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STATE RESPONSES TO CONTENTION AND NEW WAVES OF PROTEST



Principal Investigators: Kazimierz M. Slomczynski and J. Craig Jenkins, Department of Sociology, and Irina Tomescu-Dubrow, Cross-National Studies: Interdisciplinary Research and Training Program (CONSIRT)

What makes political protest more likely in some countries than others? If protest happens, when is it likely to be through conventional means such as petitions and rallies rather than contentious means such as strikes and occupations? And how do states typically respond to such protests?

To answer these questions, Kazimierz Slomczynski, Craig Jenkins and Irina Tomescu-Dubrow are leading a project to integrate data from more than 1,700 national surveys that include 2.3 million respondents from 142 countries into one dataset, [Surveys on Protest Behavior](#).

The researchers received a four-year, \$1.4 million award from the National Science Foundation for the project, "Survey Data Recycling: New Analytic Framework, Integrated Database and Tools for Cross-National Social, Behavioral and Economic Research," starting September 1, 2017.

Whereas previous surveys of protest behavior mainly examine individual characteristics such as gender, age, education, political efficacy, and interest in politics, Slomczynski et al. will also take into account characteristics of countries.

Specifically they will examine both democratic values such as support for rule of law, separation of powers, majority rule, and representative government, and democratic indexes such as rights to form political organizations, freedom of the press, fairness in the voting process, competition selection and constraints on the chief executive, and access of parties to public financing.

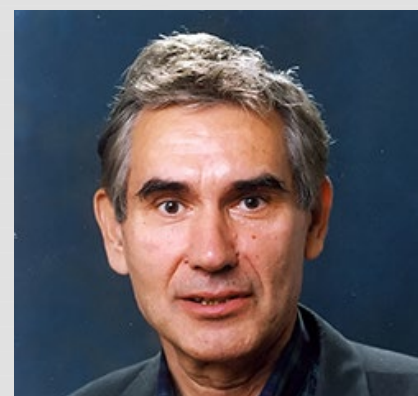
The research hypothesis is that protest happens in countries where there is a discrepancy between democratic values – how people want the government to work – and democratic indexes – how it actually does work. If the discrepancy is relatively small, the researchers think protest will likely be conventional. But if the discrepancy is large, protest will likely be contentious.

The larger the discrepancy between democratic values and democratic indexes, the more contentious protest will be, researchers hypothesize.

Harmonizing data

To identify all the variables needed to test this hypothesis, researchers are pulling together information from 22 international projects such as the World/European Values Survey, barometers conducted around the world, and specialized projects on political behavior to create a new dataset called Surveys on Protest Behavior.

Integrating information from so many different projects requires researchers to harmonize data by converting it all to the same platform. Specific research



activities include:

- Gathering existing variables regarding
 - political protest, distinguishing between conventional protest and contentious protests
 - change or lack of change in democratic practice after political protest and contention.
- Constructing new variables by
 - harmonizing selected variables related to democratic values and assessment of functioning of state institutions
 - calculating interactions between democratic values and democratic practices
 - Assessing the functioning of state institutions.
- Using these variables to develop new statistical models.

Researchers aim to answer the following questions:

- How do states respond to contention? What role does the form of protest play for the nature of state reactions? Under what circumstances do state responses strengthen democracy, and when do they weaken it?
- If democratization increases, do people engage more in conventional protest? Does a decrease of democratization lead to more contentious protest? If so, after what time lag could contentious protest occur?
- What is the role of people's assessment of state performance in generating protest behavior? Is this a factor that matters on its own, or mainly in relation to actual performance of the state?
- What is the interactive role of democratic values and political context in generating different types of protest? Does the positive association between democratic values and conventional protest hold up across political contexts? What about for disruptive protest?

Products of this research include:

- The Surveys on Protest Behavior dataset, containing new contextual variables, harmonized variables, and assessment of the functioning of state institutions. This dataset will be archived and made public.
- A paper "When and How State Responses to Contention Generate New Waves of Protests: Using Harmonized Survey Data for 142 Countries" to be sent for publication in a top social science journal.
- A conference on **Democracy, the State and Protest: International Perspectives on Methods for the Study of Protest**, held May 2017 at the Mershon Center. Conference papers will be edited and used as the basis for a special issue of a high prestige journal.



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