

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

CHARLES TILLY. *Regimes and Repertoires*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, ix + 256 p., index.

Readers of even a small sample of Charles Tilly's recent prodigious output will know the script. Start with a handful of well-honed concepts developed over the three decades since the book *From Mobilization to Revolution*; refine them further; then develop a carefully circumscribed model and show its fecundity for the analysis of political contention past and present, near and far, using systematic data and rich historical illustration. Many concepts, such as repertoire of contention and political opportunity will be familiar; others, such as regime and the "mechanisms and processes" approach to explanation, perhaps less so. For readers new to Tilly's work, *Regimes and Repertoires* is an excellent introduction.

*Regimes and Repertoires* is organized around three questions (with emphasis on the first two): How do regimes affect contentious politics? Why? How do contentious politics affect regimes? The terms of the first question are addressed by mapping variations in political regimes on the one hand, and repertoires of contention on the other. Political regimes vary on two dimensions: state capacity (control over resources, activities and people) and degree of democratization (combining civil liberties and political rights). The resulting typology of high-capacity democratic, high-capacity nondemocratic, low-capacity democratic, and low-capacity nondemocratic regimes is used in comparative analyses to show that repertoires vary by regime type. The two-dimensional framework is also used to show variations over time, as in chapter 5's analysis of South Africa from the establishment of apartheid in 1948 to the end of the century: regime changes (on the axes of state capacity and democracy) and consequent changes in political opportunities combined with pre-existing institutions, social relations and culture to shape mobilization and claim-making by a complex and shifting array of political actors. The lesson here, and elsewhere in the book, is that static initial conditions are but the starting point for explaining contention by tracing its dynamic processes.

Another lesson is methodological. For data on democratization and dedemocratization, Tilly uses Freedom House ratings of civil liberties and political rights. Students (and perhaps readers of this review) tend to balk at this, rightly suspicious of anything that smacks of the United States's selective touting of democracy. Patient explanation is required to convince them (if they are convinced!) of the virtues of a public, systematic source of data using a reasonably transparent methodology consistently over

several decades, when it helps to explain important differences in forms of political contention. It also illustrates the important distinction Tilly makes between causal coherence and symbolic coherence. Too often efforts to explain contentious politics are derailed by a focus on symbolic meanings and conventional categories that combine phenomena with disparate causes and effects, and split them off from phenomena with similar causes and effects. This principle also appears in Tilly's "all-purpose revolution finder" (159), which in contrast to special-purpose definitions of revolution (e.g., Marxist limitation on "revolution" to "real" class revolutions), defines a revolution as any "forcible transfer of power over a state" involving two blocs of contenders that have at least tacit popular support, and considers revolutionary situations and revolutionary outcomes separately, in order to "specify exactly what must be explained."

Variations in repertoires are not as neatly formulated as variations in regimes. After some preliminary formalization of the concept of repertoire based on dimensions of likelihood of repetition and familiarity, Tilly returns to his longstanding distinction between the parochial, particular and bifurcated repertoire; and the cosmopolitan, modular and autonomous repertoire that developed with the social movement, and is with us still. While useful, the potential of this classification could be developed more fully, following the same logic used for regimes, of turning dichotomies into two-dimensional variables. The specifics of the British case on which the distinction is based could be simplified (as Tilly himself hints on pages 161-162) on one dimension into the degree of autonomy from the routines, relations and communal identities of daily life; and on another into scale (from local to global) or perhaps violence (low to high), depending on the problem at hand. Thus, for example, Tilly shows that violent political performances are more characteristic of low-capacity nondemocratic regimes than of either high-capacity nondemocratic or low-capacity democratic regimes, with the lowest levels of violent contention in high-capacity democratic ones.

The payoff of the book comes in the last three chapters, on collective violence, revolutions, and social movements. Tilly has written so much about political contention that it is impossible for him not to revisit territory that he has previously examined at book length, in *The Politics of Collective Violence* (2003), *European Revolutions 1492-1992* (1993), and *Social Movements, 1768-2004* (2004). Yet considering the three topics together, integrated around the relation between regimes and repertoires, provides fresh insights for readers familiar with that work and a marvelous introduction to Tilly's current oeuvre for those who are not.

Tilly finds that social movements, with their characteristic repertoire of displays of worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment, are concentrated in democracies, especially high-capacity ones (albeit diffusing to nondemocratic regimes too); revolutionary outcomes in high-capacity nondemocratic regimes; and revolutionary situations and civil wars in low-capacity nondemocratic regimes. But these are broad generalizations and the real interest of the book lies in tracing the historical paths through

which these happen, showing how and why regimes and their changes affect repertoires. There is much of that, as Tilly ranges from 17th-20th century France and 18th-19th century Britain, to 20th century India, Peru, Rwanda, South Africa and the USSR, among others. Through its analytic framework, and its examples, the book represents a welcome breakout from the focus of much social movement thinking on western democratic regimes.

*Regimes and Repertoires* is a book that all students of contentious politics should read. Early on Tilly alerts the reader to “the high stakes of our inquiry” (4). As I started reading the book, Kenya teetered on the verge of wholesale “ethnic cleansing” after a disputed election. *Regimes and Repertoires* was a handy guide for understanding the dynamics of contentious politics spiraling from social movement forms to collective violence. It shows us that transitions to greater democracy are messy and unleash suppressed conflicts, a lesson that western political leaders would be wise to heed. This book is also a fine reminder of what Tilly has accomplished over a half century: whatever particular disagreements a reader may have, it is simply not possible to think about revolutions, collective violence and social movements in the same way as BCT (Before Chuck Tilly).

With all the richness of the content of this book, it is a shame that the University of Chicago Press (publisher of the *Chicago Manual of Style*!) was not more careful with copyediting. In the book’s final paragraph, the nonsensical “What causes democratization and democratization?” (216) appears instead of “What causes democratization and dedemocratization?”

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