SYMPOSIUM/ 9

Understanding the birth, quality and collapse of democratic regimes through movement-party interactions[1]

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ABSTRACT: This article provides a discussion of Sid Tarrow's "Movements and Parties. Critical Connections in American Political Development". First, it discusses the concept of movementization of parties. Second, it focuses on the main linkage and relational mechanisms that define the interaction between parties and movements. Next, it introduces the comparative part of Tarrow's book highlighting the role that movements play in the processes of democratic anchoring and de-anchoring. Eventually, it critically reviews the concept of hybridity by attempting to uncover the constitutive mechanisms of the process of movementization and its empirical referents in recent U.S. history.

KEYWORDS: movementization, mechanisms, linkage, brokerage, democratic anchoring and de-anchoring, hybridity.

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1. Introduction

Sid Tarrow's *Movements and Parties. Critical Connections in American Political Development* is a much-needed book on the interaction between social movements and political parties. Interestingly, in this work

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Cornell's emeritus professor focuses on the role that movements play in both the processes of transition to democracy and the transformation of democratic regimes over time.

The main thesis of the book is that democratic quality can be both negatively and positively affected by movements by expanding or retrenching it – causing in the latter case what Tilly called 'de-democratization' (2003; 2007, chap. 3), a concept tied to both growing inequalities across a population and an increasing reliance on public policies that result in a more unequal distribution of resources.

As will become clear in a moment, understanding Tarrow's book is particularly challenging and translates into a kind of treasure hunt that requires careful reading of an argument that does not always have a linear development. The book published in the series of *Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics* is rich in insights and mobilizes concepts from different strands of literature that are extremely valuable in interrogating the relationship between two of the main actors of the political system. If one criticism can be made of this brilliant contribution, it is that it fails to dwell adequately on a number of concepts that would have benefited from more in-depth discussion.

We will first consider the concept of movementization, after which we will focus on the main linkage and relational mechanisms that define the interaction between parties and movements. Then, we will introduce the comparative part of Tarrow's book highlighting the role that movements play in the processes of democratic anchoring and de-anchoring. To conclude, we will critically review the concept of hybridity by attempting to uncover the constitutive mechanisms of the process of movementization and its empirical referents in recent U.S. history.

1. A one-sided and incomplete movementization

When, for example, the author gets inspiration from the 2014 McAdam and Kloos' book *Deeply Divided* adopting the concept of 'movementization of parties', he does not clarify exactly what he means. In fact he refers to 'a *partial* "movementization" of the US party system' (21, emphasis added) describing what in the 1960s resulted as a consequence of the combined effect of the adoption of direct primaries and new campaign financing rules favoring the institutionalization of candidate-centered electoral politics. According to the author, this has translated differently on the two sides of the political spectrum: on the right, there has been an ideological infiltration of the Republican Party by new actors merging into a novel form of radical conservatism, while on the left, a simple addition of new interest groups to the broad coalition supporting the Democrats took place (134-5). In this sense, the partiality of the movementization seems to be related to the fact that it would appear to be an asymmetrical process affecting only one of the two main parties.

Later on, Tarrow seems to understand parties' movementization as a transference in the locus of polarization of American society. Polarization would thus have shifted from the direct confrontation occurring within the movement sector – as happened between the civil rights movement and segregationists in the South in the previous decades – to the two major parties for 'from the 1960s on, much of the movement/countermovement interaction was mediated through the party system' (145). This legacy of the 1960s has lasted until after the advent of Donald Trump in the political sphere with the key role of the Tea Party evolving from a grassroots movement supported from well-funded national right-wing groups and sympathetic media outlets into an 'insurgent faction' within the Republican Party (165) which dislodged traditional party elites from their position (15). According to Tarrow, Trump 'crystallized the movement elements within the party and provided them with a charismatic focal point' (176). Towards the end of the journey the social movement scholar claims that Trump founded a populist movement *within* the Republican party finding himself 'at the helm of a movementized party, one in which the transactional elements of party

politics coexisted uneasily with the ideological drive of the movements that had been absorbed into the party in previous decades' (177). As such, movementization of parties could be interpreted as a process involving radical ideological elements coming from movements. Curiously, Tarrow's emphasis seems to be primarily on identity, while seeming to ignore other important elements that define movements, such as informal organizational structures and unconventional forms of action (della Porta & Diani 1998).

In the conclusions of the book, however, the author recalls the concept of movementization when he mentions the two-sided character of Republicans and seem to clarify what he intends with the 'partiality' of such process by stating that the party became 'partly movementized – especially at the grassroots … While the party at the summit has been hollowed out, its lieutenants and drill sergeants at its base are connected to the archipelago of white nationalists, evangelical Christians, and anti-black and anti-Semitic groups across the country that erupted at the Capitol a week earlier' (234). Thus it would appear that not only is the U.S. party system asymmetrically movementized – since the process primarily affects the Republican party – but also that the Grand Old Party (GOP) itself would be only partially movementized as it would fall prey to a constant tension between pushes from above (transactional politics) and below (ideologically motivated politics).

2. Searching for mechanisms

From the very preface of the volume, Tarrow declares 'In this book, I will propose a number of other mechanisms of party/movement interaction that have become common in the last few decades' (XIII). To be fair, however, such mechanisms are mentioned throughout the volume in a rather cursory and unsystematic manner, which makes it quite complex for a reader not particularly familiar with the author's previous works to unpack the key elements of the argument. Below we will specifically discuss: a) the *anchoring mechanism* linking movements and parties, and b) the *relational mechanism* connecting two opposite sides of the GOP considered as a partially movementized party.

Before proceeding, however, let us point out a few important sentences that come toward the end of the book and which appear as a kind of summary of the mechanisms identified by the author in the volume: 'Some of these mechanisms were *unidirectional* (e.g., how movements affect parties and vice versa) but others were *reciprocal*. Some of these took place mainly in the *electoral arena* while others engaged parties and movements *in the central state*. Some mechanisms had *immediate effect* – like the impact of movements on elections – but the most substantial relationships effected change in institutions and, at the margins, the character of American political institutions' (242, emphasis added).

According to this quotation, we can essentially distinguish 3 main classes of mechanisms in the relationship between movements and parties: the first type concerns the *direction* of the mechanism, which can be one-way or two-way; the second type concerns the *locus* in which the mechanism manifests itself, which can be the institutional or the electoral arena (but we can obviously imagine many other ones); and the third type concerns the *temporality* and refers to mechanisms' short-, medium- and long-term effects.

The last class of mechanisms requires special discussion because the issue of the outcomes of the relationship between movements and parties is of particular interest. Some indications to this effect can be found in the early part of the book, where Tarrow explains that the dynamics of relations between the two actors have taken five major forms over the past century and a half, based on their consequences over time (7). *Short run effects* concern the electoral arena and consist in: a) the introduction of new forms of contentious collective action to influence campaigns; b) movements joining electoral coalitions (possibly influencing the election result). *Medium run effects* occur when movements provoke the emergence of

countermovements leading to what Mahoney (2000) calls 'reactive sequences', generating lasting forms of backlash politics. This is clarified by two examples: 'the reactions against Reconstruction that led to the Ku Klux Klan and the Jim Crow South or the movement for civil rights in the 1960s that turned white southerners into the core electorate of the Republican Party' (5) and 'the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan [that] were reactions to 9/11 while the defeat of the Republican Party and Obama's election victory in 2008 were reactions to that reaction' (155). *Longer run effects* concern two further types of consequences, a more limited one and a wider one: a) a sort of mutual shaping between parties and movements affecting each other; b) the influence on the future of political institutions and of the regime itself.

It is not entirely clear, however, why at the end of the book Tarrow limits the discussion to a short-term effect such as the impact of movements on elections which would depend on the openness and closure of electoral opportunities, party strength and weakness, and how movements respond to the dilemma of facing potential risks and benefits of electoral competition.

2.1. Clarifying linkage mechanisms

As anticipated, 'anchoring' is an important linkage mechanism of a movement to a party cited by Tarrow and inspired by the work of Daniel Schlozman (2015). Notable examples of anchoring to the Democrats over time are those involving African Americans, women and the labor movement. However, while its implications are detailed by the author it is not entirely clear what this anchoring mechanism means exactly. According to Tarrow 'These movement/party linkages exerted a *long-term influence* on party organizations and ideologies and – more broadly – on the development of the American political regime' (18, emphasis added).

Though this is not made explicit by the author, at certain points in the book it emerges how linkage mechanisms vary according to the intensity of the relationship between movements and parties. Tarrow in fact mentions the existence of more or less organic relations between the two actors. Besides anchoring, he also refers to 'infiltration', 'capture', 'merger', and 'fusion' (which are apparently used interchangeably). In the words of the author 'The most complete linkage of a movement to a party – less an "anchoring" than a "merger" – was the insertion of the "long new right" into the Republican Party after the Goldwater defeat in 1964' (239). Therefore, the process of movementization of the GOP would be caused by a merger-type of linkage mechanisms and would be different from simply adding new interest groups through anchoring, as was the case with the Democrats (138).

Following Tarrow's reasoning we can hypothesize that anchoring mechanisms create horizontal relations between a movement and a party (viz the anti-Iraq war movement and the Democrats) while merging mechanisms (i.e. Tea Party and Republicans) generate a mixture of horizontal and vertical ties which in turn produces movementization (154). It is unclear however what kind of mechanism operate when vertical relations are established between a movement and a party as in the case of the ties between the Koch network and GOP (which we will present in more detail below). Is it equally a matter of merging or do different linkage mechanisms operate in this case? And which ones, if any? We also notice that the capture mechanism (which is unclear whether it is equivalent to merging) unfolded in two directions (from party to movement and vice versa) as the case of the Republicans shows: first, they captured much of the energy of the Tea Party movement but later the party was captured by the Trumpian movement (15).

2.2. Brokering old and new conservatives

According to the author 'a social movement – the New Right, with its mélange of economic libertarianism, religious fervor, and racial resentment – was the *relational mechanism* between the old and the new Republican Party' (246). Here a reminder of the distinction between relational, environmental and cognitive/dispositional mechanisms – only hinted at in a footnote by the author – would probably have benefited the reader. As explained elsewhere*, cognitive/dispositional* mechanisms work through changes in individual and collective perception; recognition, understanding, reinterpretation, and classification exemplify such mechanisms. *Environmental mechanisms* refers to externally generated influences on conditions affecting social life, such as resource depletion or enhancement. *Relational mechanisms* directly alter relations among people, groups and interpersonal networks. Of particular interest is *brokerage*, a crucial relational mechanism which is defined 'as the linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with one another and/or with yet other sites' (McAdam et al. 2001: 26). From the definition just seen, therefore, it would seem clear that the ascent of the New Right in the 1960s and the resulting ideological takeover of the GOP operated as a brokerage mechanism that has made Republicans permeable to infiltration by new waves of ideological insurgents, like the Tea Party, and an ideal environment for Trump's seizure.

3. The role of social movements in the process of democratic anchoring and de-anchoring

At the risk of confusing a process that has parties and movements as its empirical referents (and which we have discussed in section 2.1) with one that concerns the holding of a democratic regime as a whole, of particular interest are democratic 'anchoring' and 'de-anchoring' that have been theorized by Leonardo Morlino (2005; 2011, chap. 5-6) in relation especially to southern European countries. The Italian scholar shows that the two processes are crucial to understanding democratic consolidation and crisis respectively. According to him, parties are the key intermediary institutions in these processes. Nonetheless, he stated that 'if parties are in a declining trend as strong anchors, new intermediary agents will develop in the foreseeable future' (2005: 768). Furthermore, he contends that destructuration of traditional parties and emergence of new parties with different relationships with interest groups are the key aspects of the democratic crisis. Morlino's reflection assigns an ancillary role to social movements but Tarrow's work illuminates their anchoring and de-anchoring role for democracy when he refers to the cases of Italy after World War I, South Korea in the 1980s and Chile in the decades following the fall of the Pinochet dictatorship.

In the ninth chapter of Tarrow's book entitled 'Learning about America from Abroad' the author presents us with two negative cases and one positive case. The former are Italy –where movement dynamics prevented cooperative and coalitional logics generating fertile ground for the rise of fascism – and Chile, where marginalization of movements, savage neoliberalization, and dramatic inequality were the outcomes of a 'pacted democratization' (*Concertación*). The latter is South Korea, a case of 'contentious democratization' (della Porta 2016) where inclusive coalitional logics and wide-ranging master frames helped building and defending democracy and rights. Spain and Portugal are also mentioned, but very quickly, as two different cases of democratization (respectively, 'pacted' and 'contentious') that occurred in the same geographic area (Iberian Peninsula) and at the same time showing important differences in terms of

democratic inclusion of economically disadvantaged people (Fishman 2019). The interesting aspect here concerns the legacy of the process of transition to democracy as well as the (more or less active) role that social movements played in that process contributing to shape more or less fair societies.

Among the lessons Tarrow draws from the comparative analysis of the above-mentioned case studies, the advent of fascism in Italy is particularly noteworthy. He basically argues that Italy's democratic collapse was the outcome of the mixture of 'lateral' and 'vertical' polarization between 'red' (communist and socialist) and 'white' (catholic) movement subcultures (Cento Bull 2001), which prevented the negotiation of party compromises in the political system and the defense of the fragile democratic regime beyond partisan interests. While lateral polarization is understood in terms of distance between ideological poles (left vs right), vertical polarization refers to social sorting of parties along the lines of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and – especially in the Italian case – class. In Tarrow's words 'Partisan polarization and social movements together paralyzed the political elite, allowing a thuggish adventurer to turn a struggling democracy into a dictatorship' (213).

What could probably be added to the author's remark is that while movement subcultures may have played a role in the 'pernicious' polarization that fostered the advent of Mussolini's fascist regime, they certainly made a fundamental contribution to the resistance movement that enabled Italy's liberation from Nazi-fascism. Indeed, whereas historiography still hotly debates the extent and nature of the liberation struggle the latter can be conceived as a social movement capable of bringing together alternative political subcultures such as anarchists, communists, actionists, socialists, Christian Democrats, liberals, monarchists, and republicans. Most of them joined in a political and military umbrella organization made up of the country's main anti-fascist parties and movements called *Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale* (National Liberation Committee), which eventually gave birth to the republican order. We can therefore state, following Tarrow and Morlino, that movements' political subcultures probably played a polarizing role de-anchoring Italian democracy by favoring Mussolini's rise to power. Similarly we can observe that the liberation movement from Nazi-fascism played – obviously in the exceptional context of World War II and in concert with Anglo-American military intervention – a relevant role in the fall of the fascist regime twenty years later and in the anchoring of the reborn democracy.

4. The indiscrete charm of hybridity

Another issue that could have benefited from further elaboration by the author concerns the discussion of 'hybrid' organizations. Tarrow employs this concept to describe groups operating in the grey area between movements and parties, maintaining close ties with the latter but not subsumed by them (149).

Over the past decades, the concept of hybridity has been very fashionable in the social sciences. To name just a few applications, we can mention the concept of 'hybrid regimes' mixing authoritarian and democratic features sometimes described with the terms 'democradura' or 'dictablanda' (Schmitter 1995), the mingling of different media logics typical of 'hybrid media system' (Chadwick 2013), the blend of conventional and unconventional warfighting in 'hybrid wars' (Johnson 2018), cultural hybridity in ethnic and racial studies (2005) or hybrid methodologies such as QCA (Schneider & Wagemann 2012). As a matter of fact, the concept of hybridity has long been criticized in several areas (i.e. Brah and Coombes 2000).

However, in his book Tarrow distinguishes horizontal, vertical and mixed types of hybrid organizations. According to the author, *horizontal* hybrids show traditional forms of linkages with the party based on common political interests and function specialization as in the case of the anti-Iraq war movement and the Democrats in response to President George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq in 2002. *Vertical* hybrids, on the

other hand, base these relations on vertical ties providing vast financial resources to the party and using them to influence it and make it dependent on themselves; this type is exemplified by the network of right-wing organizations created by the Koch brothers – owners of the second-largest U.S. industry – in the last decades of the 20th century (a.k.a. the 'Kochtopus') which became quietly influential in Republicans' public policies. Lastly, *blended* hybrids present a combination of horizontal and vertical ties with the party. Representative of this type is the Tea Party, a movement with grassroots origins that developed links to Washington-based advocacy groups which helped elect a new cadre of Tea Party-linked radical candidates to Congress after the 2010 elections. The Tea Party 'assailed the party system from the bottom and from the top through a combination of grassroots organizing, advocacy group pressure, and amplification by the media' (175). The difference between the three types could perhaps be identified in the main lever of party influence: the power of numbers in the first case, the power of money in the second, and both in the latter case. In the end, however, it is not clear why the author associates networks reminiscent of social movements (i.e. the anti-war movement) with 'horizontal hybrids' and calls those similar to pressure groups (i.e. the Koch network) 'vertical hybrids'. In fact, the only real hybrid among the cases mentioned would seem to be what is called 'blended' (i.e. the Tea Party). The danger of using this adjective very broadly is that 'at night all organizations are hybrids', so its usefulness is severely limited by the fact that it does not allow one to discriminate or qualify a particular type of organization.

Given what we have just stated, and recalling the earlier discussion of linkage mechanisms and the movementization process (sections 2.1 and 1), we propose to conceptualize movementization in the form illustrated in Table 1. The purpose of this proposal is to link seemingly disconnected parts of Tarrow's analysis; specifically, the part on linkage mechanisms between movements and parties (in the rows) with the one on the type of influence exerted by movements on parties (in the columns). Together, these are the constituent elements of the process of movementization of the U.S. party system. When we consider the outcome of movementization as the ideological transformation of the party, the table shows how in fact the U.S. system is only partially movementized. The process just affects the right side of the scheme, where the Tea Party and Koch network produced such an effect on the GOP by generating an ideological takeover of the party. On the left side, on the other hand, we find the anti-war movement, which despite establishing horizontal ties with the Democrats and trying to influence the party by strength of numbers, has failed to reposition it ideologically.

Table 1 - Constitutive mechanisms of the process of movementization

Linkage mechanism / ties	Type of influence	
	Numbers	*Money*
Anchoring (horizontal ties)	Anti-Iraq war movement (**Democrats**)	
Merging (vertical ties)		Koch network (**Republicans**)

Movementization seems to be a particularly useful concept for describing the relationship between parties and movements in a two-party system such as the U.S., where it is very difficult for a third force to emerge and a movement party to establish itself (della Porta et al. 2017). In this sense, one could extend the reflection to the British case, looking in particular at the Labour Party and the role played by Momentum during Corbyn's leadership (Dennis 2020; Garland 2017; Pickard 2017). Can we define Labour as a movementized party during that time? If one considers the mechanisms identified in the U.S. case, the answer seems to be negative. In fact, we are faced with a situation similar to that of the Democratic party – the linkage mechanisms between Momentum and Labour seem to have been essentially horizontal (anchoring) while the resources mobilized were militants rather than being economic-financial in nature. Nevertheless, if one looks at the outcome, the answer seems to be positive, and similar to what happened to the GOP: an ideological takeover of the party with a clear radicalization (in this case a repositioning to the left). Can the process of movementization therefore also occur through a different combination of mechanisms than those identified in the U.S. case? And what, for example, would be the differences and similarities in the relationship between Labour and Momentum compared to those between the Democrats and the antiwar movement? This question is destined to remain unanswered here but hopefully it will stimulate the author to further explore this type of process and its associated mechanisms in the future. What we can notice, however, is that Momentum operated in a diverse intraparty ecosystem, in which unions integral to both the anti-austerity movement and the Corbynist movement were present. It is important to stress that unions exerted a significant influence, insofar as they have the resources and political instruments to heavily influence the leadership of the Labour Party.

The British case, just like the U.S. case, reminds us why the movementization process is so interesting. It seems to challenge one of the cornerstones of comparative politics, namely, that in two-party systems characterized by a limited number of party actors, the direction of competition is centripetal, and thus the major parties tend to converge toward the center (Caramani 2008, 233). The implications of movementization of party systems for democracy anchoring and de-anchoring is thus a fundamental topic that future research will necessarily need to focus.

Finally, and related to hybridization and the digital as a driver or otherwise key component of such process, an overlooked element in Tarrow's book concerns technological change and, in particular, the *digitization of society* and its political consequences. The author acknowledges that even in some of his past work this factor has not been given due importance when he claims that the big transformation defined elsewhere as 'movement society' (Meyer & Tarrow 1998) – understood as a 'normalization' of contentious forms of politics in Western democracies – has gone well beyond what was expected because of *an unpredicted technological revolution* as well as growing inequality exacerbated by the international financial crisis that fostered a resurgence of class movements (150). As he adds 'least predicted at all by "movement society" authors was the growth of hybrid groups with some of the properties of a movement but piloted by deep-pocketed ideological groups like the Koch network that intervene in the party system without becoming part of party organizations' (24). It is worth noting that some strands of the literature associate the advent of hybrid social forms (e.g., organizations, forms of participation – see Karpf 2012; Pavan 2022) precisely with the digital. As we saw above, when the author talks about hybrid organizations he does not mention this element – although he later devotes a brief paragraph to 'Digitizing Movement Organization' (pp. 189-190) – that perhaps could have helped further explain what he exactly means when using this term.

In concluding our reflection, we cannot ignore the concerns expressed by Tarrow about inequality as an increasingly pressing social problem in the U.S. context that is defined as 'the Chile of the northern hemisphere' (230). We can therefore end the discussion of this excellent volume by quoting Tilly's very timely admonition: 'Just as past democratization has always occurred through struggle and has frequently

suffered reversal, the path ahead contains many an obstacle in the form of new inequalities and their political consequences' (2003, 42). Chile's recent history seems to point to a path of hope that after much social suffering and injustice 'bent toward justice'. Hopefully, this will also be the next horizon of American political development.

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