

Protest, Social Movements, and Global Democracy since 2011
BISA@40 Workshop, London, 16 June 2015

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Abstract: *This workshop brings together scholars from diverse backgrounds to examine the evolving relationship between global protests, democracy, and inequalities since 2011. In light of the limited achievements of the Arab Spring and other pro-democracy movements, the workshop seeks to examine and unpack arguments that these protests represent both a new phase and new prospects for mobilization. The workshop engages with new theoretical and methodological perspectives and illuminates novel aspects of transnational social movement dynamics, such as the evolving role of ICTs, deterritorialisation and government counter-responses.*

Purpose:

From the Arab uprisings of 2011 onwards, a new wave of mass protest has spread across multiple continents, spanning anti-austerity protests in Europe, anti-corruption mobilizations in Latin America, and anti-authoritarian protests in the Middle East and East Asia. These protests, with their use of social media, horizontal mobilization structures, and transnational dynamics, may mark a new stage in the development of social mobilization. Departing from depictions of increasingly professionalized movement organisations and identarian movements which have dominated the literature since the late 1990s, the new movements have been described as “networks of outrage and hope” that call existing political and distributive arrangements into question from increasingly “deterritorialised” domains (Castells, 2012; Scholte, 2005). They may reflect dissatisfaction among key elements of the citizenship with the social, political and economic inequalities and asymmetries characterizing contemporary societies, and the political and economic projects that sustain them, be they democratic or not (Della Porta & Mattoni, 2014).

The workshop will explore the significance of this new wave of protest in world politics, interrogating in particular its relationship with democracy at the national and global levels, and its potential for addressing global inequalities. The workshop enquires as to whether ‘21st century protests’ mark a genuinely new stage in the development of social mobilization and a global democratising trend, or are a recurrent symptom of the asymmetries lingering within modern polities in a neoliberal context (Castells, 2012; Della Porta, 2013). Overcoming the initial optimism triggered by the alter-globalisation movement at the turn of the millennium (Stephen, 2010), and the “Arab Spring” and the “colour revolutions” in Eastern Europe since then (Davies 2014), it is necessary to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between these mobilisations, democratisation, and state power (Scholte, 2014; Tilly & Tarrow, 2007).

All too commonly these topics have been addressed within disciplinary confines, which this workshop aims to transgress. For this reason, participants have been invited from as wide a range of backgrounds as possible in order to provide a unique interdisciplinary and methodological dialogue. International relations scholars, political philosophers and sociological theorists utilising positivist and post-positivist approaches have been invited to discuss the link between the new movements, their attendant possibilities for democratic change, and their prospects for addressing inequalities.

This objective will further be facilitated by the workshop’s unprecedented coverage from around the world: the participants will present on the experience in, inter alia, Argentina, Armenia, Bahrain, Belgium, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Georgia, Italy, Jordan, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Russia, Senegal, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, and the UK.

List of Participants:

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