

Repertoires of Strategies

FEDERICO M. ROSSI

CONICET – Universidad Nacional de San Martín, Argentina

The interrelated concepts of *repertoire of strategies* and *stock of legacies* contribute to an understanding of historically rooted and collective processes of strategy making and performing. These concepts complement Charles Tilly's "repertoire of contention" because the dynamics of interaction of a social movement with allies and antagonists cannot be fully understood or explained through the study of its public and contentious dimension only because it depicts just part of the story. The implications of incorporating a focus on strategies are central for social movement studies because they lead us to pay attention to actors and their intentions, and the interactions among the intentions of a variety of deliberate actors. And, if this focus on strategies is placed in a historical perspective it bridges the relationship between the pace of historical processes and the experiences and expectations of the actors involved in these processes.

Beyond public contention and micro tactics

Social movement scholars have accorded a great deal of importance to the study of tactics and strategies (Gamson 1975; Fantasia 1988; Fligstein and McAdam 2011; Maney et al. 2012; Vaz Moura 2018; Meyer and Staggenborg 2019; among others). Among the efforts to clarify the crucial difference between tactics and strategies, the most refined one is the "Clausewitz-inspired understanding" by Nepstad and Vinthagen (2012, 282, n. 1): "we define *tactics* as the means and plan to win a single campaign (one battle) and *strategy* as the plan of how to win the struggle (the war). Thus, tactics involve the small-scale repertoire and subgoals of the movement, while strategy is about how a movement reaches its goals."

A fundamental approach to *strategizing* is Tilly's concept of "repertoire of contention." His concept has allowed us to study contentious and public events and their slow pace of change as part of what is known as "contentious politics." Tilly (1995, 26–27) defined the repertoire of contention as a limited set of actions based on a relatively deliberate process of choice, in which social relations cluster together in recurrent patterns based on social and cultural capital accumulated through struggle. His definition is unambiguously limited to disruptive acts performed in the public space (Tilly 1986, 3–4; 1995, 32; 2008, 203–204). This focus means that Tilly's definition does not allow for the study of a case of mobilization that did not happen; for example, one that was planned and organized by the members of a movement but never carried out. In this way, the narrative built would neglect that a public action emerges because several other nonpublic actions were performed and led to a contentious result. As a result, Tilly's conceptualization alone is unable to explain situations where contention does not emerge, as well as the relationship between the public and contentious events generally described by the media and those that were not reported because they were not performed in the public space. The full picture of the strategic dynamics of interaction of social movements with the state, allies, and

The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements, Second Edition. Edited by David A. Snow, Donatella della Porta, Doug McAdam, and Bert Klandermans.

© 2023 John Wiley & Sons Ltd. Published 2023 by John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

DOI: 10.1002/9780470674871.wbespm624

antagonists emerges if we broaden our scope beyond the contentious and public dimension of social movements only.

In contrast, with the goal of developing an agency-based approach to social movements, Jasper (2004, 2006, 2012) proposes the study of “strategic dilemmas/trade-offs,” suggesting the universality of micro short-term *tactical* decisions. While this proposal reintroduces tactics to social movement studies, it does not draw a conceptual distinction between “strategy” and “tactic” (Jasper 2004, 14, n.1) and lacks “an understanding of how much dilemmas are interrelated and how their solutions are constrained” (Meyer and Staggenborg 2012, 6). An additional problem with this approach is that, although sometimes an action seems to be logical when its effects are retrospectively analyzed, the “social agents have ‘strategies’ which only rarely have a true strategic intention as a principle” (Bourdieu 1998, 81). As a result, it omits the limitations posed to human agency by historical legacies of past struggles, which provide a meaning to, and guides, limits, and enriches, each short-term tactic. It is, thus, necessary to trace the history of the strategy/tactic that is being performed to provide a contextualized meaning of it. Retaining Tilly’s tradition of contextualized political analysis allows us to avoid universalizing that which is time–space specific, and pushes us to ask how and why certain strategies enter the predominant repertoire of a movement while others do not.

Repertoire of strategies

A repertoire of strategies is a historically constrained set of available options for non-teleological strategic action in public, semi-public (evolving across specific groups), or private arenas (Rossi 2015, 22). In other words, the collection of strategies used by a social movement to achieve its main goals. The basic idea is to consider contentious and routine repertoires simultaneously, not limiting the analysis to the in-the-public-space aspects of the movement, and achieving a fuller depiction of historical events. Thus, this concept allows for explaining aspects that Tilly’s concept was ignoring.

Social movements simultaneously perform two types of repertoires. Thus it is important to identify the three main ways in which the repertoire of strategies differs from the repertoire of contention. First, the repertoire of strategies is more dynamic. Second, it is not solely contentious nor always public. It includes Tilly’s forms of public disruption, as well as non-contentious private actions such as informal meetings with politicians, audiences with the president, and so on. The term “strategy” and not “tactics” is part of this concept because movement actors choose a contentious and public action versus another form of action as part of the movement’s long-term goals and a wider understanding of the social reality. Each strategic choice will necessarily include many tactical decisions to achieve the goal. The third difference is that the repertoire of strategies is mostly defined in its relationship to medium- and short-term changes in the political context, while the repertoire of contention is associated with longer-term changes.

Following Bourdieu (2000, 145), action is the product of the accumulation of historical legacies. Though acknowledging the contextual constraints on actors’ choices, the repertoire of strategies has two fundamental differences with Bourdieu. First, collective actors, not individual agents, perform repertoires of strategies. Second, this definition is rooted in a perspective that is not structuralist, allowing for spaces for rupture and dislocation. However, the repertoire of strategies is informed by the attribute of Bourdieu’s (2000, 160) “habitus”: that the actor’s choices are not necessarily coherent. Therefore, the definition of repertoire of strategies

is sustained by the idea of the restricted nature of the available options perceived as feasible by the actor. While for Bourdieu the individual agent is structurally predisposed to selecting a particular strategy, in the repertoire of strategies the strategic choice is the result of a historically constrained set of available and concatenated options (i.e. the stock of legacies). To sum up, the accumulation of strategies by a collective actor builds repertoires based on evaluating (whether correctly or not) their (and/or others') past strategies and, thus, opting to innovate, emulate, readapt, or reject them in a (socially delimited) conscious and oblivious fashion.

The concept of repertoire of strategies has two specific attributes that differentiate it from that of ideologies: it only represents the strategic options chosen, and, though being modular, it is rooted in time and space. It allows for the selection of strategies (contentious or otherwise), in public, semi-public, or private arenas, and thus offers a tool for improving the analytical connection among multiple types of simultaneous actions pertaining to the same actor. In other words, the repertoire of strategies has a historical origin and tradition that can explain it, but it can be, and generally is, redefined by other actors coming from diverse ideological positions and different historical moments.

The emergence of strong white supremacist movements in the USA, extreme right-wing evangelical movements in Brazil, and neofascist movements in many parts of Europe shows that there is no straightforward relationship between ideology and repertoire of strategies. The difficulty for social movement studies in explaining their emergence is due to its overemphasis on left-wing actors. Instead, how repertoire of strategies expansion happens across (ideologically diverse) movements offers an explanation for what right-wing movements have been doing for decades to enrich their own repertoire: studying, emulating, and resignifying strategies of other very different movements for their own purposes.

As stated, repertoires of contention and repertoires of strategies refer to things happening within the same movement that are related but different. Their interrelation is seen when the use of different contentious methods may result from the same strategy, or when the same contentious action is connected to different strategies. The interaction between the two repertoires is asynchronous because the repertoire of strategies does not evolve through slow social change, meaning that innovation in repertoires of strategies is much quicker and easier than in repertoires of contention.

The interplay of both repertoires in the same movement can be observed in the analysis of how strategies are created, reformulated, used, and discharged in the struggle of the Piquetero movement in Argentina. For 25 years, while the repertoire of contention of the Piqueteros remained steadfast in its use of roadblocks, marches, and encampments, the repertoire of strategies changed several times in the same period and was composed of around 15 predominant strategies, with only some of them used by the whole movement (Rossi 2017).

Demonstrating the utility of going beyond contentious-only studies, González-Agüero et al. (2020) explain how the insulin patients' movement in Chile could accommodate their repertoire of strategies to changes in the political and institutional context while creating collaborative interactions with the state. Abers et al. (2021) show how variations in responses to the COVID-19 pandemic are explained by the different strategies performed by social movements inside and outside government and by contrasting ideational disputes in Argentina and Brazil. Gutiérrez (2020) analyzes the "troubled collaboration" of a popular movement of urban waste recyclers and the center-right government of the city of Buenos Aires as a result of a repertoire of strategies that combines contentious and collaborative actions. And Shevtsova (2017) offers a comparative analysis of opposite outcomes of LGBTI movements in Turkey and Ukraine

confirming that to understand the differences we need to go beyond public actions and analyze instead each movement's repertoire of strategies.

In two innovative applications of the original concept, Caciagli (2019) analyzes the internal dynamics of squat movements in Rome as “educational sites of resistance,” adding a spatial dimension to the repertoire of strategies concept. And Delgado de Carvalho (2020) expands the analysis of the differences between public and semi-public actions in a repertoire of strategies, building a typology of public and semi-public actions and explaining what leads to the emergence of each one in the small peasants' movement of Brazil.

Stock of legacies

The repertoire of strategies represents the predominant set of strategies used by a movement in a specific time period. But, what delimits the actors' perception of the availability of strategies in their repertoire? As in the case of the repertoire of contention, there are elements that limit what the repertoire can contain. While the repertoire of contention changes very slowly, linked as it is to macro-transformations such as regime changes, the repertoire of strategies is more dynamic, which implies that its demarcation is based on actors' participation in a historical accumulation of events, experiences, and intentional learning processes that build a stock of legacies.

Stocks of legacies are the concatenation of past struggles, which, through the sedimentation of what is lived and perceived to be lived as well as what is intentionally learned, produces an accumulation of experience that adds or eliminates specific strategies from the repertoire of strategies as both a self-conscious and oblivious process (Rossi 2015, 31). The repertoire of strategies and the repertoire of contention are connected through the stock of legacies because they are both informed by the latter. In other words, in interplay with the configuration of the political context, the stock of legacies is the historical and nonrationalist limitation of the repertoires.

The concept of stock of legacies is inspired by Schutz's (1967, 76–77) concept of “stock of experience.” According to Schutz (1967, 77–78), a “meaningful lived experience” is the reflective product of each individual's flowing stream of experience that builds a stock of knowledge, that which enables each person to guide his or her conduct in the course of their life. In a stock of legacies, the actor opts for actions based on a set of identified available options that are open to innovation. But this process of selection is not that of an entirely free agent, nor is it the result of a coherent deliberation. Rather it is limited by socialization, from among (mis)perceived accumulated available options, and within a restricted set of legacies that enrich or impoverish the range of the stock. The stock of legacies offers a complementary explanation to the purely structural limitations to innovations suggested by Tilly (1986, 4, 390–391; 2008: 203–204), which tend to make it much easier to explain the stability of repertoires than changes to them.

The stock of legacies is composed of multiple and sometimes even contradictory accumulated experiences that build expectations that are reasonable for certain lived experiences rather than rational or universal forms of action. For instance, the stock of legacies of the Piquetero movement is composed of three main elements. First, the armed struggle of urban guerrillas and the consequences of violent repression. Second, Christian-based communities' practice of *basista* organization and their urban land occupations. Third, trade unionism, which is the result of the accumulated experience of syndicalist and communist unionism and later also of

Peronist unionism (Rossi 2017). In the case of the Albanian student movement of the 1990s, the stock of legacies included the cultural revolution of the 1960s and the structural changes to socialism of the 1980s (Shahini 2021).

How the stock is built is a crucial empirical question. Two excellent studies analyze this. In the first, Donoso (2017) traces the construction of the repertoire of strategies of the Chilean student movement to the identification of specific experiential events that accumulated or constituted a stock of legacies for the movement that opted for what she calls “outsider” and “insider” strategies in interactions with the state. The second, by Parra Coray (2021a), identifies and elaborates the stock of legacies produced by the interaction between parties and student, environmental, and feminist movements in post-transition Chile.

Explaining innovation in repertoires of strategies

While the stock of legacies explains the historical roots of strategies, what explains changes in repertoires of strategies? Some strategies have a long tradition with international origins, while others are quite new. Because the repertoire of strategies is not structurally determined as the repertoire of contention, its transformations happen as a result of debates that are permanently renewed among movements, as well as the party, union, and intellectual elites related to them. These debates sometimes set into motion some modifications that are partially based on experiential learning.

Experiential accumulation intentionally and unintentionally expands or restricts the repertoire of strategies, and thus plays a decisive additional role in the comprehension of the interactive process of change and continuity. Actors reduce or expand their repertoire of strategies by defining and redefining their past actions and how they are linked to their present choice of strategic options. This can take place through slow and gradual changes at the state and regime levels, but also through systematic reading/studying (which happens among many philosophically or ideologically minded groups), trans-generational intentional transmission (when the older leaders give courses and informally transmit their experience and knowledge to younger and less experienced members), “resignification” (where the original strategy is taken up by another group with different political goals and inserted within a different set of legacies), and by participating in many gatherings and meetings with other movements that tend to build a community of shared practices, among other things. In other words, the repertoire of strategies is delimited by nonrationalistic principles as a result of the stock of legacies, as well as the configuration of the political context.

Bobes (2021) details the expansion of the predominant repertoire of strategies of some movements in Cuba since the 1990s and how the 2019 Constitution intends to respond to the growing organizational autonomy of society from the state. In a similar fashion, Rozas Bugueño and Maillet (2018) explore the combination of intra-movement dynamics of transmission of strategies and short-term changes in the configuration of the political context to explain innovations in the repertoire of strategies of the movement against private pensions in Chile. And Parra Coray (2021b) analyzes how the social explosion of 2019 meant an expansion of the repertoire of strategies of Chilean social movements through accumulated experiences, political praxis, and maturation of ideas that was not perceived by the specialized literature because the focus was placed on the contentious dimension only.

Conclusion

The concepts of “repertoire of strategies” and “stock of legacies” dilute the artificial distinction between routine and contentious politics, connecting both of these as part of a rainbow of possible strategic options. The identification of a predominant repertoire of strategies allows for the recognition of elements fundamental to a social movement that could not have otherwise been perceived in its analysis. It allows us to explain what is happening when the repertoire of contention is not deployed, narrating a much more dynamic and rich process of strategic action than is possible through the concept of repertoire of contention alone. And it opens the door to analyzing the internal complexity of a movement. This internal richness would never be apparent if the analysis was reduced to the Tillyan approach alone. In addition, these two concepts help to close the gap between micro tactical trade-offs and macro repertoires of contention with a collective and historically rooted understanding of strategy making. Finally, with these concepts, it is possible to link public and not-so-public arenas to analyze the full picture of the dynamics of interaction, explaining what happens when protest is not happening.

SEE ALSO: Alt-right; Collective Action (Collective Behavior); *Piqueteros* (Unemployed Workers Movement in Argentina); Processual Perspectives; Protest; Relational Arenas of Social Movements Activism; Repertoires of Contention; Right-wing Movements (Latin America); Right-wing Populism and Populist Movements; Strategy; Tactical Interaction and Innovation; Tactics; Temporality and Social Movements; White Supremacy as a Worldwide Movement.

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

- Abers, R.N., Rossi, F.M., and von Bülow, M. (2021). State–society relations in uncertain times: Social movement strategies, ideational contestation and the pandemic in Brazil and Argentina. *International Political Science Review* 42 (3): 333–349.
- Bobes, V.C. (2021). De los discursos de identidad al activismo social: los movimientos sociales en la coyuntura de la nueva constitución cubana. *Revista Brasileira de Ciência Política*. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0103-3352.2021.34.240521>.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Practical Reasons: On the Theory of Action*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalian Meditations*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Caciagli, C. (2019). Housing squats as “educational sites of resistance”: The process of movement social base formation in the struggle for the house. *Antipode* 51 (3): 730–749.
- Delgado de Carvalho, P. (2020). Collective action and political change: Public and semipublic strategies of Brazilian rural movements (1990s–2017). *Latin American Perspectives* 47 (5): 113–130.
- Donoso, S. (2017). “Outsider” and “insider” strategies: Chile’s student movement, 1990–2014. In: *Social Movements in Chile: Organization, Trajectories and Political Consequences* (ed. S. Donoso and M. von Bülow), 65–98. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fantasia, R. (1988). *Culture of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fligstein, N. and McAdam, D. (2011). Toward a general theory of strategic action fields. *Sociological Theory* 29 (1): 1–26.
- Gamson, W. (1975). *The Strategy of Social Protest*. Homewood: Dorsey Press.
- Goldstone, J. (ed.) (2003). *States, Parties, and Social Movements*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- González-Aguero, M., Vargas, I., Campos, S., Fariás Cancino, A., Quezada Quezada, C., and Urrutia Egaña, M. (2020). What makes a health movement successful? Health inequalities and the insulin pump in Chile. *Critical Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09581596.2020.1808190>.

- Gutiérrez, R.A. (2020). A troubled collaboration: Cartoneros and the PRO administrations in Buenos Aires. *Latin American Politics and Society* 62 (1): 97–120.
- Jasper, J.M. (2004). A strategic approach to collective action: Looking for agency in social movement choices. *Mobilization* 9 (1): 1–16.
- Jasper, J.M. (2006). *Getting Your Way: Strategic Dilemmas in the Real World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jasper, J.M. (2012). Choice points, emotional batteries, and other ways to find strategic agency at the micro level. In: *Strategies for Social Change* (ed. G.M. Maney, R.V. Kutz-Flamenbaum, D.A. Rohlinger, and J. Goodwin), 23–42. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Maney, G.M., Andrew, K.T., Kutz-Flamenbaum, R.V., Rohlinger, D.A., and Goodwin, J. (2012). An introduction to strategies for social change. In: *Strategies for Social Change* (ed. G.M. Maney, R.V. Kutz-Flamenbaum, D.A. Rohlinger, and J. Goodwin), xi–xxxviii. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Meyer, D. and Staggenborg, S. (2012). Thinking about strategy. In: *Strategies for Social Change* (ed. G.M. Maney, R.V. Kutz-Flamenbaum, D.A. Rohlinger, and J. Goodwin), 3–22. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Nepstad, S.E. and Vinthagen, S. (2012). Strategic choices in cross-national movements: A comparison of the Swedish and British Plowshares movements. In: *Strategies for Social Change* (ed. G.M. Maney, R.V. Kutz-Flamenbaum, D.A. Rohlinger, and J. Goodwin), 263–284. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Parra Coray, G. (2021a). Political parties and social movements in post-transition Chile: Between mistrust and reconfiguration. In: *The Social Outburst and Political Representation in Chile: Latin American Societies* (ed. B. Navarrete and V. Tricot), 51–74. Cham: Springer.
- Parra Coray, G. (2021b). “We didn’t see it coming”: Chile’s 2019 social outburst. In: *The Social Outburst and Political Representation in Chile: Latin American Societies* (ed. B. Navarrete and V. Tricot), 193–199. Cham: Springer.
- Rossi, F.M. (2015). Conceptualizing strategy making in a historical and collective perspective. In: *Social Movement Dynamics: New Perspectives on Theory and Research from Latin America* (ed. F.M. Rossi and M. von Bülow), 15–41. Farnham: Ashgate/Routledge.
- Rossi, F.M. (2017). *The Poor’s Struggle for Political Incorporation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rozas Bugueño, J. and Maillat, A. (2019). Entre marchas, plebiscitos e iniciativas de ley: innovación en el repertorio de estrategias del movimiento No Más AFP en Chile (2014–2018). *Izquierdas* 48: 1–21.
- Schutz, A. (1967). *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Shahini, A. (2021). Sullied: The Albanian student movement of December 1990. *Frontiers in Political Science* 3: 142.
- Shevtsova, M. (2017). Queering Gezi and Maidan: Instrumentalization and negotiation of sexuality within the protest movement. In: *Non-Western Social Movements and Participatory Democracy* (ed. E. Arbatli and D. Rosenberg), 85–100. Cham: Springer.
- Smithey, L.A. (2009). Social movement strategy, tactics, and collective identity. *Sociology Compass* 3 (4): 658–671.
- Tilly, C. (1986). *The Contentious French*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Tilly, C. (1995). Contentious repertoires in Great Britain, 1758–1834. In: *Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action* (ed. M. Traugott), 15–42. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Tilly, C. (2006). *Regimes and Repertoires*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tilly, C. (2008). *Contentious Performances*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Vaz Moura, J.T. (2018). Dinâmicas dos movimentos sociais: reflexões sobre cultura e oportunidades políticas. *Mediações – Revista de Ciências Sociais* 23 (2): 390–411.