



13

Politics and Social Movements

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Sociologists recognize that politics affects almost every facet of our lives. Chapter 14 introduces you to a few of the most important aspects in understanding the relationship between politics and society.

First, it is essential to understand that politics is about power and its contestation. The term “power” is defined by Max Weber as the capacity to realize one’s will despite the resistance of others. There is a difference between having power and exhibiting power. In other words, while having money usually means having power, it may not necessarily be power in the terms we understand it to be, for money is merely bits of metal and paper to which we attach a form of value. Rather, power, for sociologists, is something that is manifested in human relationships.

The authors then look at one of the major examples of power in our society: the state. The state is an institution whose agents have the legitimate right to tax its citizens, stop them through the use of force, and even kill them. The state’s power derives from its citizens who voluntarily give up some of their rights in return for other rights and privileges. With modernity and urbanization, states became necessary to manage the influx of people coming into the cities. Along with this, a key development that came with this emergence of the state was bureaucracy.

Next, the authors break up politics into several processes. First, material processes such as money are discussed. Much of the work here is derived from Marx and Weber to explain the “haves” and “have-nots” of material wealth and how politics can be shaped by such. Cultural and social processes are then discussed. The focus here is on class and its role in the social hierarchy of politics. Lastly, institutional processes are examined. Here, the authors look at how institutions and bureaucracies affect the political landscape of the state.

Social movements for sociologists are a fascinating phenomenon to study, for their very essence symbolizes a shifting norm or attitude towards some current social structure. First, the authors note that a social movement is essentially a form of power struggle between those who have control, and those who wish to acquire control. Those without power (the majority) collectively band together to make their voices and/or cases heard by the public trying to garner support through actions such as protests, demonstrations, and sometimes violence.

The chapter identifies a few theoretical approaches to social movements: new social movements, framing theory, and the political processes approach. New social movements look at the relationship between culture and collective identity. Its main proposition is that social movements are “cultural laboratories” where people explore new forms of social interaction. Framing theory seeks to explain the ways movements create and spread their understandings of the world and how these meanings help to form a sense of collective identity and purpose. The political processes approach assumes that political constraints and opportunities influence the rise and fall of social movements. A key goal of sociology is to understand why some movements for change fail and others succeed.

KEY TERMS

Citizenship regimes	Export processing zone (EPZ)	Omnivore
Collective identity	False consciousness	Political process approach
Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)	Framing theory	Political processes
Counter-hegemony	Hegemony	Polity
Cultural capital	Industrial Revolution	Social capital
Culture industry	Institutions	Social movements
	North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)	Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)
		Univore

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between social capital and cultural capital? (p. 299)
2. What is the difference between a pressure group and an interest group? (p. 305)
3. Aside from money, what are some other material resources? List two to three. (p. 296)
4. What is the difference between a social trend and a social movement? (p. 304)
5. What is the difference between bridging and bonding social capital? (p. 299)
6. What rights did the first-wave feminists fight for? (p. 308)
7. How can forms of transnationalism reflect a new global political era? (p. 301)
8. What are the three core framing tasks that must succeed in order for a social movement to be successful? (p. 306)

9. What gave rise to the Idle no More Movement? (p. 307)
10. What three factors are needed for a social movement to be considered global? (p. 312)

READINGS AND WEBSITES

Hobbes, Thomas. (1914). *Leviathan*. London: Dent.

Despite being written over three and a half centuries ago, Hobbes's book still remains one of the most influential pieces of work on the subject of power, legitimate government, and society. In it, he examines the situation in Britain during the civil wars of the seventeenth century. In a society where there is no social contract between the people and a strong central government, life, as Hobbes famously put it, would be "nasty, brutish, and short."

Lipset, Seymour Martin. (1969). *Politics and the Social Sciences*. New York: Oxford University Press.

The late S.M. Lipset wrote numerous books about politics using the comparative approach to analyze several aspects of North American society. In this book, he examines several issues relating to politics and sociology. They include, but are not limited to, the field of political sociology, political theory, politics and inequality in society, and data analyses of policies in society.

Tilly, Charles. (2004). *Social Movements, 1768–2004*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Tilly's book is one of the more often cited works when it comes to discussing social movements. His book encompasses the expansion and transformation of social movements across a few centuries, taking note of the politics behind the movements. Furthermore, Tilly examines how democratization affects social movements. Lastly, shifting to the twenty-first century, the author addresses how changes to technology and other aspects of our lives will impact the future of social movements.

Idle No More. (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.idlenomore.ca/>

The official website for the Idle No More Movement in Canada provides an overview, history and the goals of the movement. The website also contains academic and news articles, links and up-to-date information about the movement.

Centre for the Study of Social Movements at the University of Notre Dame. (2017). *Mobilizing Ideas*. Retrieved from <https://mobilizingideas.wordpress.com/>

Produced by the University of Notre Dame's Center for the Study of Social Movements, this website provides scholarly debates and up-to-date news on collective social action.