalism." As a *New York Times* columnist reported (Sommer 2012), "spreading radically subversive memes is Mr. Lasn's avowed mission." Memes can be phrases, but they can also be pictures, videos, products, or even tunes. Some examples floated by the *Adbusters* group include "Buy Nothing Christmas" (with a picture of an empty-handed Santa Claus), "Joe Chemo" (with a picture of Joe Camel, the tobacco mascot), a "Consumer Pig" video, "Blackspot Unswooshers" (sustainable high top sneakers), and "the Year of the Snake."

Of course, not every meme goes viral. *Adbusters* has floated a lot of them, and most disappear quickly. Why did the Occupy Wall Street meme catch on? It had many of the same virtues as the Tea Party meme. It provided a focus for a large group of people who were discontented but had not found an effective theme to express their sense of grievance. These were people with an anticorporate perspective who blamed big business and big government for the economic crisis. They were not satisfied with the Democratic Party as a vehicle for their discontent, as they saw the Democrats as too moderate, too compromised, too tied to corporate financing. In an earlier historical period, these people would probably have advocated "socialism" or "anarchism" as alternative memes, but these were old and had lost their luster. Organizing a demonstration around these memes would not be likely to generate much response.

The Occupy Wall Street meme was new, and it offered something exciting to do. The *Adbusters* post, with a hashtag as its headline, was distributed widely to email lists and blogs. It cited the recent occupation of Tahrir Square in Cairo and recent encampments in Spain as models, and called on New Yorkers to descend on "Wall Street: the financial Gomorrah of America." Specifically, it said that "on September 17, we want to see

20,000 people flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades, and occupy Wall Street for a few months" (Adbusters 2011).

They recognized that a demonstration needed to make a demand. Tahrir Square worked because the demonstrators demanded the removal of President Mubarak. What could the Occupy Wall Street demonstrators demand? The best they could come up with was a demand that President Obama convene a commission tasked with ending the influence money has on our representatives in Washington. They proposed the slogan "Democracy not Corporatocracy."

Adbusters was based in Vancouver, British Columbia, not a good location for organizing a few months' encampment in New York City. Fortunately, the encampment idea appealed to a group of organizers who were in New York City, some of whom had already staged a "Bloombergville" (named after New York's mayor, Michael Bloomberg) outside New York's City Hall to protest budget cuts (Kroll 2011). Some of them had been in Madrid on 15 May 2011 when 20,000 outraged citizens had poured into the Puerta del Sol, transforming the city's central plaza into a version of Tahrir Square. They latched on to the Occupy Wall Street meme and did the hard organizational work to make the occupation a reality.

However, they did not adopt *Adbusters*' suggestion to demand a commission to find a way to end the influence of money on politics. Campaign finance reform was not a new issue, and the Supreme Court had already vetoed it. While the protesters had long lists of complaints, they could not agree on any specific policy demands. As organizer Sarah van Gelder observed, "the system is broken in so many ways that it's dizzying to try to name them all. This is part of the reason why the Occupy movement hasn't created a list of demands. The problem is everywhere and looks different from every point of view. The one thing the protesters all seem to agree on is that the middle-class way of life is moving out of reach" (Van Gelder 2011, 4). The Occupy Wall Street meme was diffuse enough to focus their anger without tying them down to policy debates.

Wall Street symbolizes capitalism because the New York Stock Exchange is there, but the protesters did not try to occupy the stock exchange. Instead, they set up housekeeping in Zuccotti Park, a small public space a few blocks away. The park had been built by a private corporation under New York laws that require companies to build parks in exchange for permission to erect office buildings. The law required the park to be open to the public twenty-four hours a day, unlike ordinary public parks that could be closed at night or fenced off by police. This was fortuitous for the Occupy encampment.

The 17 September 2011 occupation of Zuccotti Park was successful. The park was filled with campers, and the news media descended on them. The mainstream media had been reporting on the Tea Party for two years and they needed a group to embody the other side. They seized on one of the slogans on the protesters' signs and blog posts as symbolizing the theme of the movement: "We are the 99%." The 99% meme went viral. Occupy Wall Street was defined as a movement against the increasing concentration of wealth by the most affluent 1 percent of the population. The media commentators could explore this theme in depth. It was a good counterpoint to the Tea Party's focus on debt and dependency on government.

The encampment was also intriguing from an organizational point of view (Gitlin 2012). Rather than advocating for legislative change, the protesters sought to provide a model of an alternative way of life. There was no established leadership; instead there was a general assembly where anyone could speak and decisions were made by consensus. Anyone could freeze a decision if they thought that an ethical issue was at stake. Public address systems were prohibited in the park, so organizers invented the "people's mic," whereby people would repeat the speaker's words for people who were too far back to hear. Sometimes the crowd was so large that two or three relays were needed.

This decentralized, "horizontal" decision-making took a lot of time, which was fine because it gave the protesters something to do while camping. The camaraderie was energizing, especially for people who had been depressed about not finding work in their areas of specialization or being able to maintain middle-class lifestyles. As organizer Sarah van Gelder observed:

> The Occupy Wall Street movement is not just demanding change. It is also transforming how we, the 99%, see ourselves. The shame many of us felt when we couldn't find a job, pay down our debts, or keep our home is being replaced by a political awakening. Millions now recognize that we

> are not to blame for a weak economy, for a subprime mortgage meltdown, or for a tax system that favors the wealthy but bankrupts the government. The 99% are coming to see that we are collateral damage in an all-out effort by the super-rich to get even richer. (2011, 2)

The Occupy activists did not set themselves the goal of shutting down the New York Stock Exchange. If the Occupy movement had occurred during the protest cycle of the 1960s and '70s, they might have staged a sit-in at the stock exchange around the slogan "Shut Down the Stock Exchange," just as activists tried to shut down the Pentagon in 1967. That would have given the police an excuse to arrest the protesters, and it would have alienated a lot of people who would object to the protesters' methods even though they sympathized with their goals.

In any event, this movement was not about a specific stock exchange in New York, it was about a global economic system. The point was to propagate the meme, and the Occupy meme spread very quickly to other cities in the United States and around the world. This was a remarkable example of social movement diffusion. Zuccotti Park was occupied on 17 September 2011. By 9 October, Occupy movements were underway in 95 cities in 82 countries, and in 600 communities in the United States (Wikipedia 2013b). Some of these movements actually antedated Occupy Wall Street. A Democracy Village had been set up outside the British Parliament in London in 2010. The Spanish movement, known as the *Indignados*, or the Indignant, first set up camps in Madrid and elsewhere in Spain in mid-May 2011. The General Assembly group in New York City was quite familiar with the Spanish events and with anarchist social theories and practices that have been better developed in Spain than in any other country. The Arab Spring movement, especially the occupation of Tahrir Square in Egypt, can also be seen as a precursor to the Wall Street occupation. These movements differed because the problems and political structures vary in each country, but they shared the tactic of setting up camps in public squares.

For a few weeks, it seemed as if the Occupy movement was sweeping the globe and foretelling a major social transformation. An "instant book" edited by Occupy Wall Street leaders (Van Gelder 2011) had the title

This Changes Everything. But what had really changed? The Wall Street traders continued with business as usual: few if any descended from the office towers to engage the protesters. The more acute conflict was with the New York City Police Department (Greenberg 2012b), who seemed happy enough earning overtime pay for managing and harassing the protesters. By the time Mayor Bloomberg arranged to have the police clear the park, some of the protesters acknowledged that they were secretly relieved (Gitlin 2012, 68–9). They did not really want to camp out in Zuccotti Park through the winter, and being driven out by the police was more dramatic than voluntarily decamping.

Protest Cycles and Electoral Politics

The first consequence of the protest cycle triggered by the economic crisis of 2007–08 was the election of Barack Obama in 2008, America's first black president. His campaign had some of the flavor of a social movement, based as it was on vaguely phrased promises such as "a future you can believe in." He was new on the scene and more charismatic than either Hillary Clinton, his challenger in the Democratic Party primary, or John McCain, his Republican opponent.

Both the Occupy and the Tea Party movements were, in part, reactions to his presidency, Occupy from the left and the Tea Party from the right. In the 2010 midterm elections, the right was resurgent and took control of Congress from the Democrats, greatly restricting what the Obama administration could do. The global protest cycle of 2011 had passed its peak, but Obama nevertheless defeated Mitt Romney, his less exciting Republican opponent in 2012.

In 2016, the country's focus was on the presidential election, and two protest movements emerged to support candidates in the election. Electoral reform engendered by earlier social movements had taken control of the nomination process away from the professional party politicians and given it to the public in primary elections. Two candidates emerged as protests against the candidates favored by the party establishments: Bernie Sanders for the Democrats and Donald Trump for the Republicans.

Bernie Sanders used themes from the Occupy movement, including an attack on "the 1 percent," and denouncing the decline of middle-class incomes and the influence of corporate money on politics. His slogan, "feel the Bern," was coined by an Occupy organizer (Heaney 2016). He appealed strongly to many middle-class white youth, both male and female, and promised free college tuition. His long commitment to socialist ideals promised a radical change, but he did not have a track record of support for black issues comparable to that of Hillary Clinton, and he was criticized by the Black Lives Matter movement that had arisen in response to police killings of black citizens in several American cities.

Sanders mounted a surprisingly effective movement for the Democratic Party nomination, but was eventually defeated by Hillary Clinton. The Republican challenger, Donald Trump, faced competition from a large number of rivals. The establishment candidate, Jeb Bush, did not have the kind of consensus support that the Democratic Party leaders gave to Hillary Clinton. He attacked international trade agreements, especially the North American Free Trade Agreement, for taking jobs from American workers. Bernie Sanders also attacked the free trade agreements in an attempt to appeal to the blue collar working class. Neither addressed automation, a primary cause of declining industrial and mining employment in the United States.

The Trump movement did adopt some of the Tea Party's policy goals: cutting taxes, repealing the Affordable Care Act, hostility to minorities and immigration, opposition to abortion rights. But Trump was not a consistent ideologue, and some of his positions, such as favoring a massive public works program to generate employment and repair the infrastructure, differed from traditional right-wing ideology. Where Trump really excelled was in the use of Internet memes to shape public discourse, something that could have been learned from Occupy as much as from the Tea Party (Marantz 2016; Nawaz 2016). Trump made heavy use of Twitter to create memes that stigmatized his opponents, such as #Crooked Hillary, #Little Marco, and #TimeToGetTough. This approach was highly effective in drawing media attention, much of which was critical, but that did not matter. Television coverage of the 2016 campaign devoted more time to Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server than to all policy issues combined (Boehlert 2016).

Conclusions

The global economic crisis of 2007–08 triggered a protest cycle in the United States as well as in many other countries. In the United States, the two most influential movements were the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street. Both drew on a repertoire of ideas and tactics developed in previous protest cycles, especially in the 1960s and '70s. Some of the activists were old enough to have participated in those earlier cycles of activism; others were from younger generations who were creating their own traditions. The Occupy movement also drew extensively on a repertoire of tactics developed in other countries. Both were effective in using contemporary media to propagate memes that shaped public discourse.

Of the theories considered in this volume, J-curve theory best explains the emergence of these movements, while framing theory and the cultural theory of grievances best explain their impact. The two movements offered conflicting interpretations of the causes of the economic downturn and what should be done about it. Both of these conflicting interpretations were absorbed into the mainstream political dialogue in the country. The United States differs from many of the countries discussed in this volume in having a well-established electoral system that provides a legitimate channel for discontent. Much of the activism was channeled into this arena, and the issues raised by the movements were fought out in midterm elections in 2010 and 2014 and in presidential elections in 2012 and 2016.

Resource mobilization theory helps us to understand how the movements were organized. The Tea Party drew on resources long developed by right-wing activists, including wealthy foundations and publicity from conservative media. Occupy relied on support from the labor movement and from progressive political groups in New York City and around the world. Both movements made extensive use of social media and the Internet, as well as winning coverage in traditional media.

Following political process theory, Tea Party activists moved quickly to support candidates in Republican primaries. The activists who mobilized the Occupy movement were slower to respond to the mainstream political process. Many of them were disillusioned by party politics and sought a vaguely defined radical alternative. Progressive activists did become politically active in Wisconsin and Ohio, and to a lesser extent in other states, in response to antiunion initiatives. By doing so, they faced the challenge of getting more than 50 percent of the vote in actual elections, something that is more difficult than claiming to represent the 99 percent at a rally or in a blog post.

The progressive cause in 2012 was led primarily by the Obama campaign, which relied extensively on volunteer activists and used memes popularized by the Occupy movement. And Obama won with 53 percent of the vote, aided by Mitt Romney's being caught by a blogger dismissing 47 percent of American voters as hopelessly dependent on government handouts. The Tea Party's role in 2012 was largely to support right-wing primary candidates, thus weakening Romney's campaign during the general election. Both movements were very important in promoting memes that were absorbed into the mainstream party campaigns, but winning elections required putting together broader coalitions. This was also the lesson of the We Are Ohio campaign, which won a dramatic victory by appealing to a wider segment of the state's population.

In the 2016 election, the Trump campaign easily defeated well-funded and experienced Republican primary opponents, and it won an Electoral College victory in 2016, although it lost the popular vote by a substantial margin. Trump benefited from the constitutional structure in the United States, which gives disproportionate weight to small states and rural areas that had been left behind as the global economy developed.

Commentators are divided in their appraisals of both the Tea Party and the Occupy movements (Gitlin 2012; Greenberg 2011, 2012a; Kornacki 2012; Roberts 2012; Walzer 2012). Both were very successful in promoting their memes, which was their most important accomplishment. But neither became a dominant organizational force in American politics—indeed, both remained outside the mainstream. The Tea Party movement was clear about its policy proposals, but it was unable to nominate a Republican candidate that clearly shared its ideas, and its support may have done more harm than good to the Romney campaign in 2012. In 2016, Trump took more from the organizational tactics of both the Occupy and the Tea Party movements than from the Tea Party's policy agenda. Occupy never found a specific policy focus, which some commentators see as a serious flaw (Walzer 2012). However, its broad goals of lessening inequality and sustaining the middle classes were espoused by the Obama campaign, which won in 2012, and by the Bernie Sanders campaign, which came surprisingly close to winning the Democratic Party's presidential nomination in 2016. It is not at all clear that Sanders could have defeated Trump had he won the nomination; his support from minorities was weak and his focus on stigmatizing the wealthy 1 percent might not have defeated Trump's stigmatizing of minorities, the poor, and trade policies. But the demographic trends in the United States continue to favor the groups that supported Obama and Sanders, and they will certainly mount strong challenges to Trump and his base in forthcoming elections.

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