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New social movements and political opportunities in Western Europe

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Abstract. We present a number of concepts and hypotheses concerning the impact of the political opportunity structure on the mobilisation pattern of new social movements in Western Europe. The hypotheses refer to the general level of mobilisation in a given country, the general forms and strategies of action employed, the system level at which mobilisation is typically oriented and the development of the level of mobilisation across time. The hypotheses are tested in a comparative analysis of France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland. The analysis reveals country-specific variations in the mobilisation patterns of new social movements, which are largely in line with the theoretical expectations and serve to confirm the relevance of the political process approach for the study of social movements.

Introduction

The crucial contention of the so called 'political process' approach to social movements is that social processes impinge indirectly on social protest, via a restructuring of existing power relations (McAdam, 1982). This contention has received considerable support from Skocpol's (1979) analysis of social revolutions. As she has shown, social revolutions are typically triggered by a political crisis that weakens the control on the population exercised by the political system. Similarly, the analysis of a century of collective violence in France, Germany and Italy by Tilly et al. (1975) has indicated that the rhythm of collective violence did not so much depend on structural transformations of society, but was rather directly linked to shifts in the struggle for political power. More recently, the political context has also been shown to be of considerable importance for the mobilisation and the impact of different types of new social movement. Thus, in what has probably been the first systematic study of the impact of the political context on the fate of a new social movement, Kitschelt (1986) has shown how the impact of the anti-nuclear movement varied according to specific characteristics of the political context of the countries he studied.

For the systematic analysis of the political context that mediates structural conflicts given as latent political potentials, the notion of *political opportunity*

structure (POS) has become fashionable. First introduced by Eisinger (1973), it has been elaborated by Tarrow (1983, 1989). We shall employ a modified version of this concept to show the importance of the political context for the mobilisation of new social movements (NSMs) in Western Europe. Following the conceptualisation of Kriesi (1991), we distinguish three broad sets of properties of a political system: its formal institutional structure, its informal procedures and prevailing strategies with regard to challengers, and the configuration of power relevant for the confrontation with the challengers. The first two sets of properties provide the general setting for the mobilisation of collective action; they also constrain the relevant configurations of power. Together with the general setting, the relevant configuration of power specifies the strategies of the 'authorities' or the 'members of the system' with regard to the mobilisation of the 'challengers'.[1] These strategies, in turn, define (a) the extent to which challenging collective action will be facilitated or repressed by 'members of the system', (b) the chances of success such actions may have, and (c) the chances of success if no such actions take place, which may be either positive if the government is reform-oriented, or negative if the government in power is hostile to the movement (Koopmans, 1990).

In other words, the country-specific mix of facilitation/repression and chances of success and of reform is, in part at least, the result of strategic calculations of the authorities. However, it is not exclusively determined by such strategic calculations, since the general setting also restricts this country-specific mix in a way that is independent of the concrete strategies devised by the authorities. Finally, this country-specific mix determines the set of strategic options available for the mobilisation of the 'challengers'. It provides the crucial link between the POS and the challengers' decision to mobilise or not, their choice of the form of mobilisation, the sequence of events to be organised, and the target of their campaign. Figure 1 presents a graphical summary of this argument. As Koopmans (1990) pointed out, the way the country-specific conditions enter into the challengers' strategic calculations will depend on the type of movement in question.[2]

After a brief discussion of each of these general concepts,[3] we shall test some hypotheses concerning the impact of the various aspects of the POS on the mobilisation of NSMs in four Western European countries – France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. These hypotheses will be tested using data on protest events, collected in a comparative project on the development of NSMs in these four countries in the period from 1975 to 1989. Following the lead of others (Kriesi et al., 1981; McAdam, 1983; Tarrow, 1989; Tilly et al., 1975), we have collected systematic data on protest events on the basis of a contents analysis of newspapers.[4] In each one of the four countries, we have analyzed the Monday editions of one major newspaper for the period indicated.[5] Protest events constitute the basic units of an

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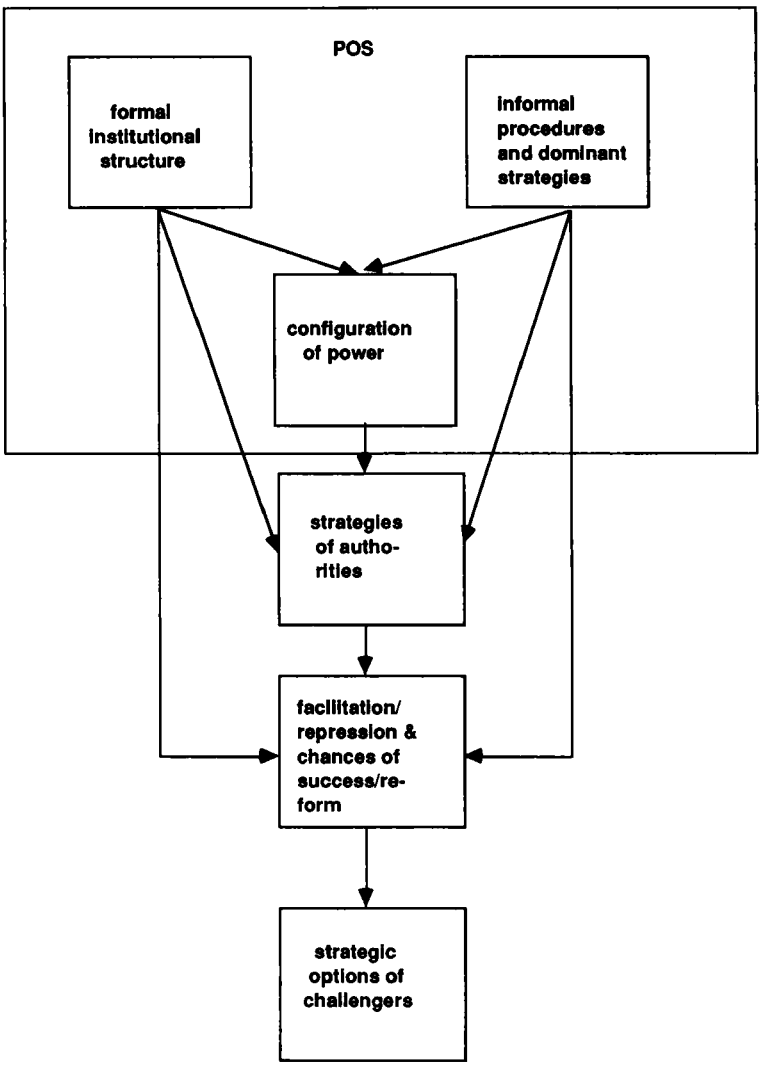

Fig. 1. Conceptual outline of the general argument.

organised, sustained, self-conscious challenge to existing authorities or other political actors. This challenge, in turn, establishes a social movement according to the definition given by Tilly (1984).

We have defined as protest events any kind of public action of a demonstrative, confrontative or violent form which is reported in the newspapers we analysed. Excluded from this definition are conventional legal actions (such as the filling of a legal suit), conventional political actions (such as participation in a consultation procedure), conventional media-oriented actions (such as

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press conferences or public resolutions), and strikes. The actions included range from petitions and demonstrations, through boycotts, disturbances and occupations to violent attacks against persons. In the Swiss case, they also include direct-democratic forms of action – initiatives and referenda. In other words, protest events have been defined irrespective of their goal.

For each event, a limited number of characteristics have been coded.[6] On the basis of the goal of the event, we have decided whether it was an event of a given NSM, or of some other movement. Among the NSMs we count the ecology movement (including its anti-nuclear energy branch), the peace movement, the solidarity movement (encompassing various branches mobilising for humanitarian aid, political refugees, human rights, political regimes in the Third World, and against racism), the autonomous movement (including the squatters movement and the Swiss movement for youth centres), the women's movement, the gay movement, and the citizens' rights movement (mobilising for democratic participation and against repression).

The general political context

For the conceptualization of the overall institutional setting, our approach follows the state-centered theories (Badie & Birnbaum, 1979; Zysman, 1983), which have usefully been applied to the field of new social movements by Kitschelt (1986). In this tradition, a distinction is often made between *weak and strong states*. Weak states are defined by their openness on the input side and by their lack of a capacity to impose themselves on the output side. Conversely, strong states are defined as closed and having a high capacity to impose themselves. The internal structure of the state institutions – the degree of their internal coherence or fragmentation – is thought to determine the overall strength or weakness of the state. Among our four countries, Switzerland clearly seems to have the weakest state, France the strongest one (see Badie & Birnbaum 1979), with the 'semi-sovereign' Federal Republic of Germany (Katzenstein, 1987) coming closer to the Swiss case, and the rather centralised Netherlands more closely resembling the French one (Kriesi, 1990).

The informal procedures and prevailing strategies with respect to challengers are either *exclusive* (repressive, confrontative, polarising) or *integrative* (facilitative, cooperative, assimilative). It is important to note that such procedures have a long tradition in a given country. According to Scharpf (1984: 260), they develop a powerful logic of their own. Efforts to change them are up against all the 'sunk costs' of institutional commitments supporting them. Among our four countries, the French and the German legacy is typically one of exclusion and repression.[7] While the formal institutional

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structure of the Federal Republic has been completely rebuilt after World War II, the dominant strategy of its ruling elite with regard to challengers from below has continued to be marked by the experience of the past (Koopmans, 1991). In contrast to France, however, where the exclusive strategy is associated with a strong state, the exclusive strategy in the Federal Republic combines with a relatively weak state, which will result in a different overall setting for social movements in general, and for NSMs in particular. Integrative strategies are typical for the two small, consensual democracies – the Netherlands and Switzerland. Just as in the exclusive case, they are compatible with rather different formal institutional structures. A strong unitary Dutch state, with a system of cabinet government comparable to the 'Westminster model', together with a relatively coherent bureaucracy, contrasts with a Swiss state weakened by its federalism, its fragmentation and its direct-democratic institutions.

Combining the distinction between strong and weak states with the distinction between exclusive and integrative dominant strategies, we arrive at four distinct general settings for dealing with challengers. As is indicated in Figure 2, each of these general settings corresponds to one of our four countries. The combination of a strong state with an exclusive dominant strategy we call a situation of *full exclusion*. In such a situation, the challenger can count on neither formal nor informal access to the political system. Because of its strength, the state can often choose merely to ignore challenges; if it does react, however, it will most likely confront the challenger with repression. Moreover, since the state is a strong one, the challenger is neither likely to have veto power, nor is he likely to obtain substantive concessions.[8] This case is represented by France.

In contrast to 'full exclusion', we find the case of *full procedural integration*, which is characterised by the combination of a weak state with an inclusive dominant strategy. In such a situation, repression is comparatively weak and the challenger's access to the system is formally as well as informally facilitated. Given the weakness of the system, the challenger cannot count on important substantive concessions, but he may be able to block decisions by exercising a veto. This case is represented by Switzerland. The direct democratic institutions as well as the federalist structure of Switzerland provide for a large number of formal access points for challengers. The traditionally integrative strategy enhances the general effect of the formal structure.

Germany represents one of the two intermediate cases, that of *formalistic inclusion*. In this situation, the challenger can count on formal, but not on informal, facilitation of access. Moreover, he tends to be met with strong repression. There is a possibility of veto, but no concessions can be expected. The federal structure of the German Republic allows for a multiplication of points of access. Moreover, the strong position of the German judiciary

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provides the challengers with another set of independent access points. Compared to Switzerland, the number of formal regional and local access points is, however, more limited, because – apart from some exceptions[9] – the Federal Republic does not have direct democratic institutions. Moreover, the repressive legacy of the system implies that those who articulate themselves outside of the formally available channels will be confronted with strong repression.

The second intermediary case, of *informal cooptation*, is represented by the Netherlands. In such a general setting, challengers do not have a lot of formal access, but they can count on informal facilitation. Such informal measures may not go as far as the overt facilitation of action campaigns of social movements, but they may imply the facilitation of their organisational infrastructure. This includes public recognition, consultation, and even subsidisation of SMOs. Since the Dutch state is also quite strong, it is able to make considerable substantive concessions, and it can prevent challengers from exerting a veto. Concessions have actually been forthcoming in the Dutch case, because of the prevailing inclusive strategies, which serve to preempt challengers.

These general settings can be expected to have a country-specific impact on all challenging mobilisations, not only on those of the NSMs, with respect to the general level of mobilisation, the general form and strategy of the challenging mobilisations, and the system level at which mobilisations are typically oriented.

It is difficult to make predictions about *the general level of mobilisation*. On the one hand, as we have just argued, inclusive strategies have a tendency to preempt protest. However, it also seems plausible to argue that inclusive strategies imply elaborate decision-making processes which increase the chances for challengers to intervene and to exercise a veto. A most telling example is provided by a series of non-decisions by the Dutch government with regard to the stationing of the cruise missiles in the early 1980s, which has given the Dutch peace movement ample opportunities to continue its anti-missiles campaign. On the other hand, one may argue that repressive strategies generally raise the costs of collective action, and thereby serve to limit its scope in a general way.

However, strong repression may also stimulate collective action. As is pointed out by Koopmans (1990), there are at least three ways in which this may happen. First, repression reinforces the identity of countercultural movements, which may stimulate offensive reactions of a rather radical type on the part of these movements. Second, repression may itself become a crucial issue for the challengers. Finally and related to this second point, repression may focus media attention on the challengers, which may result in the support of third parties that would otherwise not have supported the movement. Such

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DOMINANT STRATEGY	FORMAL INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE: weak state	FORMAL INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE: strong state
exclusive	**formalistic inclusion** – formal, but no informal facilitation of access, strong repression – possibility of veto, but no substantive concessions (Germany)	**full exclusion** – neither formal, nor informal facilitation of access, ignoring/ repression – neither possibility of veto, nor substantive concessions (France)
inclusive	**full procedural integration** – formal and informal access, weak repression – possibility of veto, but no substantive concessions (Switzerland)	**informal cooptation** – no formal, but informal access, weak repression – no possibility of veto, but substantive concessions (Netherlands)

Fig. 2. The general settings for the approach of members towards challengers.

supportive mobilisation, in turn, may be expected to be of a rather moderate type.

Although it is thus very hard to say anything about the amount of uncoventional mobilisation, we can be more specific about two types of more conventional mass mobilisation that require relatively little effort from the participants: petitions and direct-democratic actions. The latter, like petitions, amount to the collection and presentation of signatures, but they are different from petitions in that they formally compel the authorities to take a position and to submit the proposition to a vote by all the citizens. The possibility for this type of action is, as we have seen, restricted to the Swiss case, and offers an extra channel of mobilisation to the citizens of that country. We may, therefore, expect that the existence of this possibility in Switzerland leads to a higher overall participation in protest events. Petitions, although of course equally possible in all countries, are not likely to be equally important in all of them. A petition is a very moderate form of action which entails only a small amount of direct pressure on the authorities. It is, therefore, a more likely form of mobilisation in those countries where authorities can be expected to react favourably even to such a friendly show of public discontent. This means that petitions are expected to be most frequent in the two countries with inclusive informal strategies: Switzerland and the Netherlands.

To arrive at a comparable indicator of the general level of mobilisation in each country, we have calculated the total number of persons mobilised in the

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events represented in our newspaper file per million inhabitants; that is, we have taken the sum of all participants[10] in the events we have recorded over the 15 years period, multiplied this by one million and divided by the total population of the country in question. For the events where we did not have any information about the number of participants, we calculated estimates on the basis of the median of the number of participants in comparable events in the same country.[11] In Table 1 the value of this rough indicator of the general level of mobilisation is given for three types of mobilisation: unconventional events mobilising people in the streets (ranging from demonstrations to violent events), petitions, and direct-democratic events.

If we look at the first column, we notice that the general level of uncoventional mobilisation is of the same order of magnitude in each of the four countries. This result reflects the difficulties we had in formulating hypotheses concerning this aspect of mobilisation. We find the result quite puzzling. It suggest that there might be something like a 'natural' level of unconventional mobilisation which is attained – in different ways of course – in each country, irrespective of the POS or the level of structural problems. Of course, we have no way of knowing whether this finding is only accidental. It seems clear, however, that such a 'natural level' can at the most extend to comparable, democratic countries. Dictatorial regimes, at least in the short and medium run, often succeed in limiting protest to a very low level.

However, turning to the more moderate forms of mass mobilisation, significant differences emerge even between the countries under study. The more moderate forms are clearly more popular in the two inclusive, consensual democracies. Due to its additional direct-democratic possibilities, Switzerland now emerges with the highest level of overall mass mobilisation. Strikingly, even outside of direct-democratic channels, quite a lot of petitioning is going on in this country, although the Netherlands rank even higher on this. In the two countries with exclusive dominant strategies, Germany and France, petitions are much less popular, especially in the fully exclusive French case, where people apparently do not have much faith in the effectiveness of such a moderate form of protest.

Table 1. General level of mobilisation (participants/million)

Country	Unconventional mobilisation	Petitions	Direct democracy
The Netherlands	216,000	304,000	–
Germany	232,000	140,000	–
France	237,000	24,000	–
Switzerland	234,000	207,000	198,000

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In line with the above considerations, we hypothesise that, with regard to the *general forms and strategies of action* typically used by challengers in the different countries, the French context of 'full exclusion' invites disruptive strategies on the part of the challengers. As Wilson (1987: 283) observed, the strength of the French state gives rise to its greatest weakness; unable to allow challengers to articulate their concerns through formal or informal channels of access, it is periodically confronted by large scale explosions of discontent. By contrast, the highly accessible Swiss system is expected to invite moderate, conventional strategies on the part of the challengers. Such a system functions much like a sponge; it absorbs all kinds of protest without granting much in the way of concessions to meet the demands of the challengers. In spite of a conspicuous lack of concessions, challengers may continue to mobilise in moderate ways, because procedural success is to some extent a functional equivalent of substantive success (Epple, 1988), and because occasionally the challenges may still exert a veto power. We may expect, however, that there will be considerable variation of this general theme within Switzerland, given that the informal procedures to deal with challengers vary quite substantially from one region to the other.

In the general setting of informal cooptation in the Netherlands, we may also expect collective action to be moderate. The Dutch tradition of pillarisation will especially stimulate the growth of social movement organisations, working through conventional channels, that will be treated in much the same way as are the religious minorities for which the system was set up. This implies large scale subsidisation, integration into advisory bodies, and even some relatively autonomous role in the implementation of government policies. On the other hand, the possibilities to influence policies will not be as large as in Switzerland, most importantly because of the lack of possibilities for direct-democratic intervention and because of the relative strength of the Dutch state. Therefore, the Dutch action repertoire may be expected to include a considerable amount of more radical, confrontative forms of action as well. The low level of repression enables social movements to use such forms but at the same time will ensure that the actions involved remain mainly of a non-violent nature.

Finally, in the case of Germany we may expect the relatively large number of formal access channels, and the possibility of blocking political decisions through such channels, to invite moderate mobilisation. On the other hand, the level of state facilitation of social movements will be quite low, due to the repressive legacy of the German state. While this legacy may also be expected to push the bulk of the activists to more moderate, less risky forms of action, it will at the same time probably lead to the radicalisation of another, smaller group that will turn to more radical, violent forms of action.

In our newspaper analysis, we have distinguished five broad forms of protest

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events of increasing radicalness: direct democratic events, demonstrative events (such as petitions and demonstrations), confrontative events (such as blockades and occupations), events of light violence (such as violent demonstrations and limited damage to objects) and of heavy violence (bombings, arson and violence against persons). For each of the four countries, Table 2 presents the distribution of events over these five forms of action. The distributions are given separately for NSMs and for other movements.

As the table indicates, collective protest in France is, indeed, more disruptive than elsewhere. Heavy violence clearly plays a larger role among French NSMs than among those in other countries. Such violence is not as prominent among the NSMs in France, however, (17.8% of their events belong to this category) as it is among the other French movements, for which it constitutes almost a third (31.4%) of the events. The other movements mainly associated with these violent actions are the French regional movements, especially those in Corsica and the Basque country.

Mobilisation in Switzerland, on the other hand, is most moderate – given the possibility of mobilisation in direct democratic channels. The direct-democratic possibilities turn out to be less frequently used by NSMs (4.8% of events) than by others (13.3%). In spite of the generally moderate character of the Swiss action repertoire, we also find a considerable amount of light violence (10.6% of events) among Swiss NSMs, and some heavy violence (6.1%)

Table 2. Form of protest events (in percentages)

Level	Netherlands	Germany	France	Switzerland
New social movements				
1. Direct democracy	–	–	–	4.8
2. Demonstrative	57.4	66.7	58.8	68.1
3. Confrontative	30.5	19.3	18.7	12.7
4. Light violence	6.5	7.1	4.8	10.6
5. Heavy violence	5.6	6.7	17.8	3.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n	(881)	(1795)	(811)	(811)
Other movements				
1. Direct democracy	–	–	–	13.3
2. Demonstrative	48.2	62.3	34.6	63.0
3. Confrontative	42.9	18.3	27.5	14.5
4. Light violence	2.2	3.1	6.5	3.1
5. Heavy violence	6.7	16.3	31.4	6.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n	(450)	(541)	(1430)	(511)

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among the events produced by other movements. These violent events are largely caused by the urban autonomous movement of Zurich and by the regional movement of the Jura, and are thus explained by regionally specific factors.

In the case of the Netherlands, confrontative mobilisation plays, indeed, the important role that we expected. A total of 30.5% of the events of NSMs and fully 42.9% of the events of other movements can be classified in this category. The Dutch action repertoire is thus clearly more radical than the Swiss, but it is still a moderate kind of radicalism that prevails.

In the German case, the overall repertoire of protest is quite moderate, and comparable to the Swiss. However, heavy violence plays a considerable role among the other movements (16.3% of the events). In fact, the same is true for the NSMs as well. Although the 6.7% of heavy violence is not that much higher than in the Netherlands (5.6%) and in Switzerland (3.8%), it includes very heavy acts of violence (among others committed by the Rote Armee Fraktion), in which several dozens of persons have been killed. The existence of such a violent minority in a generally moderate social movement sector is in line with our above expectations regarding the effect of repression; moderating most and radicalising a minority of protestors.

Highly conventional forms of action, such as lobbying and judicial action are not included in the above figures because such forms only rarely reach the newspaper columns. For the NSMs we have, however, an additional indicator that taps the extent to which such actions are undertaken. This is strength of formal, professionalized movement organisations (SMOs). In Table 3, the total SMO membership per million inhabitants is presented for the three most important NSMs.[12]

The international differences here are quite remarkable and fully in line with what we expected. In the two consensual democracies with integrative strategies, SMOs of NSMs turn out to be much larger than in the two exclusive countries. In both the Netherlands and Switzerland, SMOs receive considerable state subsidies and have a whole range of channels of access available to them. By contrast, in Germany and even more so in France, SMOs have only limited access to the decision-making process, which makes them less attractive for possible members. Moreover, facilitation by the state is much less important in those countries. The differences among the four countries can also be seen when we consider the national branches of international SMOs only. Thus, for instance, the national chapters of Amnesty International and the World Wildlife Fund have, even in absolute terms, a larger membership in the Netherlands and in Switzerland than in Germany and France, although the number of inhabitants of the latter two countries is much higher. Equally remarkable are the differences between the three movements. The same pattern emerges in all four countries, with the ecology movement having by far

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Table 3. Membership of new social movement organisations (per million inhabitants)

Level	Netherlands	Germany	France	Switzerland
Ecological movement	85,000	34,000	17,000	78,000
Solidarity movement	18,000	2,000	2,000	18,000
Peace movement	3,000	1,000	1,000	3,000
Total	106,000	37,000	19,000	100,000

the strongest organisational infrastructure, the solidarity movement being already a lot less organised and, finally, the peace movement being quite weak as far as its formalised organisations are concerned.

With regard to the system level at which mobilisation is typically oriented, our hypothesis is simple. We maintain that mobilisation is predominantly oriented at the national level in centralised states, while being above all oriented at the regional or local level in decentralised states. Table 4 largely confirms this hypothesis.

In the two federalist countries – Germany and Switzerland – mobilisation is much more decentralised than in the two centralised ones – the Netherlands and France. The Swiss NSMs in particular are by far the most locally-oriented ones – 43.5% of their events are locally oriented – whereas the German NSMs are about as locally oriented (25.3% of their events) as they are oriented toward the regional level (22.1%). The very limited regional orientation of the

Table 4. System level towards which protest events are oriented (in percentages)

Level	Netherlands	Germany	France	Switzerland
New social movements				
1. International	25.9	12.8	8.7	22.8
2. National	51.7	38.8	66.6	29.8
3. Regional	3.7	22.1	17.6	3.8
4. Local	18.7	25.3	7.2	43.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n	(870)	(1789)	(809)	(811)
Other movements				
1. International	16.4	16.5	4.1	19.4
2. National	56.0	40.2	74.7	15.1
3. Regional	5.5	11.8	10.1	33.7
4. Local	21.9	31.4	11.1	31.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n	(439)	(532)	(1422)	(510)

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Swiss NSMs (3.8% of their events) is striking compared to the remarkably strong regional focus of the other Swiss movements (33.7%). Given the great weight of the regional, (cantonal) level in Swiss politics, the absence of a regional orientation of the Swiss NSMs is all the more astonishing. The concentration of the events of the French NSMs, as well as of the other French movements, on the national level corresponds to the far-reaching centralisation of the French state. What also distinguishes the French movements from those in the other three countries is their lack of international orientation.

Summarising, we conclude that the French pattern of mobilisation is the most centralised, the least formally organised and the most radical. As a result of their overall radicalism and lack of formal organisation, the French movements also mobilise a comparatively small number of people in moderate forms. Thus, the French pattern of social movement mobilisation mirrors the situation of 'full exclusion' movements have to face in the same country. The Swiss pattern, by contrast, is the most decentralised and the most moderate one, mobilising the comparatively largest number of people. Moreover, formalised SMOs operating through conventional channels are very strong in Switzerland, reflecting the characteristics of 'full procedural integration' prevailing in this case. The Dutch and German patterns, finally, correspond to the contradictory situations the social movements are confronted with in these countries. Integrative strategies coupled with a strong state result in a centralised, but otherwise hybrid mobilisation pattern in the Dutch case. This pattern combines strong formalised, fully integrated SMOs mobilising comparatively large numbers of people in rather conventional forms with a moderate, non-violent radicalism of those protesting in the streets. 'Formalistic inclusion' in the German case, finally, results in an equally hybrid, but nevertheless distinct pattern that combines a largely decentralised mobilisation of the majority of protesters by relatively moderate, but little formally organised means with a far-reaching radicalisation of a small violent minority.

The configuration of power in the party system

We shall now turn to the third broad set of properties of the POS: the configuration of power. We shall here focus on the configuration of power in the party system. A more complete treatment should also take into account the corresponding configuration in the system of interest-intermediation, especially that in the union system. Moreover, the opportunities for a specific movement or set of movements (like the NSMs) will also depend on the composition of the social movement sector (SMS) at large. Compared to the configuration of power in the party system, these factors are in our opinion,

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however, of only secondary importance for the mobilisation of NSMs, which is the main reason why we do not treat them systematically here.

The configuration of power in the party system refers to the distribution of power among the various parties as well as to the relations which exist between these parties. As is indicated in Figure 1, the configuration of power in a given political system can be thought of as an element of the POS that intervenes between the formal institutional structure and the system's general strategic legacy on one hand, and the country-soecific mix of strategies applied to challengers on the other. Itself constrained by the general systemic context (such as the electoral system) the configuration of power in turn sets more specific limits to the strategies available to the authorities with regard to given challengers.[13] It modifies the openness of access channels and the system's capacity to act, and it modulates the general strategic legacy.

Not all the established parties have been of equal significance for the mobilisation of NSMs in Western Europe. The supporters of NSMs typically belong to the electoral potential of the left (see Müller-Rommel, 1984, 1989; Kriesi & van Praag Jr., 1987). Therefore, we have to pay particular attention to the *configuration of power on the left.* As has been indicated in more detail elsewhere (Kriesi, 1991), two aspects of this configuration are of particular importance in the present context: whether or not the left is divided between a major Communist current and a Social Democratic/Socialist one, and whether or not the left participates in government.

Following Brand (1985: 322), we propose that under conditions of a *split left*, there will be relatively little action space for the NSMs in general, and that support for their mobilisation by the Social-Democrats will be strongly conditioned by their struggle for the hegemony on the left. By contrast, in a setting where the left has *not been divided* and where the class conflict has been pacified by the time of the emergence of the NSMs, there will be more action space for the NSMs and the Social Democrats can be expected to be much more likely to support the mobilisation of these new challengers. To what extent they will be prepared to do so depends, however, on a second set of factors.[14]

With regard to this second set, we expect the Social Democrats to profit, if they are *in the opposition*, from the challenges that NSMs direct at the government. These challenges weaken their major opponents in the next elections. Moreover, since the supporters of NSMs also form part of the electoral potential of the left, the Social Democrats will appeal to them in the frame-work of a general strategy designed to build as broad an electoral coalition as possible. Being in the opposition, they will therefore tend to facilitate the mobilisation of NSMs. On the other hand, being in the opposition, they have of course no possibility to make any material concessions to the NSMs. If *in government,* the Social Democrats will be much less amenable to

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the mobilisation of NSMs, even if they may be willing to make limited concessions to some of them. The details of the strategy chosen by a Social Democratic governing party depend on its position in the government. If the Social Democrats govern alone, then they will be more able to make concessions than if they depend on a coalition partner. If they are only a minority partner in coalition governments, then they may not be able to make any concessions at all.

These considerations imply decisive changes in the POS of NSMs, when the left becomes part of the government, and when it resigns from government. If the left takes power, the necessity for mobilisation decreases for NSMs, because of anticipated chances of reform in their favour. At the same time, their mobilisation is no longer facilitated by their most powerful ally. The net result predicted is a clear-cut decrease in the mobilisation of NSMs, but not necessarily for other movements that are not dependent on the support of the left. Conversely, if the left resigns from government, the necessity for mobilisation increases for NSMs, because the chances of reform in their favour become much more limited. Moreover, their mobilisation is now facilitated by their most powerful ally. The net result to be expected in this case is a clearcut increase in the mobilisation of NSMs, but not necessarily of other movements that are not dependent on the support of the left.[15] The impact of these changes in the POS of NSMs may not exactly coincide with the change in government. We have to allow for some measure of anticipation or delay. For example, the deterioration of a government coalition where the left participates may already improve the POS of NSMs before the effective collapse of the coalition. Similarly, prolonged coalition formation and unstable prospects of a newly-formed centre-right coalition may delay the mobilisation of the left against the new government.

The general outline of the configuration of power on the left is given by the two crucial dimensions discussed so far – split/unified left, left in/out of government. It is also, finally, modified by the extent to which *new forces on the left* (the New Left, and Green parties in particular) have constituted themselves as new actors within the party system, and by the extent to which the traditional major parties on the left – Communists and Social Democrats – have been open with regard to these new forces.

We should briefly like to discuss the strategies chosen by the Social Democrats with regard to NSMs in the four selected countries in the light of these general theoretical expectations. Figure 3 indicates the situation of the Social Democrats in the four countries in the course of the last twenty years.

Let us first take a look at the French Social Democrats. Among the four countries selected, these are the only ones who have been faced by a major Communist party. In the early 1970s, the Communists were definitively the dominant force on the left. It was at that time that President Pompidou

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		Left divided into major Communist/Social Democratic parties: No	Left divided into major Communist/Social Democratic parties: Yes
Social Democrats in government	Yes	Germany (1970s), Netherlands (until 1977, 1981/82), Switzerland	France (1980s)
	No	Germany (1980s), Netherlands (1980s)	France (1970s)

Fig. 3. Situation of the Social Democratic parties in the countries under study.

predicted that, as a result of the bipolar dynamics of the presidential system, only two political forces would survive in French politics – the Gaullists and the Communists. He has, of course, been wrong. By the early 1980s, the Socialist Party (PS) has become the dominant force on the left.[16] To gain predominance on the left, the PS has opened itself to various leftist militants since the early 1970s. It has attracted important groups of militants from the CFDT, the PSU, left wing Catholics, and also from the NSMs. At that time, the PS appeared to be the best of all possible choices for NSM-supporters and activists (Ladrech, 1989). But, for the PS, the integration of the concerns of the NSMs remained superficial. It constituted a tactical choice rather than a fundamental reorientation.

As the renewed party rapidly gained success, it became increasingly less accessible to outside forces such as the NSMs (Lewis & Sferza, 1987). In the course of the late 1970s, the party's strategy has become less facilitative, although it has remained generally favourable to the NSMs. Not soon after the PS came to power in 1981, its strategy has changed again, in line with what we would have expected. The party abandoned the concerns of NSMs which would have imperiled its short-term management of the economy. Thus, it completely gave up its – admittedly always quite limited – anti-nuclear position (von Oppeln, 1989). Depending on the issues raised by NSMs, the PS in power has, at worst, followed a fully exclusive strategy, at best one of cooptation by material concessions and procedural integration. The only exception from this general pattern is the anti-racist movement, which received strong support from the socialists, even when they were in government.

The German Social Democratic party (SPD) has traversed a trajectory exactly opposite to that of the French PS. All through the 1970s and up to 1982, the SPD was the dominant partner in a coalition with the FDP. During this period, it followed a strategy which comes close to full exclusion – close to the

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one of the French socialists in power. To understand why, we should, first, note that the SPD had to govern in coalition with the FDP, which imposed a constraint on the amount of concessions they could have made to the NSMs. Second, the generally repressive legacy prevented the governing SPD from taking a more integrative stance toward the NSMs. Third, the terrorist attacks during the 1970s, while being themselves in part a result of the generally repressive mood, reinforced the tendency of the governing SPD to resort to repression once again. Finally, although there was no Communist competition in Germany, the SPD nevertheless was under pressure from the strong union movement to stick to the traditional goals of the labour movement. However, contrary to the PS, the leadership of the SPD was not able to centralise debate on the new issues, or to keep internal discussions under control. This greater openness of the SPD can be attributed to a number of factors (von Oppeln, 1989): the federal structure of the German political system; the relatively strong position of the party's youth organisation (Juso's); the challenge by a vigorous Green party since 1979; and the programmatic disorientation of the SPD in the final stages of the left-liberal coalition. When the coalition finally broke down in 1982 and the SPD had to join the ranks of the opposition, these factors resulted in a much more facilitative strategy with regard to the new challengers.

In line with the integrative strategy of the Dutch political system, the Dutch Social Democrats (PvdA) have been open to NSMs since the early 1970s. Under the impact of the depillarisation of the Dutch political system and significant competition from New Left parties in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the PvdA had radicalised and attracted many New Left militants, who eventually gained control over the party (Kriesi, 1989). Being the dominant government party from 1973 to 1977 tempered its support for NSM mobilisation provisionally. But after its change into the opposition in 1977, the PvdA came even closer to the NSMs than it had already been. It joined the antinuclear power camp in 1979 – after the Harrisburg accident (Cramer, 1989: 66) – and, most importantly, it embraced the goals of the peace movement (Kriesi, 1989). Except for its brief spell in government in 1981–82, one may describe the strategy of the PvdA with respect to NSMs during the first half of the 1980s as one of strong facilitation. This situation changed radically, however, after 1985. In this year, the PvdA's liaison with the peace movement finally proved to be a failure, when the government decided to deploy cruise missiles after all. When this decision did not lead to the hoped for electoral gains for the PvdA in the 1986 elections, the Social Democrats' close link to the NSMs was almost completely severed. This was the result of a new party strategy (finally successful in 1989) designed to make the PvdA acceptable to the Christian Democrats as a government partner once more. This example shows that there may be

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conditions under which even a Social Democratic party in opposition may refrain from supporting the NSMs.

The Swiss Social Democrats (SP/PS), finally, have had an ambiguous position with regard to NSMs. Having been part of the grand-coalition that has governed Switzerland since 1959, they shared the formal responsibility for the government's policies against which the NSMs mobilise. Having always been in a clear minority position within the governing coalition, they have at the same time been opposed to the government on specific issues, including several issues of concern to NSMs. The ambiguity of the party's position is reflected by its internal division into a party left and a party right. As a result of the most fragmented character of the Swiss party system, the specific configuration of power within the party has varied from one canton to the other.

Given the situations described, we first maintain that the NSMs have generally played a less important role in France than in the other three countries. The split in the left in France, as well as the absence of a pacification of class and other traditional conflicts,[17] are expected to have limited the action space of NSMs to a greater extent than elsewhere. The results presented in Table 5 confirm this hypothesis.

The percentage of protest events caused by NSMs is considerably lower in France (36.1%) than elsewhere. Measured by the share of protest events, the preponderance of NSMs turns out to be particularly impressive in Germany (76.9%), but they dominate also in the two smaller countries where they cause around two-thirds of the events. Except for Switzerland, we get largely similar results if we measure the relative importance of the NSMs by the share of participants they have mobilised in each country. In the case of Switzerland, the share of participants (47.7%), turns out to be considerably smaller than the share of the number of events (63.7%). This means that, on the average, the events caused by Swiss NSMs are clearly less massive than those caused by other Swiss movements and that, in relative terms, they are also less massive than those generated by the NSMs in the other countries. Among the other Swiss movements, the regional movement of the Jura, in particular, has been able to mobilise large numbers of people over an extended period of time –

Table 5. The relative level of mobilisation of NSMs and other movements in the four countries

Country	Percentage of events caused by NSMs	Percentage of participants mobilised by NSMs
The Netherlands	66.1 (n = 1331)	72.9
Germany	76.9 (n = 2336)	81.4
France	36.1 (n = 2241)	37.1
Switzerland (without direct dem.)	63.7 (n = 1215)	47.7

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much larger numbers than any of the NSMs of the country. Moreover, the fact that events associated with Swiss NSMs turn out to be less massive than those of other countries is clearly linked to their predominantly local orientation. Local events are typically smaller than events targeted at higher system levels in all the countries.

Second, following the above considerations about the effect of the Social Democrats' acceding to or resigning from government, we expect a clear decline in France in the level of mobilisation of NSMs since 1981, the moment the left came to power. The mobilisation of the labour movement is also likely to have declined, but not the mobilisation of the other movements. Conversely, for Germany we expect an increase in the level of mobilisation of NSMs, starting in the early 1980s. The left has lost power in 1982, but the coalition had already started to get into difficulties before that date, and competition from the Greens had set in since 1979. No corresponding increase is expected for the other movements – with the possible exception of the labour movement. In the Netherlands, the mobilisation of NSMs, but not necessarily that of other movements, should have started to increase in 1978. For Switzerland, predictions are more difficult, since there has never been an explicit change in government as in the other countries. Alternatively, one might argue that the takeover of the Social Democratic party organisation by its left wing in some cantons during the late 1970s may have had a clear mobilisation effect on the NSMs in the regions concerned.

Figure 4 allows for a test of these expectations. It contains four diagrams, one for each country. In each diagram, the evolution of the number of events caused by NSMs and the one caused by all the other movements are shown.[18] Let us first look at the two large countries. The contrasting evolution of the number of NSM events in the two countries starting in the early 1980s is striking: whereas Germany experiences a surge of NSM activity after 1980, there is a decline of their mobilisation in France. This contrast corresponds to our hypothesis about the impact of the loss of power of the left in Germany, and of its access to power in France. The level of mobilisation of the other movements has hardly at all been affected by this change in the configuration of power, which also corresponds to our expectations. Here however, the aggregation of all other movements obscures important differences. Whereas left-wing mobilisation follows the same declining pattern as the NSMs, mobilisation from the right increases after the coming to power of the socialists.

Turning to the two smaller countries, the case of the Netherlands confirms the general hypothesis once again. After the Social Democrats lost power, the level of mobilisation of NSMs started to increase and reached impressive peaks in the early 1980s. The reaction to the change in power has not been as rapid as in France or Germany, but the general pattern conforms to what we have expected. Also as predicted, after 1985 the Dutch NSMs experience a rela-

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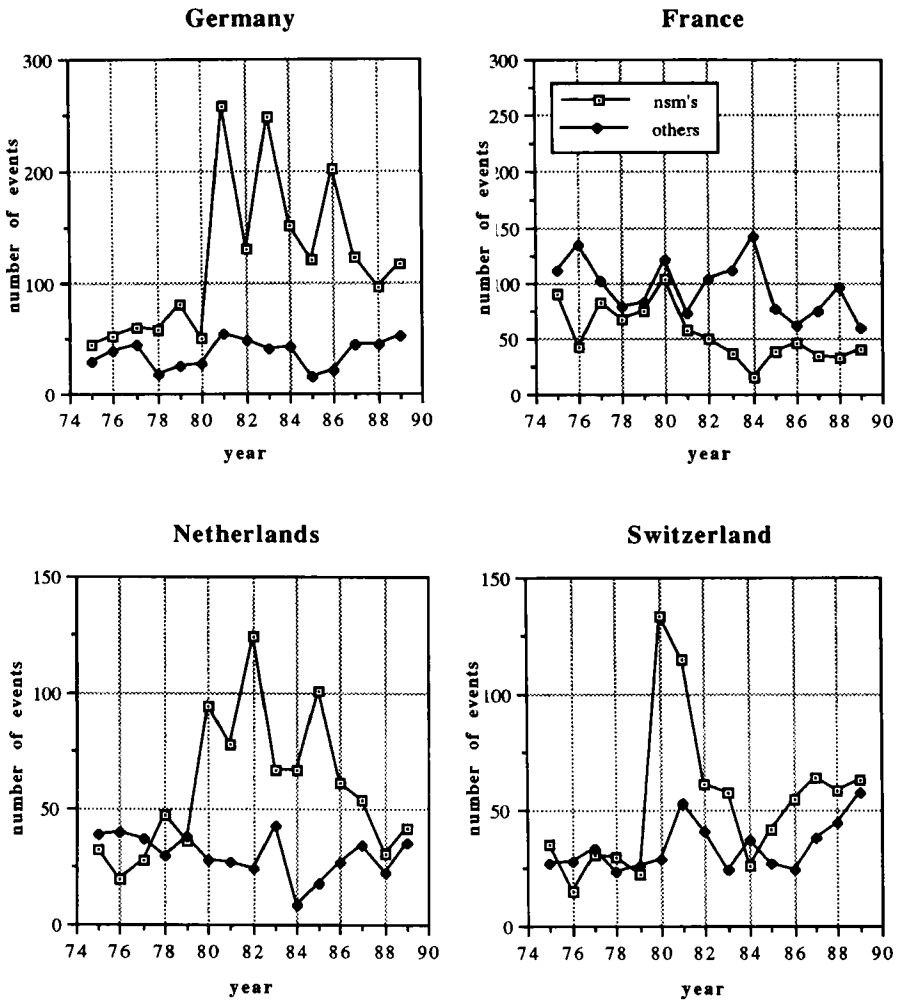

Fig. 4. Evolution of the number of events caused by NSMs and by other movements in the four countries between 1975 and 1989.

tively strong decline that coincides with the changes in the strategy of the Social Democrats. As in France and Germany, the other movements have once more not been affected by such changes in the configuration of power. In the Swiss case, we also find a substantial increase in the mobilisation of NSMs at the beginning of the 1980s. This increase has, however, been almost exclusively a result of the mobilisation of the urban autonomous movement at Zurich. This lends some support to our hypothesis that the change in power within the regional and local Social Democratic party may have been conducive to the enormous increase in the overall level of mobilisation. Concerning

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the other Swiss movements, they have again hardly been affected by such changes in the configuration of power on the local level.

To conclude this section, we should draw the reader's attention to the fact that we have not offered any hypotheses about the course of the events once the mobilisation of NSMs has reacted to a change in the configuration of power. The basic idea is that the initial change in the level of mobilisation caused by a basic change in the configuration of power will establish a specific interaction context which will follow its own auto-dynamic course. Karstedt-Henke (1980), Tarrow (1989, 1989a) and Koopmans (1990a) have presented some theoretical arguments about how such interaction contexts may develop. Finally, the argument presented has not taken into account differences between various NSMs with regard to their dependence on POS either. More detailed analyses show that not all NSMs react to the same extent to a change in the configuration of power (Duyvendak, 1990a; Giugni & Kriesi, 1990).

Conclusion

In this paper we have tried to elaborate the notion that 'politics matter', even in the field of new social movements. In stressing the importance of conventional politics for movement politics, we have implicitly taken issue with the mainstream of NSM analyses in Western Europe, for which aspects of social and cultural change are central to the understanding of the evolution of NSM mobilisation. In our view, social and cultural change only become relevant for the mobilisation of social movements to the extent that they are mediated by politics. In focusing on politics we do not deny the relevance of other factors for the explanation of the origins and the development of social movements in general, and of NSMs in particular. However, we maintain that the overt collective action that constitutes the organised, sustained, self-conscious challenge to existing authorities is best understood if it is related to political institutions, and to what happens in arenas of conventional party and interest group politics. We interpret the general thrust of our results as a confirmation of this basic point.

The invisible side of social movements, the activity which does not become public and is not reported in the newspapers, is probably less related to the factors of POS. To stress the overt challenge of social movements is not to deny that movements have a less visible side as well. Since it does not treat the latent side of social movements at all, the theory presented here obviously is only a partial one. However, in our view, the crucial element of a social movement is its overt challenge to authorities – it is the series of action campaigns, constituted in interaction with the authorities, that defines a social movement in Tilly's (1984) terms.

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As indicated, the argument presented in this paper presumes that the most relevant level of the POS is the national one. The other levels have entered into our argument only in a subsidiary way. This raises, finally, the question as to whether the theoretical argument is not only partial, but also one that is no longer pertinent for the explanation of the evolution of contemporary movements mobilising in a world that increasingly becomes determined by international politics. The international POS certainly is becoming more relevant for movement politics as well. Today, changes in the international POS may have a structural impact on the level of the national POS. Thus, the breakdown of the formerly communist states in Eastern Europe and the end of the divide between East and West introduce fundamental changes in the POS of NSMs in the countries with a traditionally divided left. The end of the divide between East and West implies, in the not too long run the end of the divided left in these countries. In this case, it is still the national POS which ultimately determines the mobilisation of NSMs, although a national POS of an entirely different make-up. The relevance of the national POS may, however, decline in an even more fundamental way, if the nation-state loses its prominence in conventional politics in a unified and/or regionalised Europe. There certainly are strong tendencies towards the decline of the nation-state, but we believe that they should not be exaggerated at this point. They do not yet challenge the crucial importance of the national-level POS for the mobilisation of NSMs.

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Notes

1. We adopt here the simple distinction between 'members' and 'challengers' as it has been made by Tilly (1978). While it is not always possible to separate members from challengers neatly, we stick to this distinction to simplify the exposition. We shall frequently refer to the 'members' in terms of 'authorities', that is, the two terms are used interchangeably.
2. We are aware of the fact that both types of strategy – those of the authorities and those of the challengers – are to some extent mutually independent. This interdependence does, however, not enter into the present discussion, because the focus is on those aspects of the political context that have to be taken as given by the challenging actors. The mutually interdependent

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aspects of the political context belong to what we propose to call the 'interaction context' of a specific challenge. The interaction context follows its own logic which will not be treated here.

3. For a more detailed account of these concepts and their implications, see Kriesi (1991).
4. For more details about this methodology and the problems it involves we refer the reader to the presentation of Tarrow (1989: 27–31, 349–66) and to the summary discussion of Olzak (1989).
5. We used *Le Monde* for France, *Frankfurter Rundschau* for Germany, *NRC* for the Netherlands, and the *NZZ* for Switzerland. To limit the amount of work, we restricted ourselves to one issue per week. We chose the Monday edition, because a large number of protest events take place over the weekends, which means that we get at a larger number of events than if we had picked a day at random.
6. These characteristics include the location of the event in time and space, its form and thematic focus, the number of participants (if possible as reported by the organisers of the event), the organisations participating, the reactions of the authorities and the possible location of the event within larger action campaigns of the movements concerned.
7. As other Southern European countries, France has a long legacy of repression of the labour movement (Golden, 1986; Gallie, 1983).
8. We did not enter here into the discussion of the different forms of success. For a more detailed discussion of this point, see Gamson (1975: 28ff.), Kitschelt (1986: 66f.) and Kriesi (1991).
9. There are direct-democratic procedures (*Volksbegehren*) in one member state of the Federal Republic – Bavaria – and on the community level in Baden-Württemberg.
10. In case the newspaper reports contained more than one estimate of the number of participants, we have chosen the highest figure reported, which is of course usually the version of the organisers.
11. The number of events with missing data about participants were not evenly distributed among our four countries: the percentage of missing data range from 4% for Germany, though 16% for the Netherlands and 20% for France to 28% for Switzerland. A comparable event was defined as an event of the same form (e.g. demonstration) in the same country (e.g. a demonstration in France).
12. The figures have been computed by adding the 1989 (or the year for which figures were available closest to that year) membership figures of all large formalised organisations for each movement, as reported by the organisations themselves. The figures have been rounded to whole thousands.
13. The configuration of power is, of course, also a function of the cleavage structure of a given society (see Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). We acknowledge this determinant factor, but we want to restrict our attention here to the interrelationships among the elements of the political system.
14. The structure of the union system also plays a role in this context. Thus, a strong union system may exert pressure on the Social Democrats to give priority to the traditional labour concerns, even if they do not face a serious trade-off in electoral terms.
15. The labour movement may be an exception, because it may also have a greater incentive to mobilise under these circumstances.
16. On the right, the Gaullists soon had to contend with a second major conservative force (UDF), not to talk about the rise of the Front National.
17. Apart from class conflict, other 'traditional' conflicts still play an important role in French politics. In the whole period under study, regional conflicts played an important role in the social movement sector (responsible for 17.9% of all unconventional events), and in the 1980s conflicts around the position of religious education mobilised hundreds of thousands (responsible for 9.3% of all events and 17.5% of all participants).
18. Among the other movements, the labour movement is included. Since we have not taken strikes into account in our analysis, the number of events caused by the labour movement is

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relatively small in all the countries – it varies between 3.6% for Switzerland and 9.8% for France. In order to keep the presentation in Figure 5 as simple as possible, we have not shown the evolution of the labour movements separately.

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