

Dynamics of Protest Mobilization and Rapid Demobilization in Post-2001 Afghanistan: Facing Enlightening Movement

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Abstract : Taking a relational approach, this paper analyzes the causal mechanisms associated with successful mobilization and rapid demobilization of the Enlightening Movement in post-2001 Afghanistan. The movement emerged after the state-owned Da Afghan Bereshna Sherkat (DABS) decided to divert the route for the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TUTAP) electricity project. The grid was initially planned to go through the Hazara-inhabited province of Bamiyan, according to Afghanistan's Power Sector Master Plan. The reroute served as an aide-memoire of historical subordination to other ethno-religious groups for the Hazara community. It was also perceived as deprivation from post-2001 development projects, financed by international aid. This torched the accumulated grievances, which then gave birth to the Enlightening Movement. The movement had a successful mobilization. However, it demobilized after losing much of its mobilizing capabilities through an amalgamation of external and internal relational factors. The successful mobilization yet rapid demobilization constitutes the puzzle of this paper. From the theoretical perspective, this paper is significant as it establishes the applicability of contentious politics theory to protest mobilizations that occurred in Afghanistan, a context-specific, characterized by ethnic politics. Both primary and secondary data are utilized to address the puzzle. As for the primary resources, media coverage, interviews, reports, public media statements of the movement, involved in contentious performances, and data from Social Networking Services (SNS) are used. The covered period is from 2001-2018. As for the secondary resources, published academic articles and books are used to give a historical account of contentious politics. For data analysis, a qualitative comparative historical method is utilized to uncover the causal mechanisms associated with successful mobilization and rapid demobilization of the Movement. In this pursuit, both mobilization and demobilization are considered as larger political processes that could be decomposed to constituent mechanisms. Enlightening Movement's framing and campaigns are first studied to uncover the associated mechanisms. Then, to avoid introducing some ad hoc mechanisms, the recurrence of mechanisms is checked against another case. Mechanisms qualify as robust if they are “recurrent” in different episodes of contention. Checking the recurrence of causal mechanisms is vital as past contentious events tend to reinforce future events. The findings of this paper suggest that the public sphere in Afghanistan is drastically different from Western democracies known as the birthplace of social movements. In Western democracies, when institutional politics did not respond, movement organizers occupied the public sphere, undermining the legitimacy of the government. In Afghanistan, the public sphere is ethicized. Considering the inter- and intra-relational dynamics of ethnic groups in Afghanistan, the movement reduced to an erosive inter- and intra-ethnic conflict. This undermined the cohesiveness of the movement, which then kicked-off its demobilization process.

Keywords : enlightening movement, contentious politics, mobilization, demobilization

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