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Roger Karapin
CUNY Hunter College

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Opportunity/Threat Spirals in Social Movements:
The U.S. Women's Suffrage and German Anti-Immigration Movements¹

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edited by Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow

Roger Karapin²
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Abstract

Many have noted that protesters sometimes expand political opportunities for later protests, but there has been little analysis of how this occurs. The problem can be addressed by analyzing opportunity/threat spirals, which involve positive feedback among: actions by challengers (bold protests and the formation of alliances between challenger groups); opportunity-increasing actions by authorities and elites (elite divisions and support, procedural reforms, substantive concessions, and police inaction); and threat-increasing actions by authorities and elites (new grievance production and excessive repression). Interactions among these eight mechanisms are demonstrated in two cases of social movement growth, the U.S. women's suffrage movement of the 1910s and the German anti-immigration movement of the early 1990s. The cases show similar positive feedback processes despite many other differences, which suggests that the specified interactions may operate in a wide range of social movements in democratic countries.

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²Professor of Political Science at Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York. Email: rkarapin@panix.com.

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Introduction

Political-opportunity and political-process theories of social movements have been surprisingly unidirectional. That is, they have mostly posited conditions under which movements are likely to begin, expand, and succeed in their goals. Causation flows in one direction, from the political environment to movement activity. Yet movements include actors who aim to build power and sometimes do so; protesters sometimes affect their environments and hence the course of protest.

In this article, I argue for the greater inclusion of positive-feedback processes in theories of why some movements grow in activity and power. Briefly, the claim is that one condition of movement growth is that positive feedback develops among certain kinds of actions by protesters, their elite allies, and authorities. The positive feedback creates spirals of increasing opportunity, threat, or both. The next section shows that theories of movements have touched on these interactions but have left them largely unexplored. I then describe positive-feedback processes in terms of eight kinds of actions, or mechanisms, and the ways they tend to reinforce each other when movements are growing. The mechanisms and the interactions among them are demonstrated through two case studies, the U.S. women's suffrage movement (1910-20), and, more briefly, the German anti-immigration movement (1991-93), which were chosen in a strategy of universalizing comparison. If the same kind of positive-feedback processes occur in such disparate cases, it is likely they can be found in a wide range of growing social movements in democratic countries. The conclusions suggest some ways to simplify our analysis of complex opportunity/threat spirals and how to relate them to external causes.

Where is the Positive Feedback?

Political-process theories have mostly focused on how political environments affect protest mobilization and outcomes. The main factors identified include the configuration of formal institutions, including their openness; elite divisions and the provision of elite support to movements; success chances; threats to the interests of protesters or their constituents; the level of repression or facilitation; organizational strength; and the nature of dominant discourses (Eisinger 1973; Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Tilly 1978: 54-56; McAdam 1982: 40-51; Kitschelt 1986; Tarrow 1989a: 34-36; Gamson and Meyer 1996, 279-81). Whether stable or changing features of the political environment are emphasized, the main causal linkages have been from the environment to movements.

At the same time, leading political-process theorists have often recognized that protesters also affect their political environments, perhaps in ways that make later protests more likely (e.g., Tarrow 1989a: 36-37, 1994: 96-97; Gamson and Meyer 1996: 278-79, 289; McAdam 1996a: 35-37; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 243-44). However, this aspect of political-process theory has been relatively undeveloped. As McAdam wrote, the observation that movements make opportunities is "indisputably true ... [but] not widely reflected in the extant literature" (McAdam 1996a: 35). A decade and a half later, that conclusion is still accurate. Indeed, explicitly interactive theorizing, which systematically examines how movements and their political environments affect each other, has been uncommon.

Major early exceptions¹ were by Doug McAdam, who made a clear theoretical statement that movements and political environments affect each other after movement emergence, and then gave empirical support concerning how the civil rights movement gained elite allies and triggered counterproductive repression (McAdam 1982: 52-54, 147-49, 167, 174-79). McAdam

also argued that the development of a movement depends on tactical innovations to which opponents cannot effectively respond, and that later the opponents make tactical adaptations which undermine the movement's power (McAdam 1983).

Finally, ten years ago, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001: 45-50) made a major advance by reconceiving the main elements of previous, relatively structural theories, including organizations, opportunities, and repertoires, as interactive processes between protesters and polity members. What's more, this work identified opportunity/threat spirals as a central and common process of interaction among challengers and polity members, defined as "sequences of environmental change, interpretation of that change, action, and counteraction, repeated as one action alters another actor's environment" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 243, 323).

However, like the previous political-process work, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly leave opportunity/threat spirals largely unspecified in theoretical terms and largely unexplored empirically. When spirals are invoked or illustrated, they are mostly like black boxes (e.g., McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 243-44, 252-53, 324, 330). Exactly what kinds of actions by challengers, by authorities, and by other polity members (elites) can contribute to opportunity/threat spirals? Which actions are most common or powerful? What is each kind of action likely to lead to? What mechanisms link one action to the counteraction? What sequences of action and counteraction occur most often, or have the most effect on protests?

Because these questions have not been addressed, we are not much farther along in this area than we were a decade ago. Theoretical works have made only fragmentary contributions to our understanding of how positive feedback contributes to social movement growth. Three areas have received the most attention. First, Sharp (1973) and McAdam (1983) have analyzed how new protest tactics can throw opponents off balance and trigger violent repression that,

paradoxically, promotes protest by recruiting elite allies and participants for protest groups. The circumstances under which repression backfires have also been studied by Mason (1989), Brockett (1993), Schock (2005), and Hess and Martin (2006), among others. Second, theorists of collective action have analyzed how initial participation in protests helps promote further participation, by reducing collective-action problems (e.g., Chong 1991; Marwell and Oliver 1993). However, this work has focused on processes among protesters and potential protesters, not between them and elite allies or authorities. Third, the theory of protest cycles analyzes how the use of new protest tactics by "early risers" creates opportunities for other movements to develop, forming a larger wave of protest, which grows until authorities respond decisively with repression and reforms that divide movement participants (Tarrow 1989a: 51-52, 1994: 7, 86, 155, 156, 180, 189; Koopmans 1993; Meyer 1993; Meyer and Whittier 1994; cf. also Sommer 2000). As important as these strands are, they do not provide an overall picture of positive feedback among challengers, authorities, and elites.

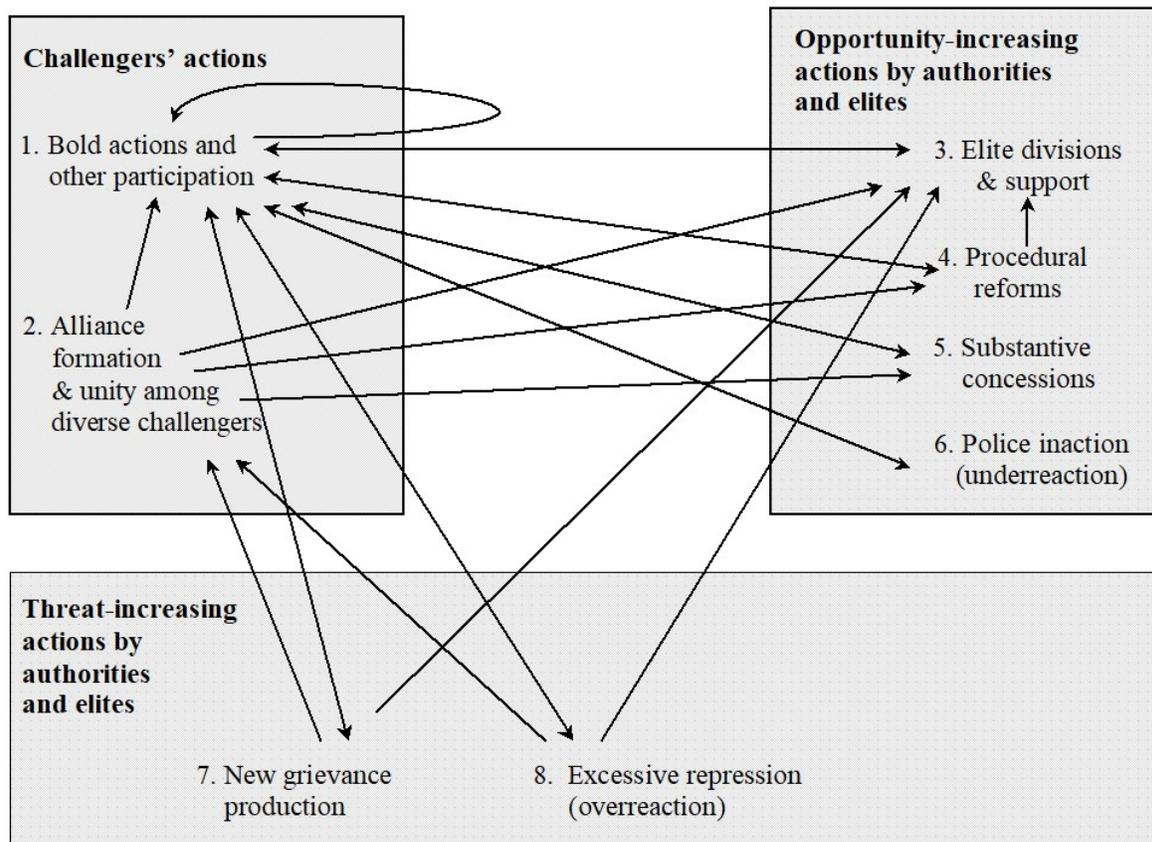
Mechanisms and Feedback in Opportunity/Threat Spirals

Before trying to provide that overall picture, a few clarifications may be helpful. First, the scope of this theoretical effort is limited to individual social movements that are oriented toward the state in established democracies. It does not directly address other kinds of contentious action, non-democratic regimes, or interactions between related or opposing movements in cycles of protest -- even though opportunity/threat spirals seem to operate in those settings, too.² Second, the theoretical process outlined here is not intended to be complete, even within the domain of state-oriented movements in democracies. In particular, news media and the public, as represented by public opinion, comprise additional actors of importance, which mediate among

many of the mechanisms included here (McAdam 1996b; Koopmans 2004), but are largely left aside here in order to put some limits on the complexity. Organization building, framing, and identity-formation mechanisms are not included here either, although they may be important aspects of opportunity/threat spirals.

Within those limits, the theoretical process proposed here is an attempt at a more comprehensive understanding of positive feedback among protesters, authorities, and elites. I developed the theory in an earlier book, partly inductively, through a comparison of four cases of urban-renewal and nuclear-energy conflicts in Germany, and partly by synthesizing disparate elements of political-process theories and political-process analyses of cases (Karapin 2007: 36-45). In the present version, it includes eight types of action (or mechanisms³), which combine to form an opportunity/threat spiral, in which actions reinforce each other in a positive-feedback process. As shown in Figure 1 and described below, each of the eight mechanisms tends to trigger certain other mechanisms on the list, and thus contributes to positive feedback. In addition, each tends to promote movement participation more directly, by increasing success chances, facilitation, sudden grievances, or challenger unity. There are three broad kinds of actions: actions by protesters; opportunity-increasing actions by authorities and elites; and threat-increasing actions by authorities and elites.

Figure 1. Interactions among Challengers, Authorities, and Elites in Opportunity/Threat Spirals



Actions by protesters

(1) **Bold actions** means that protesters undertake collective actions that are daring, novel in methods or targets, seize power resources, or involve large numbers of participants. Especially given the preferences of the news media, such actions tend to attract attention (McAdam 1996b: 346-50), provoke authorities, and put protesters at risk of repression. Hence they may cause some *elites to increase support* (McAdam 1982: 147-49, 167; Schock 2005: 162) or knock authorities off-balance, causing them to *overreact* or *underreact* to protests (Sharp 1973: chs. 10, 12; McAdam 1983). They may also trigger *procedural reforms*, *substantive concessions*, or *new grievance production*, each of which also has potential effects on movement participation.

Finally, bold actions by one group of protesters, if not suppressed, can directly encourage others to protest, either because the initial actions are inspiring or because their efforts are interdependent (Tarrow 1994: 156; Biggs 2003: 224-28).

(2) **Alliance formation and unity among diverse challengers** means that protest groups with a wide range of methods and/or demands work toward some common goals in the same general setting. The alliance may be explicit or merely an objective one that the actors do not recognize or that they publicly deny. Demands may range from moderate and incremental to radical or extreme, while protest methods may range from conventional (predictable) to disruptive (nonviolent but unpredictable) to militant (threatening or using violence). A diversity of methods and goals increases the collective capacities of the allied protesters. This makes it possible to launch *bold actions* while at the same time keeping open lines of communication to elites and hence chances for gaining *elite support* and avoiding *police repression* (Gamson and Meyer 1996: 288-89; cf. Tarrow 1994: 155). A diversity of methods also makes it possible to carry out different kinds of bold actions in the same campaign, e.g., militance by a few, conventional or disruptive protests by large numbers. Moreover, it makes it more likely that moderate protesters will win *procedural reforms* or *substantive concessions* from authorities who feel threatened by the radical flank (Haines 1988; Button 1978: 174-76; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988: 718-19).

Opportunity-increasing actions by authorities and elites

(3) **Elite divisions and support** means that political elites express disagreements with each other about the issues on which protesters are making demands, or that some elites express support for protesters or their demands. The line between elites and authorities is often blurred in

the case of elected officials in democracies, who both direct parts of the state and act as politicians vying for public support. Weak insiders, who are in the elite circle but are relatively marginalized there, are more prone to support protesters than are more powerful elites (Grant and Wallace 1991: 1118-20). Elite divisions are strongly related to other elite processes that lie outside protest politics, e.g., socioeconomic change or elections and electoral competition, but can also be affected by some of the mechanisms here. Elite divisions and support increase protesters' success chances and reduce their risks of repression and hence encourage more *bold actions and other protest participation* (Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Tarrow 1994: 87-89; della Porta 1995: 81).

(4) **Procedural reforms** means that authorities increase protesters' or the public's routine access to officials. This may involve new institutions and legal frameworks, or merely a more inviting use of existing procedures. Procedural reforms reduce the costs of taking action, which promotes especially routine *participation* in the movement and provides routine access to *elites who may increase their support* for protesters (Tarrow 1994: 86-87, 1989b: 310-23; Karapın 2007: 99-103).

(5) **Substantive concessions** means that authorities make concessions that favor the interests of protesters or their constituents and that appear to be in response to particular protests, often because of their timing. Substantive concessions increase protesters' perceived success chances and hence encourage *participation* in the movement generally, and specifically in the methods that appeared to be successful (McAdam 1983: 743; Kriesberg 2007: 177; Tarrow 1994: 156).

(6) **Police inaction** means that police are unusually passive in the face of illegal or disruptive protests. Inactivity could be due to institutional weaknesses in coercive capacity or due

to strategic, tactical, or policy decisions by either the police or higher authorities. Police inaction reduces the costs and risks of *bold actions*, and hence encourages their repeated use or spread (Tilly 1978: 100; della Porta 1995: 82; Willems 1997: 447).

Threat-increasing actions by authorities and elites

(7) **New grievance production** means that government officials or elites make new substantive threats to the interests of protesters, refuse to adopt major policy reforms in the face of strong protests, or either close or obviously manipulate procedural channels. These threats rapidly increase perceived grievances, which tends to increase movement *participation* (Walsh 1981). If the threats are seen as severe, they may prompt outrage and thus increase *unity within or between protest groups* and win *elite support* for protesters (Kriesberg 2007: 167).

(8) **Excessive repression** means that police or organized societal forces⁴ repress protests in a way that is perceived as unjustifiably harsh or undifferentiated, i.e., which does not distinguish between different socially relevant types of protesters or kinds of protest action. By contrast, consistent, proportionate, and flexible repression tends to effectively suppress protests. Police overreactions, or their toleration of repression by other actors, may be the result of decisions made by higher authorities. While repression immediately reduces the movement's capacities and increases the risks that protesters face, these demobilizing effects are often outweighed by the outrage provoked by excessive repression, especially if it is conveyed or magnified by media reporting. Outrage may further radicalize militant protesters and may increase *unity among and recruitment to protest groups* (della Porta and Tarrow 1986; della Porta 1995: 80; Sharp 1973: 678-90; Willems 1997: 444-48). In addition, it may win *support from the public and elites* and thus paradoxically lead to reduced risks of repression because authorities then bow to elite or

public pressure (Sharp 1973: 658-78; McAdam 1983: 745-46, 748; Kriesberg 2007: 168; Mason 1989: 482; Brockett 1993: 471-72; Smithey and Kurtz 1999; della Porta 1995: 81; Tilly 2006: 224-25). Hence, excessive repression may, through these mechanisms, lead to an overall increase in *bold protests and movement participation*. This effect is more likely when opportunities are generally large, e.g., because elites are already divided (Brockett 1993; Schock 1999: 367-68).

The overall theoretical argument, then, is that when large movements develop, they do so through a process of mutually reinforcing interactions (positive feedback) among these elements. As seen in Figure 1, the mechanisms can interrelate with each other in a great number of ways, but perhaps not in all possible ways. These mechanisms can also help explain the decline of social movements. Decline often results when authorities make policy reforms (*reducing substantive threats*), incorporate some but not other protest groups (*reducing protester diversity*), and learn to use police in proactive, flexible, proportionate ways, (*reducing sudden grievances and facilitation*) (McAdam 1983; della Porta and Tarrow 1986; Tarrow 1989b: ch. 12).

Before demonstrating this process through the case studies, a few more clarifications may be helpful. First, this description of the process is agnostic about whether actors are rational and correctly perceive opportunities and threats, or whether perceived and objective opportunities and threats diverge.⁵ Second, here I mostly leave aside the important question of what causes this positive-feedback process to develop. I do not claim that these mechanisms always have the indicated effects, only that they have done so in many cases in a wide variety of circumstances. In many other cases, they have not had those effects, and the reasons presumably lie in other conditions, whether initial or contemporaneous, structural or processual. In the women's suffrage case study, I will indicate some of these additional causes, and I will return to this issue in the

conclusions. Similarly, here I can address only tangentially the extent to which these mechanisms are independent of larger forces and to which the actors possess some agency through the mechanisms. I think it is likely that the mechanisms have some independence, since they often arise unpredictably, are contingent on each other, and sometimes depend on accidents of timing.

Dynamics of the U.S. Women's Suffrage Movement, 1910-20

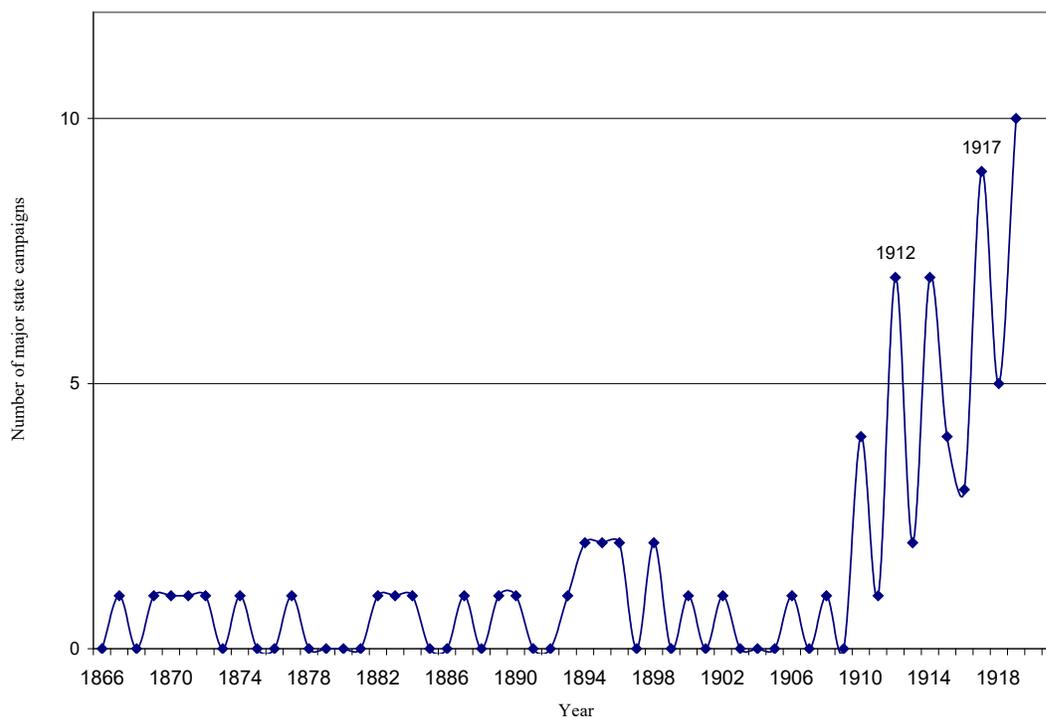
New growth of an old movement

The women's suffrage movement originated at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, began campaigning for the right to vote just after the Civil War, and founded two national organizations in 1869. It finally achieved nationwide women's suffrage through congressional passage and state ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the federal constitution a half century later, in 1919 and 1920. But the movement remained small and progress was slow during its first four decades, with only 16,000 members in the main national association in 1910 and only four states having granted women's suffrage by that date. The period from 1896 to 1910 has been called "the doldrums" for its relative lack of activity (Flexner 1975: 256).

The next ten years saw a massive increase in movement activity, according to many measures. As seen in Figure 2, the annual rate of major state-level campaigns for women's suffrage shot up seven-fold from the 1891-1910 period to the 1911-19 period.⁶ In the first period, there were only 14 major campaigns in 20 years, or 0.7 per year, while in the second period, there were 47 major campaigns in 9 years, or 5.2 per year. Peaks in activity were reached in 1912-14 and 1917-19. McCammon, Hewitt, and Smith's (2004: 534) analysis of 883 appeals made during state-level campaigns over the 1866-1919 period shows a similar surge in activity, with a peak in 1913-14 at about three times the rate of the 1900-1910 period, and a smaller peak in 1917. A

variety of new protest methods also grew greatly in this period. For example, the number of states which had seen the new tactic of the women's suffrage parade grew from 2 in 1908 to 17 in 1914, and then 24 in 1917 (data from McCammon 2003: 793). Finally, membership of the National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) quadrupled to 65,000 in 1914 (Banazsak 1996: 45). Why did the movement awaken from the doldrums to engage in this surge of activity during the 1910s? And why did activity peak in the 1912-14 and 1917-19 periods?

Figure 2: Major State Campaigns by the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1866-1919



Underlying causes of this growth include a massive increase in women in the workforce and in the number of educated, professional women. Women in employment nearly doubled to 7.4 million from 1890 to 1910, including large numbers of teachers, sales clerks, and office

workers. Women also rose from 15 to 34 percent of all college graduates in the 1870-1920 period (Giele 1995: 158). From their numbers a critical mass would be mobilized on behalf of women's suffrage (Flexner 1975: 236). Also, the rise of the urban middle-class progressive movement and its state and national legislative successes in the 1900s (Wiebe 1967) created potential allies for the suffrage movement and a political climate in which further reforms seemed possible.

However, another, necessary cause of the growth in women's suffrage movement activity was the development of an opportunity/threat spiral, which linked new protest methods, rising elite support, substantive concessions, and large-scale participation in the movement in cycles of positive feedback. In the following, I will trace causation in three main positive-feedback loops, which also interacted with each other to create an overall opportunity/threat spiral.

Tactical innovation and elite support

First, a spiral of tactical innovation, rising elite support, and increasing participation developed. Inspired by experience with the English suffrage movement and discouraged by previous defeats, activists adopted a variety of new protest methods and undertook bold actions. These led to broader participation and new success in winning the support of politicians and the right to vote in some states. In turn, this reinforced the use of new methods in later state-level and national campaigns, raised participation, and led again to the movement gaining elite support and voting rights.

When Harriot Stanton Blatch returned to the U.S. from England in 1902, she was dismayed to find the movement that her mother had helped to build was listless and engaged in uninspiring activities, chiefly meetings in private homes and public halls (Flexner 1975: 257-58). Beginning in the late 1900s, Blatch and other women of her generation who had been exposed to the more

adventurous and militant tactics of the English movement helped initiate a period of experimentation with new methods in the U.S. movement. They often acted through new organizations, such as the Equality League, the Congressional Union, and the National Woman's Party. Innovation was also a product of the sudden grievances produced when suffrage campaigns met with defeat. A study by McCammon found that the pro-suffrage parade, a tactic that women began to use in 1908, was more likely to be adopted in states where a major suffrage campaign had failed within the previous year (McCammon 2003: 807-8).

Although the U.S. movement initially did not adopt high-profile tactics used in England (such as heckling speakers or violence), it did adopt a great variety of new protest methods, ranging from new organizational routines to public demonstrations. These methods increased the movement's ability to communicate with potential members and potential elite supporters. Door to door campaigning and organizing supporters at the precinct and district level with the help of card files were mundane but valuable new instruments that were first used, with good results, in New York and Washington states in the 1907-10 period (Flexner 1975: 261-62; Scott and Scott 1982: 30). Lobbying of public officials also became much more carefully planned and coordinated after 1910 (Banaszak 1996: 134-35).

Since women were not often seen in the public sphere, they took a bold step and got much attention when they began to hold open-air meetings, parades, trolley tours, automobile pilgrimages, and silent protests from the late 1900s onward (Lumsden 1997: 27-33; Scott and Scott 1982: 29-30; McCammon 2003: 788). In addition, suffragists and women trade unionists formed new alliances, as the NAWSA dropped its advocacy of educational qualifications for voting in 1909 and female workers came to see voting rights as important to their struggles to organize. The Women's Trade Union League helped to bring working-class women into the

movement, and the American Federation of Labor's increased support in 1915 helped the movement make inroads in the industrial states of the northeast and midwest (Keyssar 2000: 203-6).

The new methods and alliances led to broader participation and new success in winning the support of politicians and the right to vote in the states. The new organizing methods helped the movement communicate with its potential followers and mobilize them for political action on referenda and for lobbying. Public protests showed the movement's commitment, size, and organization and greatly increased the visibility of their cause among bystanders, the press, and hence political elites. Bold actions helped win elite support, as seen in a study by Banaszak, which found that the use of confrontational tactics is correlated with the introduction of suffrage legislation by state politicians (Banaszak 1996: 177-79).

The effectiveness of these methods in winning elite support, votes, and hence voting rights was shown in the successful state-level campaigns in the 1910-13 period, which broke a 14-year losing streak for the movement. A carefully organized district-by-district campaign led to a 2-1 margin of victory in a Washington state referendum in 1910, and a very tightly organized lobbying campaign won presidential suffrage for women in Illinois in 1913. Moreover, in California in 1911, suffragists experimented with many new techniques during an intensive six-month campaign, including billboards, forms of entertainment such as pageants and plays, national speakers, and a famous touring car called the Blue Liner. They won the referendum for full suffrage by a very narrow margin of 3,500 votes (Flexner 1975: 263-65, 270).

In turn, these victories increased perceived success chances and encouraged more participation. Scott and Scott (1982: 30-31) write that "morale rose" with the state-level victories. Moreover, given how the victories were won, they created interest by other activists in using

similar methods in their own states and in a national campaign for a federal amendment to the constitution. As the new methods were used in those contexts, they again raised participation, attracted attention, and gained elite support and voting rights. Alice Paul, a young activist who returned from England in 1910 with ideas about new tactics and a partisan strategy, became an NAWSA officer and organized a women's parade in Washington, D.C. at Woodrow Wilson's inauguration in March 1913. The action was so successful in gaining attention for the movement that the NAWSA called on state organizations to hold parades in May 1914 and each May thereafter. By 1914, 17 states had held suffrage parades, and most of them continued the practice (Scott and Scott 1982: 31; McCammon 2003: 793, 794, 801).

Furthermore, the movement was energized by the rising success chances that were signaled by the Washington and California victories in 1910 and 1911. NAWSA membership shot up three-fold from 1911 to 1914 and activity reached a peak in 1914, about three times that of the 1900s, according to data on the movement's appeals (McCammon, Hewitt, and Smith 2004: 534). The number of state campaigns for voting rights increased sharply, from at most one per year in the 1897-1909 period, to an average of five per year from 1912 to 1915, to an average of eight per year from 1917 to 1919 (see Figure 2). Moreover, after 1911, many of these campaigns were in populous eastern and midwestern states, so the number of participants rose even more sharply than the number of campaigns.⁷

Concessions and opportunities

A second major opportunity spiral involved the interaction among state suffrage campaigns, elite support, and the winning of voting rights. The granting of voting rights comprised a kind of substantive concession⁸ obtained through electoral procedures (statewide

referenda) or granted by state legislatures. Those gains increased the movement's power and success chances, which in turn helped it to gain the support of politicians who either had to face female voters or began to see women's suffrage as likely to be adopted in their states.

In 1909, women had won the right to vote in only four states with 17 votes out of 483 in the Electoral College. Both Republicans and Democrats were largely uninterested in the issue, seeing no electoral advantage or disadvantage in it. But as women gained the vote in more states, politicians began to take note. By 1914, 12 states with 91 electoral votes had women's suffrage, and by 1918, it was 21 states with 213 electoral votes (Scott and Scott 1982: 26, 166-68).

With each victory in a state, the movement as a whole gained more respect and support from politicians in Congress and state legislatures (Scott and Scott 1982: 42). Those in suffrage states now had to face female voters, and hence became more willing to support a federal constitutional amendment, which became the NAWSA's focus after 1915. Politicians in non-suffrage states were also affected. As more and more of them came to think that women's suffrage would eventually be adopted in their states, they tried to profit from it rather than be harmed by it. This was a bandwagon effect, driven by the Democrats' and Republicans' competition for votes, in what Keyssar calls the endgame in each state. This explains why urban machine politicians during the 1915-20 period turned from opposing suffrage to neutrality or support for it (Keyssar 2000: 213-15). It also helps explain why the Republican and Democratic parties and their presidential candidates both adopted planks in favor of women's suffrage (though not for a federal amendment) in 1916. Other reasons include dramatic marches by suffragists at the parties' conventions (one march was held during a drenching rainstorm and gale) and the desire to undercut the Progressive Party, which had endorsed women's suffrage in 1912 (Scott and Scott 1982: 33-34).

In turn, rising support from the major parties encouraged the state suffrage organizations to mount campaigns and the NAWSA to support them. In addition, the nine state victories during the 1910-14 period convinced the NAWSA to greatly increase its mobilization. The organization had been largely moribund and in leadership crisis in the first half of the decade, during which the initiative for the victorious campaigns had come from the states. But in December 1915, the organization chose Carrie Catt and a team of professional leaders to lead a massive campaign for a federal constitutional amendment. Given the voting power and politicians' support that the state campaigns had won since 1910, they now saw an opportunity to win in the 36 states that would be needed to ratify the amendment (Flexner 1975: 281-92).

Bold protests, repression, and outrage

Third, there were important spirals of bold protests, excessive repression, and outrage in 1913 and 1917. Unusually bold demonstrations in favor of suffrage triggered violence from private citizens and the arrest and mistreatment of nonviolent demonstrators by police. This led to publicity and outrage, which in turn increased elite support and broadened participation in the movement.

While the vast majority of the new, demonstrative tactics adopted by the women's suffrage movement did not provoke repressive responses, two episodes of protests did. Indeed, they are good examples of what Gene Sharp calls "political jiu-jitsu." The events of 1913 began with a parade of 5,000 women in the national capital the day before President Wilson's inauguration, on March 3. Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, now working for the NAWSA's congressional committee, organized the parade, taking advantage of the crowds of hundreds of thousands who had assembled for the inauguration. The paraders were spat upon, knocked down, cursed, and

insulted by onlookers, who tried to prevent them from passing. Broken into smaller groups, the suffragists fought their way up Pennsylvania Avenue, taking an hour to walk ten blocks; bystanders scuffled and over a hundred people were injured in six hours of activity. The women, who had received a parade permit with the help of a congressman's suffragist wife, received no protection from the police, although they eventually did from federal soldiers and some National Guardsmen (Lumsden 1997: 78-81; Flexner 1975: 272-73).

The parade and the harsh treatment of the women gave the women's suffrage cause enormous publicity and led to a public outcry. Many political elites sympathized with the women, as shown by a Senate committee's ensuing investigation, which heard 150 witnesses and led to the resignation of the police chief (Lumsden 1997: 81). The suffrage movement gained new impetus from the publicity. Its congressional committee became more active and the Congressional Union was formed, initially within the NAWSA and later as an independent group. Broad protest participation in new bold actions was also spurred. Many suffrage groups made "pilgrimages" to Washington, petitions were circulated, delegations visited Wilson, and an automobile procession travelled to the Capitol to present 200,000 petition signatures to a group of senators (Flexner 1975: 273-74; Scott and Scott 1982: 31). As noted above, the success of the 1913 parade led the NAWSA to promote the tactic throughout the country, and 14 states saw their first women's suffrage parades in the following three years (McCammon 2003: 801).

The second episode was the series of pickets at the White House organized by Alice Paul's National Woman's Party beginning in January 1917. Picketing the White House, adapted from the union tactic of picketing a workplace on strike, had never been done before and it was difficult for police to find a legal infraction in it. Initially, the stationary, silent pickets were peaceful, as were moving pickets on Inauguration Day in March. By the summer, the slogans on

the picketers' signs were more provocative (referring to "Free Russia" and the lack of democracy in the U.S. in June, to "Kaiser Wilson" in August). Bystanders tore away the women's banners and attacked them, while the police offered little or no protection, and sometimes knocked down the women themselves. Arrests of the protesters (not of their attackers) also began in June, followed a bit later by short jail sentences, and then longer ones. Terms of imprisonment were for up to six months in a Virginia workhouse or the Washington, D.C. jail, in miserable conditions that included vermin and beatings.

As had happened in England, women prisoners protested their conditions and their lack of political-prisoner status with hunger strikes, and authorities responded with forced feeding. As news of those brutal procedures was smuggled out, it "made martyrs wholesale" (Flexner 1975: 295). The martyrdom probably had far-reaching effects since altogether 218 women from 26 states were arrested, 97 were jailed, and those arrested included professional and wealthy women, many from respected Quaker families, as well as young college graduates. Although the NAWSA denounced the protesters, when news about their prison conditions came to light, there was public outcry, and the prisoners were all released in November. The next March, a D.C. court invalidated the arrests and prison sentences (Lumsden 1997: 117-35; Flexner 1975: 292-97; Scott and Scott 1982: 41; Ford 1991: chs. 4-6, esp. 148, 159, 162, 198).

The pickets and the repression of them had important, though somewhat mixed, effects on elite and public opinion. The events produced huge publicity for the movement, despite the Wilson administration's attempts to silence the press (Graham 1983-84: 672-76 & n. 29), and Flexner implies that they speeded up action by Congress. The chairman of the Senate committee on women's suffrage inspected conditions in the Virginia prison on September 14, and the next day his committee issued a favorable report on women's suffrage. Nine days later, the House

created a committee and soon set a date of January 10 to vote on the federal amendment (Flexner 1975: 297). While NAWSA leaders thought the pickets almost cost the movement these gains, the National Woman's Party leaders understandably thought that the pickets were responsible for the congressional action. Flexner concludes that these protests had mixed effects on elites, and she emphasizes that it was the combination of moderate and militant actions, as well as the involvement of women in the war effort, that produced congressional victory at this time. Scott and Scott write that "[p]robably the militant tactics did more good than harm" in terms of gaining elite support, since the President and Congress feared what the women would do next, and hence embraced the NAWSA as the lesser of two evils (Scott and Scott 1982: 41). Keyssar agrees, and concludes that the 1917 protests helped produce presidential suffrage for women in 6 states that year,⁹ as well as full suffrage for women in New York by a large margin (Keyssar 2000: 214).

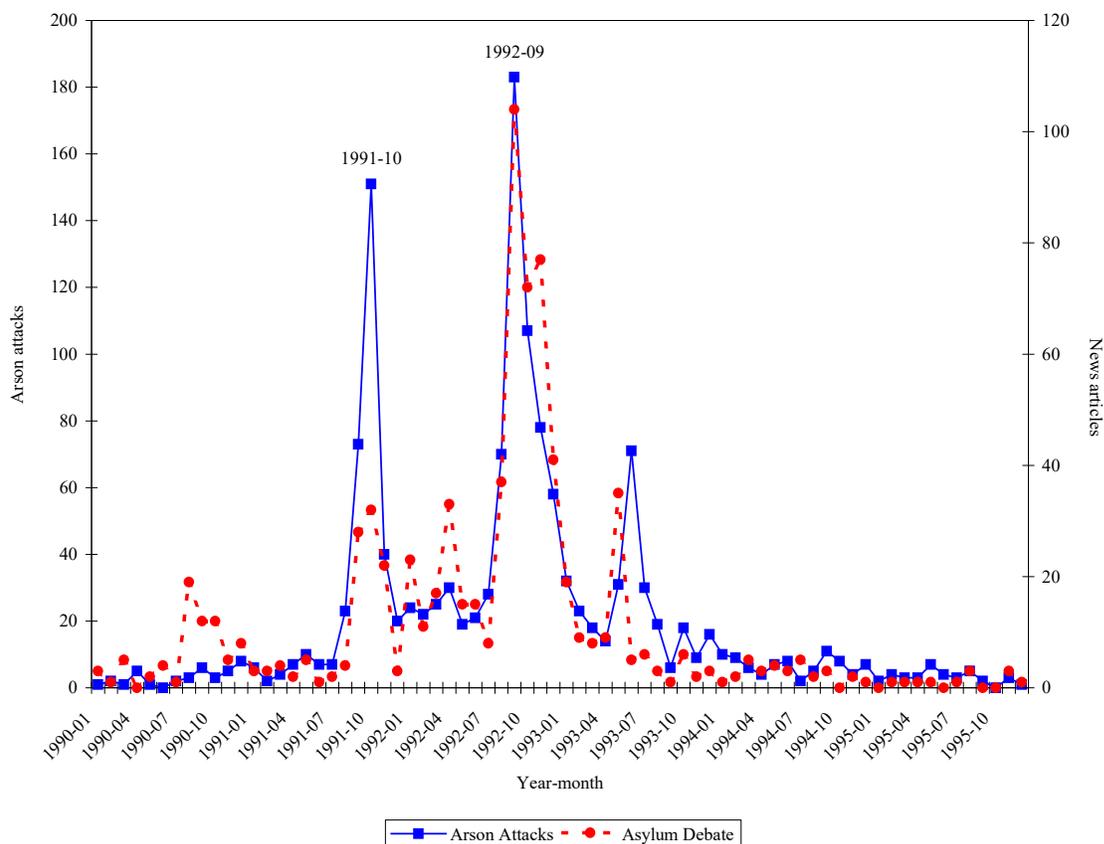
Those gains in elite support and the winning of voting rights, in turn, showed that the movement enjoyed continued high success chances. This helped it maintain its mobilization through the constitutional ratification process, which ended successfully in 1920.

Comparison to the German Anti-Immigration Movement, 1991-93

Opportunity/threat spirals can be found in a wide range of growing social movements. This is supported by the following, necessarily brief, summary of the militant anti-immigration movement that surged in unified Germany during the 1991-93 period. Figure 3 shows the increase and decline in right-wing arson attacks against foreigners' housing.¹⁰ This was the most visible aspect of the overall movement, which also included many other kinds of violence by skinheads and neo-Nazis as well as nonviolent protests by adult German neighbors of hostels for asylum seekers (Karapin 2003). The militant anti-immigration movement was very different from

the U.S. women's suffrage movement in terms of the protesters' social backgrounds (working vs. middle class), degree of formal organization (low vs. high), goals (exclusionary vs. egalitarian), and main targets (politically weak immigrants vs. state and federal governments). The movements also differed in tactics (violence vs. routine and nonviolent methods), their relation to electoral politics (none vs. strongly overlapping), and socioeconomic settings (deindustrialization and peace vs. industrialization and war). And yet the surge of anti-foreigner violence was due to the same general kinds of positive feedback as that which created the suffrage movement's growth. This occurred mainly through four opportunity/threat spirals, involving two major riots and the nationwide surges in anti-foreigner violence that followed each riot.

Figure 3: Arson Attacks against Foreigners and the Asylum Debate in Germany, 1990-95



The two crucial events for this movement were the multi-day riots against foreigners' housing that developed in the eastern German cities of Hoyerswerda (for seven days in September 1991) and Rostock (for five days in August 1992). Both riots unfolded through remarkably similar positive-feedback processes. To start with, officials housed hundreds of asylum seekers and immigrant workers in large, sometimes overcrowded hostels, in ways that exacerbated tensions between the foreigners and German residents over noise, dirt, and petty crime. Next, adult German residents responded to these *new grievances* with nonviolent protests (contacting officials, attending meetings), while right-wing youths and neo-Nazis carried out vigilante actions and threats against the foreigners. Then, elected officials responded to the challengers' actions by voicing some *support* for anti-immigration demands, while *police remained inactive* against the militants. Next, young militants began physically attacking the foreigners' housing. Adult residents responded by supporting them, creating a temporary *alliance between protest groups*, and police and political leaders responded with *extreme passivity*. This allowed the riots to escalate, drawing in hundreds of attackers who were supported by thousands of spectators. Finally, authorities made major *substantive concessions* to the violence by removing the foreigners from these localities (Karapin 2002: 155-60; Willems 1993: 219-30).

Each of these riots triggered a nationwide opportunity spiral and a surge in violence that lasted for about a month or two. Again, similar positive-feedback processes operated in each case. News coverage of the riots and the local authorities' widely publicized *concessions* to them made it seem that violence could be effective. Moreover, national politicians, led mainly by

Christian Democrats, responded to the riots by intensifying their debate on asylum rights. This indicated *elite support* for the anti-immigration movement's demands and increased its success chances (Koopmans 1996, 205; Karapin 2000, 320). In addition, there was continued *police inactivity* and widespread *new grievances* about the housing of newly arrived asylum seekers across Germany. Together, these factors encouraged skinhead groups to mount additional *bold attacks* in hundreds of German localities (Lüdemann and Erzberger 1994; Koopmans 1996: 204-5; Karapin 2007: 214-15).

The sudden decline in the anti-immigration movement after June 1993 can be explained in terms of the interruption and reversal of several key mechanisms in these opportunity/threat spirals. *Police repression* increased after neo-Nazis murdered three members of a Turkish family in Mölln (November 1992); raids and other repressive actions against the far right finally began. More important, civil society groups mobilized strongly and shifted the public discourse toward tolerance for immigrants and intolerance for right-wing violence. This discouraged right-wing militants and their potential supporters, and undermined the anti-immigration movement (Koopmans 1997: 162). However, the decisive blow to the movement came with a constitutional amendment restricting asylum rights, passed by the federal parliament in June 1993. This led to sharp reductions in the entry of asylum seekers, in the *new local grievances* related to them, in the elite debate over asylum rights, and hence in *elite support* for anti-immigration demands (Koopmans 1996: 205).

Conclusions

Opportunity/threat spirals can be complex. However, their analysis can be simplified by identifying subprocesses within the process of an overall spiral, which may combine in different

ways to promote the growth of a movement. Several subprocesses appeared in these two cases.

*Polarization spirals*¹¹ center on positive feedback between movement actions and growing elite support for them, which may continue until large substantive concessions exhaust the scope for reform and hence reduce elite divisions. Examples: the suffrage movement as it gained supporters from Democrats and Republicans, especially in its last five years; and the anti-immigration movement in its national expansion phases. *Police facilitation spirals* involve positive feedback between bold, often innovative, actions and police failure to repress them, which can also draw in support from other protesters and further immobilize the police.

Examples: the Hoyerswerda and Rostock riots.

Counterproductive repression spirals (Sharp's "political jiu-jitsu") involve positive feedback between bold protests and harsh, undifferentiated repression by police or by private actors who are condoned by police. The excessive repression may trigger support from elites and bystanders for protests, making differentiated and proportionate repression even more difficult (Sharp 1973: ch. 12; McAdam 1983). Examples: the 1913 inaugural parade and the 1917 White House pickets, arrests, and hunger strikes. *Appeasement spirals* involve positive feedback between movement activity and substantive concessions to them, which raises apparent success chances (cf. Kriesberg 2007: 177). Examples: the suffrage movement's state-level victories after 1910; and the successes of the Hoyerswerda and Rostock riots in driving immigrants out of their localities. Other subprocesses can also be identified, although they were not important in these cases. For example, in *threat spirals*, protests and state repression reinforce each other (Wright 2007), and elite support and protester alliances may be triggered, promoting protests.

While identifying endogenous positive-feedback processes is important in order to explain the growth of a movement, it is just as important to explain what causes the feedback to arise,

something I could do only to a limited degree in this article. Generally, such an explanation can draw on at least three sources, each of which probably matters to some degree. Exogenous causes, including socioeconomic processes, elite actions, and electoral activity help to set off spirals. Examples: the entry of women into the workforce for the suffrage movement; and the arrival of asylum seekers in Germany for the anti-immigration movement.

However, the endogenous mechanisms in positive-feedback processes are at least somewhat autonomous from external causes. When protesters develop new tactics and form alliances with protest groups using complementary strategies, they help to expand opportunities for later protests -- as do elites when they decide to lend support and authorities when they make blunders in their efforts to control protests. Decisions matter, and in the rising phase of a movement, protesters tend to make good decisions and their opponents tend to make mistakes. Examples: the use of new organizational and protest tactics to win state-level suffrage campaigns after 1910; and officials' creation of large hostels for asylum seekers and the failure of police to defend them when attacked by right-wing groups. Finally, coincidences and timing also matter, when they bring together an unusual combination of elements (exogenous, endogenous, or both) around the same time. Examples: the harsh treatment of imprisoned women demonstrators at a time when the suffrage amendment was on the verge of passage in Congress; and the administrative decision to distribute asylum seekers to the eastern states at a time when police were overtaxed and right-wing skinhead groups were growing there.

Finally, these two cases suggest some areas where the posited mechanisms need conceptual clarification. "Bold actions" does not capture all the innovative methods that helped the women's suffrage movement to open opportunities after 1907, but neither would a concept of "innovative tactics," since not all innovations are effective. Moreover, that movement's large

number of new, effective methods supports the thesis that a diversity of tactics is also important (Morris 1993).¹² The "substantive concessions" mechanism is another one that needs to be broadened. In the democratization of a partially democratized polity, such as occurred in the expansion of women's suffrage, concessions may be won through a routine electoral process (e.g., referenda that amend a state constitution), not only through decisions by public officials.

It is time to place the analysis of opportunity/threat spirals in a more central place in theorizing about social movements and other forms of contentious politics. In addition to applications such as those illustrated here, more work is needed in at least three areas. First, we should ask why spirals develop or fail to, by connecting spiral processes to other variables and testing rival hypotheses for explaining movement growth; paired comparisons of large and small movements would be helpful. Second, additions to the mechanisms are needed, e.g., concerning framing, identity formation, processes of organizational change, and the roles of news media. Finally, it is likely that other forms of contentious politics, including revolutions and democratization, can be analyzed in part through opportunity/threat spirals, with mechanisms modified as appropriate to those phenomena.

Notes

1. Detailed interactive theories have also been developed by Sharp 1973: chs. 9-14; Willems 1997: 431-85; Wright 2007: 34-37. Other explicitly interactive theories include Joppke 1993: ch. 1; Meyer 1993; Kriesi 2004: 77-79; Kriesberg 2007: 155-79; Goldstone 2004: 357; Amenta 2006.
2. Besides practical reasons (the author's expertise), limiting the scope may make it possible to get more specific about the mechanisms and interactions that operate in this kind of phenomenon, while leaving open the question of whether the interactions are different in other kinds of contentious politics and regimes.
3. The eight mechanisms overlap only partially with those in *Dynamics of Contention*, and in the areas of overlap there are differences in their conceptualization.
4. Vigilantes or other non-governmental groups, usually acting with police connivance, may take this role, as they did in the U.S. civil rights movement (McAdam 1983: 745-46, 748).
5. In some cases, surges in protest activity are due to overly optimistic perceptions of objective opportunities, and yet may succeed in opening opportunities (Kurzman 1996; Biggs 2003; Schock 2005: 153).
6. Figure 2 is based on the author's analysis of data in Keyssar 2000: 200, 206, 207-8, tables A.19-20; McCammon, et al. 2001: 52; Flexner 1975: 178, 180, 228, 230, 231, 269, 277, 319, 324, 330; Scott and Scott 1982: 166-68; and a dataset provided by Holly McCammon. I defined major campaigns as those that involved victories or defeats in referenda on full women's suffrage, legislative victories on full suffrage (in a few territories in the nineteenth century), and legislative victories on presidential suffrage (mostly in 1917 and 1919). If only referendum campaigns are included, there was still a four-fold surge in the annual rate of activity after 1910.
7. See previous note for data sources.
8. While voting rights can be seen as procedural gains, they comprised the ultimate goal of the movement and hence are more substantive than, say, increased access to officials for suffragists to argue their case.
9. However, in two of them, the legislative votes were held in January, just as the pickets were beginning.
10. The data on arson attacks were supplied by the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz; the data on the asylum debate is from the author's analysis of articles in the daily newspaper *die tageszeitung* (cf. Karapın 2000).
11. These are somewhat different from the polarization process in McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001: 322-27), which focuses on elite contention.
12. This can also be seen in the anti-immigration movement. From 1989 to 1991, adult residents

experimented with a variety of nonviolent protest methods (petitions, attending hearings) while youths experimented with militant tactics (group assaults of individual foreigners, clandestine attacks on dwellings). This eventually led to the discovery of a powerful combination, the mass assault on foreigners' housing by youths with support from crowds of adults. Riots were quickly combined with a variety of violent attacks on foreigners' housing in the waves that swept Germany after Hoyerswerda and Rostock.

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