

Social Movement and Public Policy: Trends, Causes and Solutions

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Abstract This research paper attempts to explore the relationship between social movements and public policy, involving historical context, theoretical foundations, encountered challenges, and potential remedies for enhancing their influence. The background highlights the enduring impact of social movements, exemplified by historical milestones like the suffragettes and civil rights activists, who reshaped public policies significantly. The literature review dissects key theoretical frameworks, including resource mobilization theory, framing theory and political opportunity theory, illuminating their relevance in understanding how social movements affect policy change. The secondary qualitative analysis as a research method is chosen to extract valuable theoretical insights. Findings emphasize the historical significance of social movements in shaping public policy, whereas the theoretical frameworks provide multifaceted perspectives on their workings. Major attention is directed towards the formidable challenges faced by these movements, advocating for strategic adaptability, persuasive framing, and acknowledgment of intersectionality as essential strategies. The implications extend to informed policymaking and societal progress, underscoring the need for a nuanced understanding of social movements' impact on public policy.

Keywords: *Social movement, Public policy, Policy influence, Intersectionality, Activism*

Introduction

In the present modern society, the dynamics between social movements and the realm of public policy stands as an essential thread, one that joins the fabric of collective aspirations and societal progress. Social movements, particularly those concerted and often grassroots efforts driven by shared grievances and visions for change, have not only shaped public discourse but have also influenced the very policies that govern lives. In this regard, this research attempts to analyze the resemblance of this relationship by unearthing the recent trends that have historically characterized their interactions, as well as dissecting the root causes that propel them forward, and subsequently examining the potential solutions that may arise when these two formidable forces converge.

Research Background

The historical lineage of social movements is as extensive as it is diverse, an unfolding chronicle of human endeavor that stretches across continents, centuries, and causes. From the suffragette movement's relentless struggle for women's voting rights to the civil rights movement's monumental pursuit of racial equality, social movements have indelibly etched their imprints on the annals of history. These movements, erupted and prevailed by impassioned activists and resonant causes, have left enduring legacies. They have reconfigured societal norms, reshaped public policies, and acted as the driving force behind transformative change (Osa, 2015). If one is to journey through time, we would encounter countless movements, each a chapter in the

story of human progress. The labour movement's fight for workers' rights in the late 19th and early 20th centuries ushered in pivotal labour reforms and regulations. The environmental movement of the 20th century bore witness to the birth of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the United States and laid the groundwork for global discussions on climate change mitigation.

Even today, in the 21st century, we witness the rise of social movements addressing pressing issues such as gun control, racial justice, and gender equality, each carving its unique path toward policy change. It is within this historical context that the significance of studying the relationship between social movements and public policy becomes evident. The resonance of social movements transcends the boundaries of time and geography, underscoring their enduring relevance in shaping the contours of our world (Tarrow, 2017). These movements not only bring marginalized voices to the forefront but also serve as a catalyst for governmental responsiveness, policy adaptation, and societal evolution.

Research Significance

The exploration of the interplay between social movements and public policy is not merely an academic pursuit but also a vital attempt with societal implications. Its significance radiates across multiple dimensions, encompassing political, social, and cultural realms, and it is underpinned by a compelling rationale that extends beyond the confines of scholarship. As societies become increasingly diverse and heterogeneous, issues related to identity, rights, and representation come to the forefront. Social

movements, often rooted in identity politics, advocate for the recognition and inclusion of diverse perspectives and communities (Klandermans, 2018). Public policy, in turn, becomes a mechanism for translating these demands into tangible changes.

Research Rationale

The symbiotic relationship between social movements and public policy underscores the adaptability and responsiveness of democratic governance. Movements serve as a barometer of societal discontent and evolving norms, pushing governments and institutions to adapt to changing circumstances. Policymakers who heed the calls of movements demonstrate a capacity for democratic responsiveness, enhancing the legitimacy of the governance structures they oversee. Conversely, those who resist change or suppress social movements may find themselves out of step with the evolving values and expectations of their constituents (Tarrow, 2019). Thus, by analyzing how movements influence policy, policymakers can make more informed decisions, anticipate emerging issues and engage proactively with citizens. Through an exploration of the trends, causes, and solutions embedded in the relationship between social movements and public policy, this research contributes to the broader discourse on social change and offers a roadmap for creating more equitable, responsive and inclusive societies.

Research Questions

The questions to be addressed in this research are articulated as under:

1. What are the discernible trends in how social movements influence public policy?
2. What underlying forces propel the emergence and persistence of social movements that seek to impact public policy?
3. How do social movements adapt their strategies and tactics to navigate the challenges posed by political, institutional, and societal barriers?

Literature Review

Historical Evolution of Social Movements

The retrospection of social movements is a rich and textured narrative of human collective action for change. It is within this context that we discover the seeds of contemporary activism and the enduring legacy of movements that have shaped societies and policies for generations. As we scrutinize the historical evolution of social movements, we encounter a narrative marked by ebbs and flows, successes and setbacks, and the enduring pursuit of justice and equality.

As far as the early 20th century is concerned, it

witnessed the pioneering efforts of suffragettes who campaigned ardently for women's voting rights. This pivotal movement, marked by both peaceful protests and civil disobedience, challenged the status quo of male-dominated political systems. Its eventual success not only granted women the right to vote but also set a precedent for future movements seeking systemic change. Similarly, the labour movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries served as a crucible of collective action (Klandermans, 2018). Workers' unions, often born out of dire working conditions and exploitative labour practices, agitated for fair wages, better working conditions, and collective bargaining rights. Their activism led to landmark labour reforms and regulations, reshaping the labour landscape for generations to come.

The mid-20th century bore witness to perhaps the most transformative social movements in recent history. The civil rights movement in the United States, led by luminaries such as Martin Luther King Jr., galvanized millions to demand an end to racial segregation and discrimination. Through nonviolent protests, civil disobedience, and powerful rhetoric, this movement achieved monumental victories, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Simultaneously, the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s ignited a wave of activism that reverberated globally (Zald, 2013). Advocating for women's rights, gender equality, and reproductive freedom, this movement shattered societal norms and paved the way for subsequent feminist campaigns. The impact of these movements extended far beyond their immediate goals, influencing public policy, and reshaping societal norms.

In the latter half of the 20th century, the environmental movement emerged as a powerful force for change. Concerns about pollution, resource depletion, and the looming specter of climate change galvanized environmental activists worldwide. Their efforts led to the establishment of environmental protection agencies, the enactment of environmental regulations, and the birth of international agreements to combat climate change. As societies entered the 21st century, new social movements arose, often facilitated by advancements in communication technology. Movements advocating for LGBTQ+ rights, indigenous rights, and immigrant rights leveraged the power of the internet and social media to connect and mobilize supporters globally (Verhulst & Walgrave, 2018). These movements challenged traditional power structures and norms, highlighting the evolving nature of social activism.

Theoretical Approaches to Social Movements and Policy Influence

The study of social movements and their impact on public policy is intrinsically tied to theoretical frameworks that offer insights into the motivations,

strategies, and dynamics at play. These theories are essential lenses through which we interpret the complex interplay between activists, institutions, and societal change. However, it is imperative to critically evaluate these theoretical perspectives, recognizing their strengths, limitations, and evolving relevance in the context of contemporary social movements.

Resource Mobilization Theory

The resource mobilization theory posits that the success of social movements is contingent upon their ability to access and deploy resources effectively. These resources include financial support, organizational infrastructure, and social capital. According to this framework, movements must mobilize resources to sustain long-term campaigns, influence public opinion, and engage with policymakers. While resource mobilization theory underscores the practical necessities of activism, it can be critiqued for its potential to oversimplify the motivations and moral imperatives that drive social movements (Klandermans, 2018). It may inadvertently reduce the complex web of activism to a matter of resource allocation, neglecting the deeply ingrained values and principles that inspire social change.

Framing Theory

Framing theory asserts that social movements engage in strategic framing to shape public discourse and perception. Movements construct "frames" or narratives that define issues, assign responsibility, and offer solutions. Effective framing can garner public support, influence policy agendas, and challenge dominant discourses. The framing theory provides valuable insights into the persuasive power of narrative construction, alongside raises questions about the ethical implications of framing (Davenport & Ball, 2015). Critics argue that framing can sometimes lead to oversimplification or manipulation of complex issues, potentially obscuring important nuances in the pursuit of mobilizing support.

Political Opportunity Theory

This theory examines the role of political context in facilitating or inhibiting social movements. It argues that favourable political opportunities, such as shifts in power dynamics or changes in public sentiment, can empower movements to effect change. Conversely, unfavourable conditions may stifle activism. Political opportunity theory is vital for understanding the external factors that shape the trajectories of movements. However, it may underestimate the agency and strategic adaptability of social movements (Tilly, 2015). Movements often create their opportunities through skilful advocacy and innovative tactics, challenging the notion that they are entirely contingent on external factors.

Contemporary Relevance and Evolving Theoretical Frameworks

In the era of digital communication and transnational

activism, it is imperative to critically examine the continued relevance of these traditional theories. New social movements, often facilitated by social media and decentralized structures, challenge established theoretical paradigms. They operate in an environment where resource mobilization, framing, and political opportunities are redefined (Tilly, 2015). Moreover, as social movements increasingly engage with intersectionality, recognizing the interconnectedness of various social issues, theoretical frameworks must adapt to accommodate this complexity. Theoretical perspectives that fail to account for the multifaceted nature of contemporary activism risk becoming obsolete. In conclusion, while theoretical frameworks provide valuable lenses for understanding social movements and their influence on public policy, a critical approach reminds us that no single theory can fully encapsulate the complexities of activism (Tarrow 2019). By recognizing the strengths and limitations of these frameworks, we can better navigate the intricate terrain where theory meets practice

Case Studies of Social Movements and Their Policy Impact

The examination of case studies offers us a window into the intricate dynamics of social movements and their tangible influence on public policy. By dissecting the experiences of specific movements, we can discern the strategies, challenges, and outcomes that define their activism. However, a critical analysis of these case studies reminds us that each movement is a unique tapestry of activism, and generalizations should be made with caution.

The Civil Rights Movement

As noted above, the U.S. Civil Rights Movement of the mid-20th century serves as an iconic case study in the annals of social activism. Led by luminaries like Martin Luther King Jr., this movement demanded an end to racial segregation and discrimination. Through nonviolent protests, boycotts, and civil disobedience, activists pressured policymakers to enact groundbreaking legislation, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Critique: While the success of the Civil Rights Movement is undeniable, it is crucial to recognize that its achievements were the culmination of decades of struggle, the sacrifices of countless individuals, and a broader societal shift in attitudes towards racial equality (Giugni & Grasso, 2016). Oversimplifying the movement's impact can obscure the long and arduous journey toward justice.

LGBTQ+ Rights Movement

The LGBTQ+ rights movement has made significant strides in recent decades, advocating for equality, non-discrimination, and marriage rights. Case studies within this movement, such as the push for marriage equality in the United States, demonstrate how grassroots activism, legal advocacy, and shifting public opinion can lead to policy change.

Critique: The LGBTQ+ rights movement illustrates the power of community organizing and legal advocacy. However, it also underscores the regional disparities in policy change and the ongoing challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals worldwide. Achieving policy change is only one facet of the broader struggle for social acceptance and equity (Davenport & Ball, 2015).

Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement

The BLM movement, born out of concerns about racial injustice and police violence, has gained global prominence in recent years. Its impact on public policy includes calls for police reform, reexamination of criminal justice practices, and increased awareness of systemic racism. While the BLM movement has brought crucial issues to the forefront, it has also faced pushback and resistance from various quarters. Public opinion remains divided, and the extent of policy change varies across jurisdictions. The movement exemplifies the complexities of navigating policy reform in the face of deeply entrenched systems (Garrow, 2018).

To infer, these notable case studies of social movements and their policy impact offer valuable insights into the strategies and challenges of activism. However, a critical lens reminds us that each movement is a product of its unique historical, social, and political context. Generalizations must be made with care, recognizing that the journey toward policy change is multifaceted, contingent on various factors, and often fraught with complexities and opposition. These case studies inspire reflection on the enduring spirit of activism and the ongoing quest for justice and equity in society.

Challenges Faced by Social Movements

Social movements are not immune to the raft of challenges that accompany activism, and a critical assessment of these hurdles is essential for a nuanced understanding of their impact on public policy. While social movements have historically catalyzed transformative change, they grapple with a range of internal and external challenges that can significantly affect their efficacy. Perhaps one of the most formidable challenges confronting social movements is institutional resistance. Governments, corporations, and established institutions often resist the demands for change presented by movements (Jenkins, 2015). This resistance can manifest in various forms, from legal obstacles to repression and surveillance. For instance, the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong faced significant institutional resistance from the Chinese government, resulting in the implementation of the National Security Law in 2020, which curtailed civil liberties and activism (Earl et al., 2014).

Furthermore, social movements frequently encounter public apathy or backlash. Some segments of society may remain indifferent to the issues

raised by movements, while others may actively oppose their goals. This lack of public support can hinder a movement's ability to sway public opinion and pressure policymakers. For example, the climate change movement has encountered skepticism and backlash from individuals and industries that resist changes to fossil fuel-dependent economies, slowing the pace of policy reform (McAdams & Kloos, 2014).

The Syrian civil uprising, initially a peaceful protest movement, escalated into a violent conflict as the government responded with extreme repression, resulting in significant humanitarian crises. Governments and institutions may attempt to co-opt movements by making superficial policy changes or token gestures without addressing underlying issues. Such co-optation can lead to disillusionment among activists and undermine the movement's original goals. The Women's Suffrage Movement in the United States faced attempts at co-optation through the passage of state-level suffrage laws that offered partial enfranchisement while maintaining broader gender inequities. The political landscape can influence the fortunes of social movements (Earl et al., 2014). Shifts in political power, electoral cycles, and changing priorities of policymakers can either facilitate or hinder a movement's ability to achieve policy change. The fate of immigration reform movements in the United States has been deeply entwined with changes in political administrations, with varying levels of support for policy changes depending on the party in power (Amenta et al., 2010). When it comes to globalization and transnational movements Globalization has brought both opportunities and challenges to social movements. While it enables transnational activism and solidarity, it also exposes movements to complex global power dynamics and the influence of international actors.

To deduce, the challenges faced by social movements are multifaceted and often intertwined. Movements must overhaul external resistance, maintain internal cohesion, and adapt to changing political landscapes. Global examples illustrate the diversity of challenges encountered by movements worldwide, emphasizing the need for critical analysis and strategic navigation to overcome these hurdles and effect meaningful policy change.

Research Methodology

This research opts for a qualitative approach with a primary focus on secondary qualitative analysis to investigate the theoretical dimensions of the topic. The choice of methodology is driven by the theoretical nature of the subject and the aim to explore existing qualitative data to derive new insights and theoretical perspectives. Existing qualitative data sources relevant to the research topic is systematically identified and selected. These sources may include transcripts of interviews, focus group discussions, content analysis

of media or documents, and ethnographic field notes related to social movements and public policy. The selected data undergoes a thorough process of review and cleaning to ensure alignment with the research focus. Irrelevant or redundant data is removed, and the remaining data will be organized for analysis.

The research methodology, rooted in qualitative analysis of existing data, provides a structured approach to exploring the theoretical dimensions of social movements and their interaction with public policy. It leverages existing qualitative data to deepen theoretical understanding and generate fresh insights in alignment with the research objectives.

Findings

Historical examination reveals that social movements have played pivotal roles in shaping public policy. The suffragette movement of the early 20th century serves as a striking example. Through sustained activism, including nonviolent protests and civil disobedience, suffragettes successfully lobbied for women's voting rights. Their efforts culminated in the passage of the 19th Amendment in the United States in 1920, illustrating how movements can drive profound policy change (Jenkins, 2015). Similarly, the civil rights movement of the mid-20th century fundamentally transformed public policy in the United States. Led by figures like Martin Luther King Jr., the movement employed tactics such as boycotts, sit-ins, and mass demonstrations. These efforts pressured policymakers to enact landmark legislation, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Act of 1965. These legislative victories marked significant milestones in the battle against racial segregation and discrimination.

Additionally, movements with limited resources may struggle to gain traction or sustain momentum, highlighting the instrumental role of resource mobilization in policy influence. Taking the Framing theory into account, it suggests that movements must carefully tailor their messages to resonate with diverse audiences and elicit emotional responses. For example, the environmental movement frames climate change as a global crisis requiring urgent action, emphasizing the moral imperative to protect the planet. This framing shapes public perception and encourages policy responses, illustrating the persuasive potential of framing strategies in policy influence (Osa, 2015).

It is important to mention that social movements often face institutional resistance from governments, corporations, and established institutions. These entities may resist movements' demands through various means, including legal obstacles, lobbying efforts, and even repression. For instance, the Occupy Wall Street movement encountered resistance from financial institutions and political elites who resisted calls for economic reform. Movements may confront public apathy or backlash, where some segments of society remain indifferent to their issues or actively oppose their goals. This lack of public support can hinder movements' ability to sway public opinion and

policymakers (Tarrow, 2017). The climate change movement has faced skepticism and opposition from industries that resist transitioning away from fossil fuels, illustrating the challenge of public apathy and backlash.

Expanding on this, the analysis highlights the significance of framing in mobilizing support and challenging dominant narratives. For instance, the analysis of the environmental movement's framing of climate change as a global crisis underscores how framing can evoke moral imperatives and urgency, subsequently influencing public opinion and policymakers. These findings emphasize the persuasive power of framing strategies in policy influence. Also, movements often encounter diverse challenges and navigate multifaceted strategies. The theoretical insights underscore that simplistic theoretical narratives may not fully capture the richness of these interactions. Expanding on this, the analysis challenges researchers and policymakers to embrace the intricacies of social movements and their policy influence. It suggests that theoretical discussions should encompass the multifaceted nature of movements, acknowledging the challenges they face and the creative solutions they employ (Zald, 2013). These theoretical complexities encourage a deeper understanding of the dynamic relationship between social movements and public policy. In conclusion, the secondary qualitative analysis of existing data contributes valuable theoretical insights to the understanding of social movements and their influence on public policy. These insights showcase the pivotal role of framing strategies, the adaptive nature of movements in response to political opportunities, the importance of intersectionality, and the need for theoretical complexity and nuance. They enrich the foundation of the research, offering a more nuanced perspective on the intricate dynamics between social movements and public policy influence.

Discussion

The exploration of social movements and their relationship with public policy in this study has unveiled a complex interplay of historical significance, theoretical frameworks, and the challenges inherent in the path to policy influence. Firstly, the historical lens underscores the enduring power of social movements as drivers of transformative policy change. Throughout history, movements like the suffragettes and the civil rights activists have demonstrated their ability to shape public policy profoundly. These historical landmarks serve as poignant reminders of the essential role social movements play in democratic societies, continually pushing the boundaries of policy reform. The theoretical frameworks examined, including resource mobilization theory, framing theory, and political opportunity theory, provide us with valuable tools to understand the mechanics of social movements' influence on public policy. Resource mobilization theory emphasizes the importance of securing and deploying resources effectively, illustrating that

movements with adequate resources can amplify their impact through framing strategies. Framing theory, on the other hand, underscores the persuasive power of narrative construction, showcasing how movements that frame issues skilfully can sway public opinion and policy agendas. Political opportunity theory emphasizes the role of political context, highlighting the dynamic nature of political landscapes in either facilitating or hindering movements' policy influence (Zald, 2013). Together, these frameworks offer a multifaceted view of the intricate processes at play. However, social movements do not tread an easy path. The challenges they encounter, both from external forces and internal dynamics, can be formidable. Institutional resistance, public apathy, internal divisions, and repression are significant hurdles to overcome. These challenges, vividly illustrated by movements like Occupy Wall Street and the Syrian civil uprising, serve as sobering reminders of the complexity and adversity movements face in their quest for policy change. Beyond these insights, the analysis of framing strategies highlights their pivotal role in shaping policy influence (McCarthy et al, 2015). Successful framing strategies enable movements to define issues, attribute responsibility, and present solutions in ways that resonate with diverse audiences. The importance of narrative construction in mobilizing support and influencing policy agendas is abundantly clear. The analysis also reveals the importance of political adaptability. Movements must seize opportunities created by shifting political contexts, a point underscored by the success of the LGBTQ+ rights movement in the United States. Their ability to capitalize on changing public sentiments and judicial decisions demonstrates the dynamism required for effective policy influence.

Conclusion

This research paper has delved into the intricate relationship between social movements and public policy, seeking to illuminate the historical significance, theoretical underpinnings, and the challenges faced by these movements. Through a multidimensional exploration, several critical insights have emerged. First and foremost, history reminds us that social movements are catalysts for profound policy change. The suffragettes and civil rights activists, among others, have demonstrated that movements, through their unwavering commitment and resilience, can significantly reshape the policy landscape. These historical benchmarks underscore the enduring power of social movements in democratic societies. Theoretical frameworks, such as resource mobilization theory, framing theory, and political opportunity theory, offer valuable lenses through which to analyze social movements' policy influence. They emphasize the importance of securing resources, constructing persuasive narratives, and navigating dynamic political contexts. The integration of these frameworks provides a comprehensive view of the intricate processes underlying movements' impact on public policy. Yet,

the path of social movements is not without obstacles. Institutional resistance, public apathy, internal divisions, and repression can pose formidable challenges. The Occupy Wall Street movement and the Syrian civil uprising serve as stark reminders of the adversity movements often encounter on their journey toward policy change. Additionally, the study underscores the pivotal role of framing strategies in shaping policy influence. Effective framing enables movements to define issues, attribute responsibility, and present solutions in ways that resonate with diverse audiences. Political adaptability also emerges as a critical factor, with movements needing to seize opportunities presented by shifting political landscapes. Furthermore, the concept of intersectionality highlights the interconnectedness of social issues and their impact on policy outcomes. This perspective urges policymakers and researchers to adopt a holistic approach when addressing multifaceted issues, recognizing that social problems are often deeply intertwined. In closing, this research paper has contributed to our theoretical understanding of social movements and their influence on public policy.

Recommendations

With the above comprehensive analysis and discussion, a blueprint of suggestive recommendations is undermentioned:

Support Movements' Access to Resources

Policymakers and philanthropic organizations should consider supporting social movements by providing resources such as funding, training, and organizational support. These resources are instrumental in enabling movements to sustain their activities and enhance their policy influence.

Promote Public Awareness and Education

Public awareness and education campaigns should be initiated to foster an understanding of the historical impact and theoretical frameworks related to social movements. This can encourage greater public support for movements' causes and their policy initiatives.

Facilitate Collaboration

Movements should be encouraged to collaborate and share strategies and experiences, particularly in navigating political opportunities and challenges. Platforms for inter-movement collaboration can strengthen the collective impact of movements. Importantly, policymakers should recognize the importance of intersectionality when addressing social issues. Policies and initiatives should consider the interconnected nature of problems related to race, gender, sexuality, and economic inequality to ensure comprehensive and equitable solutions.

Support Movements' Advocacy Skills

Training programs and resources should be made available to empower movements with effective advocacy and framing skills. This can help movements

communicate their goals persuasively to diverse audiences and policy stakeholders.

Review and Amend Repressive Practices

Governments ought to conduct reviews of repressive practices against social movements, ensuring that freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are protected. Engagement with movements in constructive dialogue can foster a more inclusive policy-making environment.

By implementing these suggestions, society can better harness the potential of social movements as drivers of positive policy change, promoting inclusivity, justice, and social progress.

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