

Support for and Participation in 'Spontaneous' Mass Protest in Iceland: The Moderating Effects of Biographical Availability, Critical Mass, and Social Embeddedness

Authors : Jon Gunnar Bernburg

Abstract : The present study addresses a topic that is fundamental to social movement theory, namely, the contingent link between movement support and movement participation. Usually, only a small fraction of those who agree with the cause of a social movement is mobilized into participating in it (a pattern sometimes referred to as 'the collective action problem'). However, historical moments sometimes emerge when many supporters become mobilized to participate in the movement, greatly enhancing the chance of movement success. By studying a case in point, this paper addresses the limited work on how support and participation are related at such critical moments. Specifically, the paper examines the association between supporting and participating in a huge 'pro-democracy' protest in Iceland in April 2016, in the wake of the global Panama Papers scandal. Organized via social media by only a handful of activists, but supported by a majority of Icelanders, the protest attracted about a fourth of the urban population, leading to a snap election and government change. Surveying Iceland's urban population, this paper tests hypotheses about the processes mobilizing supporters to participate in the protest. The findings reveal how variables derived from the theories of biographical availability (males vs. females, working class vs. professionals), critical mass (expectations, prior protest success), and social embeddedness (close ties with protesters) moderate the association between protest support and participation. The study helps to account for one of the largest protests in Iceland's history while contributing to the theory about how historical contexts shape the behavior of movement supporters.

Keywords : Iceland, crisis, protest support vs. participation, theories of mass mobilization

Conference Title : ICSMP 2018 : International Conference on Social Movements and Protest

Conference Location : Amsterdam, Netherlands

Conference Dates : January 22-23, 2018