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To cite this article: Amy G. Mazur, Dorothy E. McBride & Season Hoard (2016) Comparative strength of women's movements over time: conceptual, empirical, and theoretical innovations, Politics, Groups, and Identities, 4:4, 652-676, DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2015.1102153

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2015.1102153
DIALOGUE: NEW DIRECTIONS IN STUDYING WOMEN’S MOVEMENT STRENGTH

Comparative strength of women’s movements over time: conceptual, empirical, and theoretical innovations

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ABSTRACT

Women’s movements in Western democracies have a long history, yet there are few conclusions we can draw with confidence about their trajectories over the decades. In recent years, scholars have begun to use conceptual tools that allow for more valid and reliable comparison across a variety of temporal, sectoral, and cultural contexts. Such efforts are necessary to construct sound theory about women’s movements, their characteristics, and their impacts. This article contributes to these ongoing efforts by further developing the concept of movement strength in terms of mobilization and institutionalization as a more promising way to compare variations in women’s movement change. The analysis begins with current scholarship on women’s movements as well as the concepts developed by the Research Network on Gender Politics and the State (RNGS) project to offer a new and arguably more reliable and valid way of studying changes in movement strength. Using RNGS data on movements in 13 Western democracies, from the 1970s to the early 2000s, the article tracks degrees and patterns of mobilization and institutionalization and illustrates how this approach can add to the project of theorizing about women’s movements as drivers and outcomes cross-nationally and over time.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 4 November 2014
Accepted 27 September 2015

KEYWORDS

Women’s movements; comparative gender and politics; measuring women’s movements; social movements

Introduction

Women’s movements in Western democracies have a long history. Their complexity and variety present major challenges for scholars seeking to understand movement development and impact. The goal of this article is to offer concepts and methods, based on the key principles of validity and reliability, to improve the comparison of movements over time and cross-nationally. We focus on movement strength to assess change in terms of mobilization and institutionalization. Through careful measurement of these two dimensions, this research analyzes the comparative strength of women’s movements in 13 Western democracies, from the 1970s to the early 2000s. Building from general scholarly work that assesses, measures, and theorizes about women’s movements, we use...
concepts and data from the Research Network on Gender Politics and the State (RNGS) to develop more sound theories about women’s movements and their impact.

Women’s movements are found where women act collectively to present public claims based on their gendered identities as women. While the substance of such claims varies widely, women’s movement activities provide a means for women, in their full cultural and ethnic complexity, to make their gender-conscious ideas public, to participate in achieving their goals, and to change public policy and the state. In this article, as in the RNGS project, women’s movement actors, including individuals and informal and formal groups, are those whose expressed ideas are overtly gendered, identify with women as a group, and are framed as women representing women. Some movement actor ideas may be feminist in that they seek to change the status of women and challenge women’s subordination to men and the gender hierarchies that sustain it. The data presented and analyzed here cover women’s movements actors in general, including the actors that present feminist ideas. Thus, we are looking at women’s movements that are feminist as well as those that are not.1

This article first integrates the RNGS approach with other recent comparative research on women’s movements. We then report on new conceptual work on the subject of movement change and, building on that scholarship, propose a new model of movement strength that unpacks strength into two dimensions – mobilization and institutionalization. With these new tools, in the third part of the article, we use data gathered by RNGS researchers to describe, compare, and assess variations in empirical indicators of women’s movement strength over time and cross-nationally and suggest some propositions for future research. The last sections discuss the contributions of the application of these conceptual tools to the agenda for theory-building about women’s movements, primarily within the Western democratic context.

**Comparative research on women’s movements and change**

RNGS was established in 1995 to study the impact of women’s policy agencies in Western Europe and North America in achieving women’s movement goals in public policy.2 With a large network of scholars participating in the project, RNGS needed to develop a research design that included valid and reliable definitions of key variables, especially characteristics and activities of women’s movements, that would allow scholars to study them cross-nationally and over time.

In the early 2000s, our review of the literature found no consensus about the definition of women’s movements for comparative purposes (Beckwith 2000; Molyneux 1998). Many early feminist scholars, such as Katzenstein and Mueller (1987), Dahlerup (1986), Kaplan (1992), Threlfall (1996), and Ferree and Yancey Martin (1995), had treated movements as a major analytical focus or variable, trying to understand how changes in the nature of women’s movements have influenced policy outcomes and in turn how these activities have affected the movements. Yet, only a few defined what they meant by “women’s movements” and none offered precise empirical indicators for researchers to follow to locate them. Thus, RNGS developed its own concepts of women’s movement characteristics.

Since then, with more scholars working on women’s movements in comparative perspective, there has been welcome attention to accurate empirical measures of women’s movements. These efforts pertain to the study of research questions about women’s
movements, as both drivers and outcomes, and seek to capture the full complexity of movements over time and across different cultural settings at all levels of state action – national, sub-national, and international. We all work toward a common goal of empirically tested theory. Essential to that goal is the development of measurements that are valid – yielding observations that coincide with nominal definitions of a concept (measuring what they are supposed to measure) – and reliable – applied in similar ways with similar results regardless of cultural, national, and temporal context, by a variety of researchers. Put in broader terms of good conceptualization in social science research (Goertz and Mazur 2008), the goal is to develop operational concepts and measurements of women’s movements that “travel” without being “stretched” (Sartori 1970).

There continues to be scholarly interest in studying movements in comparative perspective in single countries3, in single regions,4 across different regions5, at the transnational/ international level6, and across policy sectors7. Today, as Beckwith (2013, 411) confirms in a review of work on women’s movements, scholars generally agree that movements comprise actors, ideas, and ways of organizing and that feminist movements are subsets of larger women’s movements. At the same time and as comparative women’s movements scholars have pointed out (Beckwith2000; Weldon2011), despite this agreement on the components of women’s movements, it remains a difficult task to measure women’s movements cross-nationally and over time. Thus, the research agenda and appropriate methods for assessing change or “trajectories” of movements are still works in progress (Beckwith2013).

Nonetheless, important insights from researchers who have made movement change over time their primary focus can help advance the research agenda. One approach is to compare and contrast single case studies: How are they similar or different in different periods of time? Grey and Sawer (2008) use case studies of “developed democracies” from the 1970s to the early 2000s; they classify them as “flourishing” or in “abeyance.” A recent study of the German feminist movement by Ferree (2012) assesses the “varieties of feminism” in Germany over the long haul, reflecting a tradition of single country cases studies to examine the women’s movements development and activities over time from rich qualitative analysis. Evans (2015) compares ideas about third-wave feminism over the past 10 years among activists in the UK and the US. Large “n” quantitative studies tend to use national directories and databases to count members and/or numbers of organizations across a given time period (e.g., Hughes et al. 2014; Paxton, Hughes, and Green 2006).

But, as Beckwith (2013) states (and we wholeheartedly agree), in order to make progress in developing theories of change, we need clear conceptualization of ways that women’s movements may shift over time and the mechanisms for those alterations. Finding such approaches has long occupied scholars of social movements. The most prominent models for analyzing social movement change focus on their formation and development, namely resource mobilization and protest cycles. There are, however, limitations in these approaches for the comparative analysis of women’s movements. Resource mobilization theory posits that variations in assets, structures, funds, and capabilities explain the establishment and development of social movement organizations (Cress and Snow 1996; Edwards and McCarthy 2004; McCarthy and Zald 1973). Scholars can look at the mobilization of movement constituents (Frank, Hadinge, and Wosick-Correa 2009; Huber et al. 2009) and how these patterns change over time. Another way is to examine organization mobilization through the number of social movement organizations in existence at a

According to resource mobilization approaches, success or failure of social movement organizations depends on changes in the mobilization of these resources. However, many types of resources such as social networks and organizational infrastructure, can be difficult to measure, particularly because these resources can vary in formality depending on the organizations in question (Edwards and McCarthy 2004). At the same time, focusing solely on more tangible and easily observed resources, such as labor and money, may produce an incomplete picture. Given these barriers, resource mobilization research often looks only at formal organizations rather than informal networks and processes; yet it is these informal aspects that are often essential to social movements, and, particularly, women’s movements. Such network analysis does provide an entrée into social movements through providing a means to look at individuals as well as organizations and the way they interrelate both formally and informally within a given field, but not necessarily as distinct parts of a single movement. Moreover, as Diani (2002) points out, cross-national and cross-temporal data are limited.

Another major approach in social movement research considers change as cycles or stages of protest. Tarrow (1983, 1989, 1998) defines cycles of protest in terms of expansion of contestation against authority. Cycles of action involve heightened conflict across society, diffusion of collective action, new contentious activities, and new or transformed action frames. Following the idea of cycles, Rosenfeld and Ward (1996) in their study of the women’s movement in the US developed a combined measure of organization and activism with three stages: abeyance/emergence, growth, and consolidation/decline. A popular assumption among those using this approach is that all social movements follow similar trajectories that begin with disruptive political strategies outside formal politics and end with institutionalization into formal political realms and disappearance of the movement (Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Miller 1999; Roth 2004).

Using the cycle approach to change, much of the work on social movements and women’s movements concludes that their evolution toward institutionalization and decline are inevitable; through their contact with institutions social movements become more professionalized and formalized (Lo 1992; Minkhoff 1994; Rucht 1997). This formalization then leads movements to being co-opted, de-radicalized, routinized, and eventually terminated (Gelb 1989; Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Roth 2004). While many now argue that institutionalization may not be inevitable, linear, or signal the death of a movement (Lang and Knappe 2013; Martin 2008; Morgan 2008; Outshoorn 2010; Sawyer 2010; Sawyer and Grey 2008), they generally accept that social movements follow recognizable waves that may emerge in a “nonlinear way” (Walby 2011, 53).

Grey and Sawer (2008) argue that life cycles and abeyance theories need revision in order to account for levels of activism and new avenues for “less contentious forms of claims-making” yet they apply this model to find that protests come in cycles or waves (11). Similarly, Knappe and Lang (2014, 363) use the conceptualization of waves of feminism – four according to them – but assert that “… waves are not neatly delineated temporal or developmental stages, but rather stand for overlapping and intersecting periods of activism.” Not all find that women’s movements follow the predicted path of these cycles. Some scholars show a trend toward the formalization of feminist demands into structured “feminist organizations” (Ferree and Yancey Martin 1995) and NGO’s (Alvarez 1999).
without equating this institutionalization with failure or the end of the movement. Others do not assume stages at all. Paxton, Hughes, and Green (2006) examine the patterns in the establishment of Women’s International Non Government Organizations (WINGOs), international conferences, and countries ratifying the International Labour Organization’s Maternity Protection Convention as indicators of movement growth from 1893 to 2003 on an aggregate level.

The problem with assuming that movements follow stages and cycles is the tendency to apply empirical findings to fit a cyclical pattern. For example, in the RNGS project, researchers initially used the Rosenfeld and Ward (1996) categories of movement stage: emergence/growth/consolidation/decline/abeyance. Initial results showed no relation between stage and movement success or women’s policy agency effectiveness, a finding that seemed to contradict much empirical work on women’s movements. A closer look showed that the concept of stage, as used in the literature, had substantial validity flaws: vastly different observations resulted in the same classification of stage. Possibly, researchers, looking for evidence of one of the cycles, relied on expert secondary sources and forced their observations into the category. RNGS researchers went back to the conceptual drawing board and developed a plan to define movement change and collect primary data on activities of movements as a whole to avoid these validity traps. It is to this alternative plan, we now turn.

**The movement strength model of change: mobilization and institutionalization**

What are the central questions for studying women’s movements cross-nationally and over time? The answer may depend on the particular interests of researchers. But those who want to know how movements as a whole vary, as opposed to looking at just specific ideologies, strategies, campaigns, or origins, are likely to consider variations in strength. Being able to measure movement strength can contribute to research questions that seek to explain the various impacts of movements (as an independent variable) on politics and policy as well as to explain the trajectories of movements (as a dependent variable) in the context of cultural and social change.

Two recent studies show how women’s movement strength can be studied cross-nationally and over time. Htun and Weldon (2012) analyze drivers of policies responding to violence against women in 70 countries from 1975 to 2005. Expanding on Weldon’s previous work (2002a, 2011), their cross-national effort combines qualitative and quantitative data collection in a measurement of both women’s movement autonomy and strength. They define strength in terms of influence and power and offer a set of indicators for measuring such strength, including: description in narrative accounts of a movement as strong; number and membership of women’s organizations and the degree of support for these organizations; massive protests and media presence. The authors combine these indicators and other information to arrive at an assessment of “autonomous feminist movement strength” for each country scored from 0 to 2.

Avdeyeva (2015) also uses qualitative and quantitative data to assess the role of women’s movement strength, among other factors, on gender equality policy in Central East European accessor countries to the EU. In this work, strength pertains to mobilization, autonomy, and organizational capacity. She considers the actual role of women’s
groups in different countries in adopting and implementing equality policy in terms of high, medium, and low levels of cohesiveness and coordination in influencing the government in the quantitative analysis. In qualitative cases studies, she assesses the activities of feminist groups using these same dimensions of strength (Avdeyeva 2015, 60). This study looks at the influence of feminist groups from 1995 to 2010 in two periods – one before accession and one after – for each country.

Here, we aim to build on these approaches to studying movement variation by offering a fuller and more explicit conceptualization of movement strength and applying it with data on movements in 13 countries across three decades collected by RNGS researchers. Following the guidelines for good conceptualization (Goertz and Mazur 2008), we drill deeper than previous studies and unpack the notion of strength into two dimensions – mobilization and institutionalization – each with specific empirical indicators – seven mobilization structures and six sites of institutional presence. It is also important to remember that conceptualization occurs in a research context, in this case Western post-industrial democracies (Goertz and Mazur 2008); thus, our aim is not to propose a measure that applies to countries outside of the West.

To capture movement variation, we focus on the general concept of women’s movement strength. We define the women’s movement as it was defined in the RNGS project: “collective action by women organized explicitly as women presenting claims in public life based on gendered identities as women” (McBride and Mazur 2008, 226). This definition was developed during the late 1990s and early 2000s, in parallel with other efforts to study women’s movements comparatively (Beckwith 2013, 414). From this basic definition there are two central and separate dimensions: (1) the discourse that women in societies develop from their experiences and is the basis for women’s claims, and (2) the actors that present the discourse in public life. These dimensions determine the means of empirical observation of women’s movements. Since the discourse involves ideas both expressed and unexpressed, it defies full empirical observation. At the same time, women’s movement actors are distinguished by their explicit speech in policy debates, which is empirically accessible. The speech that identifies women’s movement actors is overtly gendered, identifies with women as a group, and is framed in terms of women representing women; this discourse may include feminist ideas but other speech as well (see note 1 infra). Thus, the empirical indicators of women’s movements are the actors who use such speech.

An essential part of this approach to women’s movements is that the core definition does not include a specific set of women’s ideas or goals. Neither does it specify the particular structural features of the movement and its activities nor the central questions of forms and strategies. Thus, it does not assume that women’s movements are necessarily feminist or protest oriented or that they tend to have more informal and loose organization. Rather, these are potential characteristics of movement actors that can serve as independent and dependent variables. As a result, goals, forms, and strategies of movement actors are determined by empirical observation, not assumed. Scholars in different countries can use this definition to locate women’s movement actors without worrying about finding specific ideas or goals found in other countries. As such they provide the basis for propositions about how these characteristics vary over time and may explain the different levels of success of women’s movement actors in entering the policy system and producing policies that contain women’s movement ideas.
This leads us to the rest of the general concept, *strength*, here defined as the ability of women’s movement actors to accumulate political and social assets to support their claims. The RNGS framework offers two dimensions of strength of women’s movements as a whole: *mobilization* and *institutionalization*. Each of these, in turn, has a basic definition, dimensions, and empirical indicators. Using these indicators, the RNGS data-set can be tapped to study movement strength cross-nationally and over time among the 13 countries.

**Mobilization**

Mobilization means the accumulation of assets through participation of women as activists outside the state to further movement discourse and policy goals in a variety of formal and informal structures. This basic definition incorporates lessons learned about formal organizations in women’s movements (Alvarez 1999; Ferree and Yancey Martin 1995; Paxton, Hughes, and Green 2006). The formal and informal structures for women’s activism identified by this work include informal networks, protests, local movement communities and cultural centers, formation of new organizations, and policy campaigns. We measure women’s activism in all of these structures (Appendix 1). Documenting variation in women’s activities in these structures over particular time periods through recording changes in their numbers, such as growth of new organizations, number of protests, and expansions of cultural centers captures levels of activism among women’s movement actors.

**Institutionalization**

Institutionalization refers to assets found through the presence of women’s movement actors in government and quasi-government institutions. Women’s movement actors, like social movements actors, may adopt a strategy of working within a variety of state institutions to achieve their goals. The dimensions of institutionalization include the presence of women’s movement actors in legislatures, bureaucracy/higher civil services, political parties, well-established lobby coalitions, unions, and academia. The measure reports the number of women’s movement actors within many formalized non-movement and state structures and is not intended to be an assessment of women’s political representation. In observing the presence of individual movement actors we follow Ferree and Mueller (2003) and include women inside these institutions with links to formal or informal women’s movement organizations, not independent individuals who happen to use feminist rhetoric. To indicate movement actors in legislatures and the bureaucracy/higher civil service, between 1970 and 2003, RNGS country directors who provided data were comfortable with assuming that the few women in these institutions at the time had connections with women’s movement organizations, especially women in political parties. However, ideally researchers should verify that each women MP or bureaucrat did have organizational connections, a task especially difficult when looking back at the 1970s and 1980s.

**Periodization and measurement**

Periodization is an important step in the analysis. This approach moves away from the assumption that social movements follow cyclical patterns in their development and
treats the issue as a question for empirical analysis. For each country, the span of the study, 1970–2003, was divided into 2, 3, or 4 periods that coincided with the clusters of policy debates (studied in the RNGS project) across all issues over time. This produced 43 country/periods or cases listed in Appendix 2; the unit of analysis is the country/period of women’s movement mobilization or institutionalization. Researchers provided information about the activity of women’s movement actors in each of the structures of mobilization and institutionalization during each period (periods range from 2 to 10 years). The result was information on variation in women’s movements’ strength – mobilization and institutionalization – over three decades in 13 countries in Western Europe and North America – data unequaled in any other study.

Based on the reports from RNGS researchers on women’s movement actor activities in the two types of structures, we developed composite measures of all the dimensions of each aspect of strength for all country/periods. These include scales of 1–5 for each of the five mobilization and six institutionalization structures and composite scales of mobilization and institutionalization structures overall. See Appendix 1 for information on the step by step process of developing and measuring the scales and Appendix 4 for an example from France of how RNGS researchers reported specific information on women’s movement actors’ actions in the two types of structures in their country.

**Assessing women’s movement strength**

With the RNGS-based measure of movement strength laid out, the analysis can now dig deeper into the RNGS data to see what may be of value for further research on movements. The measure is used here to describe, compare, and delineate change in mobilization and institutionalization of women’s movement actors in the postindustrial democracies of the RNGS study. Going through the steps of *description, comparison, and assessment of variation over time* responds to Klandermans (1993) initial call for the development of standards of comparison of social movements that will produce similar forms of information in different countries and at different periods of time; back to the general standards of validity and reliability. We look at these three aspects for each measurement. This mapping exercise first looks at the overall composite measures for each dimension and then compares them to the measures on the component structures. Where possible, we use the findings to suggest propositions for further research. Finally, we address the question of the relationships between patterns of mobilization and institutionalization within countries.

**The terrain of mobilization**

**Description: frequencies** – *(see Charts 1–6 in Appendix 3)*

Here we compare the distribution of the composite scale to the scales for each mobilization structure. The composite scores for the 43 country/periods range from 1–10 (Chart 1). The modal frequency for this overall measure of cases is at the low end of the distribution with 37% scoring 1–2 and only 16% 9–10. Some but not all of the component structures showed a similar distribution: cases measuring the development of new organizations and policy campaigns were also toward the low end with 48% with none or few new organizations and 37% with no or 1–2 policy campaigns. The frequency distribution of cases pertaining to the development of local organizations/community centers showed a bimodal
distribution with 40% scoring 1–2 (none/few) and 40% scoring 4–5 (substantial/widespread). The incidence of informal networks and protests shows the modal measure to be in the middle with 35% reporting some informal networks and 30% with 1–4 protests over the case period. Over the 13 countries and 43 periods, then, we can rank the use of five mobilization structures: most used were local/community centers and then informal networks and protests; least used were new organizations and policy campaigns. These distributions suggest a greater importance of the more autonomous forms of activism outside the state. From these results, we can develop the following proposition to be considered in future research: *Mobilization of women as actors for movement claims is more likely through local organizations and community centers, informal networks and protests than through policy campaigns and new organizations.*

**Comparison: forms of mobilization by country**

The periodization of the debates left each country with 2, 3, or 4 periods to study. For each period, there is information about participation levels across five structures: informal networks, protests, local/community organizations, new organizations, and policy campaigns. Depending on the number of periods, there are data on 10, 15, or 20 mobilization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/number of periods</th>
<th>Informal networks expanding/large</th>
<th>Protests 4+</th>
<th>Local/community variety/widespread</th>
<th>New org. substantial/widespread</th>
<th>Policy campaigns 4+</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>Austria 3 3</td>
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<td>Canada 4 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweden 3 3</td>
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<td>1/3</td>
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<td>3/15</td>
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<tr>
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<td>17/43</td>
<td>13/43</td>
<td>18/43</td>
<td>70/215</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Notes: Periods with higher levels (4–5). To standardize for the different number of case/periods for each country, the figures are a percent of the possible case/periods where the country could have had the higher levels of protest. That total number is Total case periods × 5 (number of activism structures).
structures for each country, and 215 in total. To compare patterns of activism across the countries, we focused on the cases with high measures for each structure. Table 1 shows the percentage of structures with high measures. Taking all of the countries together, 70 or 33% of structures recorded high levels of mobilization. Here we classify the countries according to whether they are at this mean, below it, or above.

Austria (33%), Finland (33%), Great Britain (30%), and Spain (30%) have mobilizations at the overall mean. Above the mean are Germany (67%), the US (50%), the Netherlands (47%) France (45%), and Italy (40%). Below the mean are Belgium (20%), Ireland (10%), Sweden (20%), and Canada (0%). The countries range from a high in Germany with 67% of the mobilization structures registering high levels of activism to Canada where none of the mobilization structures shows high levels of participation in any of the periods.

We can also compare countries in terms of specific structures. Germany and the Netherlands had expanding or large informal networks in two-thirds or all of the periods. Germany and the US measure high on protests and Germany and Italy had consistently higher incidences of local/community organizations. Austria and France were strong in the development of new organizations over the periods, while Austria, Finland, France, and the US excelled with policy campaigns. With few similarities among the countries at different mobilization levels, the following proposition emerges: Regional patterns do not account for patterns of women’s movement mobilization.

**Change: forms of mobilization over the decades**

There are no dramatic differences in the overall levels (the composite scale) of mobilization over the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. There are cases with high and low women’s movement presence in all decades. However, by recoding each measure into three values, we can see some trends. For most structures the frequency of cases is higher in the 1970s and lower in the 1990s (Tables 1–5 in Appendix 3, available as supplemental material online). For example, in the 1970s we find 54% of the cases with expanding or larger informal networks, 67% of the cases with more than four protests, and 54% with substantial or widespread growth of new organizations. In the 1990s, on the other hand, are 60% of the cases with few or no informal networks, 53% with few or no local organizations, 57% of cases with few or no new organization, and 56% with few or no policy campaigns. There is evidence as well of a shift from higher frequencies of mobilization in the 1970s to moderate mobilization through the 1980s and 1990s. Looking at informal networks, for example, while 54% of the cases with expanding/large networks were in the 1970s, most of the cases had some informal networks in later decades. These findings reinforce observations that the intensity of the use of autonomous women’s movement channels was the greatest in the 1970s, the early days of the second wave. The following proposition can be examined in future research: Mobilization of women to movement activism is present throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s in Western postindustrial democracies. Higher levels of mobilization strength tend to occur in the 1970s rather than the 1990s.

**Within the mobilization score: are there common patterns across structures?**

Cross-tabulations of each of the structures with all the others using a Chi Square test suggest associations that address this question. There are only three cross-tabulations of interest here which suggest the following propositions (Tables 7–9 in Appendix 3, available as supplemental material online):
The more periods with few or some networks, the more we find periods with few protests. Proposition: In mobilizing women’s movement actors, protests are less likely to occur if there are few or no informal networks.

The periods with high levels of informal networks are likely also to have high numbers of policy campaigns. Proposition: The women’s movement is more likely to mount policy campaigns if there are many informal networks.

Where there are no or few local and community organizations there are also no or few new organizations formed or expanded during a period. Proposition: The changes in the frequency of new organizations and of those at the community/local level are likely to be similar.

The terrain of institutionalization

Description: frequencies

The composite scores for institutionalization for the 43 country/time periods range from 1 to 10. Unlike the mobilization scale, however, the modal frequency of scores is in the middle: 37% of the cases scored 5, and 61% had scores 4–6 (See Charts 7–12 in Appendix 3). Of the structures, only the modal frequencies of political parties and trade unions resemble the overall score distribution with the 47% and 40% scoring “medium,” respectively. The degree of presence of women’s movement advocates in legislatures and bureaucracies trends lower with 42% and 55%, respectively, scoring “low.” Across the measures for actors’ presence in interest groups/lobbies and academia the cases are distributed more evenly. Although none of the modal frequencies is found with “high” measures, they are not uniformly low either, ranging from 33% high in political parties followed by 27% for academia, 26% for legislatures, and 21% for lobbies. High measures were most scarce in trade unions (17%) and bureaucracies (7%). Thus, the proposition for future study here is: Overall, the women’s movement actors of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s in post-industrial democracies show more institutional strength through their presence in political parties and trade unions than in bureaucracies, lobbies, legislatures, and academic.

Comparison: institutionalization strength by country

We focus on the cases with high levels of presence, as we did with mobilization structures, to find patterns of institutionalization that vary by country (Table 2). The periodization of the debates left each country with 2, 3, or 4 periods to study. For each period, there is information about participation levels across six structures: Legislatures; Bureaucracies/Higher Civil Service; Political Party Leadership; Trade Union Leadership; Interest groups/Lobbies; and Academia. Depending on the number of periods, there are data on 12, 18, or 24 institutionalization structures for each country, a total of 252. Table 15 (Appendix 3, available as supplemental material online) shows that an average of 53 or 21% of all 252 structures score at high levels. Three countries had frequencies above this mean: Sweden (56%), Finland (39%), and Great Britain (31%). Sweden is the only country that shows consistently high presence of women’s movement actors especially in legislatures, higher civil service, and political party leadership. The pattern in Great Britain shows a somewhat consistent pattern with high levels found for all institutions except the bureaucracy. Finland has more varied results with high levels of women’s movement actors in legislatures and
political parties across the decades, but no high scores for trade unions or the academic world. In four countries there is a very low incidence of high measures on institutionalization: none in Italy, 8% in Ireland, 13% in France, and 15% in Germany. Our proposition here is: The patterns of institutionalization strength vary by country, but do not suggest any consistent similarities by region.

**Change: institutionalization over the decades**

Generally, the levels of women’s movement presence in institutionalization structures trends higher over time (Tables 9–14 in Appendix 3, available as supplemental material online). Most of the periods with high and medium representation in legislatures are in the 1980s and 1990s, with most of the low cases in the 1970s. The frequencies are similar for cases with high movement presence in trade union leadership, interest groups/lobbies, and academia: the vast majority of them are in the 1990s. A similar variation over time does not occur when looking at bureaucracies: there are substantial frequencies of low representation in all three decades. With political party leadership, the trends are also not striking over time. A majority of the lows are in the 1970s, but frequencies of both medium and high measures are substantial in the 1980s and 1990s making for a more even distribution. This analysis leads us to the following proposition: The strength of women’s movement institutionalization increases over time primarily through trade union leadership, interest groups/lobbies, and legislative presence.

### Table 2. Institutionalization by country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/number of periods</th>
<th>LEG</th>
<th>BUR</th>
<th>PART</th>
<th>UNION</th>
<th>LOB</th>
<th>ACAD</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria 3</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium 3</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada 4</td>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>4/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland 3</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany 3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>1/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain 4</td>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>8/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>1/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands 3</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>3/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden 3</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>10/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>7/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>11/43</td>
<td>3/43</td>
<td>14/43</td>
<td>5/43</td>
<td>9/43</td>
<td>11/43</td>
<td>53/252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Notes:** Periods with higher levels (3). To standardize for the different number of case/periods for each country, the figures are a percent of the possible case/periods where the country could have had the higher levels of protest. The total number is Total case periods × 6 (number of institutional structures). For each structure that number is case periods times 1.
**Within the institutionalization score: are there common patterns across structures?**

To find patterns of inter-relationships among degrees of presence of women’s movement actors in the various institutionalization structures we examined cross-tabulations of each structure with all the others. Using Chi Square as an indicator of association there are five patterns that suggest propositions for further research (Tables 15–19 in Appendix 3, available as supplemental material online).

1. Low levels and high levels of women’s movement actors in bureaucracies and legislatures occur together. Proposition: *When the presence of women’s movement actors in legislatures is less than 5% it is likely that there will be low presence of movement actors in higher civil service as well; similarly, the higher the presence in the legislature the higher their presence in the civil service is.*

2. The lows and highs in political party leadership and legislatures tend to occur together. Proposition: *The lower the presence of women’s movement actors in political party leadership is, the lower their presence in the legislature; similarly, the higher the presence in parties is, the higher the presence in legislatures (20–25%).*

3. Low to medium participation of women’s movement actors in trade unions and party leadership tend to occur together. Proposition: *Women’s movement actors enjoying opportunities and organizational leadership within trade unions tend to have a similar level of participation in political parties.*

4. Although periods with high levels of participation in trade unions are rare, they occur in cases when women’s movement actors are working through a range of lobby coalitions. Proposition: *When women’s movement actors are major participants in lobbies, it is likely that the presence of women in trade union leadership will also increase.*

5. Entering lobbies and academia seems to follow similar patterns. When there are few women in academia, they are also absent from lobby coalitions. The cases of high academic participation coincide with high lobby presence. Proposition: *Women’s movement actors tend to enter various formal structures at the same time: lobby coalitions together with universities and interest groups with trade union leadership.*

**Relation of mobilization and institutionalization measures**

There is no significant association between measures of mobilization and measures of institutionalization of women’s movements over the years of this study. The scales do not report the same phenomena and the composite measures do not vary together. Unpacking the scales to their component parts provides an opportunity to see whether any mobilization structures co-vary with institutional structures. Cross-tabulations of each of the measures with all the others provided no basis for suggesting activism processes and institutionalization go together or even that they are inversely related. Although we have found some patterns in the data that show trends over time and in countries, it is safe to expect that at different periods women’s movement actors can exhibit many complex combinations of mobilization and institutionalization.

Finally, to illustrate the point, consider Table 3 that combines the percent of cases/periods with high levels of mobilization and institutionalization for the countries.
Which countries are systematically high across the mobilization/institutional divide? The answer is only one. When comparing countries according to the percent of cases with high levels of institutionalization to the percent of cases with high mobilization measures according to their distance from the mean of all cases, only the US is above the mean on both measures. Germany, France, the US, Italy, and the Netherlands are high scoring on mobilization structures. Finland, Great Britain, and Sweden are high on institutionalization. We find several countries consistently low: Canada, Austria, Belgium, Ireland, and Spain. Italy is unusual for having no periods with high levels of institutionalization despite high mobilization.

**Comparative theory of women’s movements: implications for an agenda**

This section turns to the implications and potential contributions of these conceptual tools and their application for studying movement change and a shifting research agenda. Such an agenda should expand knowledge about women’s movements and enhance theorizing that includes women’s movements as a significant analytical component. We examine contributions in each of Klandermans’s (1993) three analytical dimensions of description, comparison, and change.

**Description**

Mobilization and institutionalization refer to general ideas about the dynamics of women’s movement strength. By specifying the component structures of these dynamics and analyzing the frequencies of each, we can document the complexity of behaviors that underlie the more general notions. For example, the results of counting and sorting observations of degrees of activism in mobilization structures provide an insight into changes in the strategies of movement actors. From the 1970s to early 2000s, therefore, when women joined with others to express their gender-based demands, they tended toward grassroots and informal avenues, such as local/community centers, informal networks, and protests and less toward national policy campaigns or formation of new organizations. Some women’s movement researchers agree in identifying the importance of the local level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Mobilization (%)</th>
<th>Distance from mean</th>
<th>Institutions (%)</th>
<th>Distance from mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>−10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>−3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>−33</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>−3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>+18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>+12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>−9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>+27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>−16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>−3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>+12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>−20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>−13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>+10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>−21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>+17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>−4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>−3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>−4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>−13</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>+36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>+17</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>+8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average of all cases 33 21

Notes: Percent of possible case/periods where structures show high levels of women's activism and high representation of WMAs.
Similarly, unpacking the idea of institutionalization into component parts documents the many ways movement actors have infiltrated formal state and non-state structures and to what degree. The success of movement actors has been moderate overall, with consistently high levels of presence inside the state and parties quite rare. Our results do show, however, that while moderate, women’s movement presence has been higher in political parties and trade unions than in legislatures, lobbies, academia, and bureaucracies. This finding suggests that formal quasi-government organizations may be more accessible to movement actors than state institutions, an observation also made by some work on women’s movements (e.g., Cowell-Meyers 2014; Weldon 2002b).

Comparison across countries

Cross country comparison requires reliable measures of the phenomena under study, in other words, indicators that yield consistent observations in different contexts. This conceptualization of women’s movements and movement strength uses methods that meet this reliability requirement within Western postindustrial democracies. In addition, periodization – dividing the 30-year period under study into distinct periods of movement activities – permits attention to the ways movement activities can change over time. While we did not study temporal change by country, the results of the cumulative patterns are remarkable. For example, there are five countries that have relatively higher levels of activism in mobilization structures. Unexpectedly, Germany registered the highest overall mean of mobilization, followed by the US, the Netherlands, France, and Italy. The lowest were Belgium, Ireland, Sweden, and Canada. Looking at the high frequencies of institutionalization of movement actors shows a quite different pattern: Sweden, Finland, and Great Britain are high while Italy, Ireland, France, and Germany are consistently rated lower.

Comparison demands explanation: What might explain these patterns? In exploring that question researchers might certainly look at the mix of issues that motivated activists over the 1970s–2000s. Demands for legal abortion, which often motivate new women’s movement actors to enter the fray, recurred over the period in Germany and were especially dramatic in Italy. Another avenue of inquiry could be the importance of left-wing political parties that promote women’s sections and quotas for parliament.

Whatever explanations might be offered, it is clear that previous notions about national and regional trends in women’s movements show little evidence of being valid when women’s movement strength is unpacked and analyzed (Katzenstein and Mueller 1987; Threlfall 1996). On the one hand, countries with a specific regional grouping tended to score at different levels on each dimension, and, on the other, country scores on each dimension challenged common knowledge about women’s movement trends in most of the countries; France, Germany, and Italy scored high on mobilization dimensions. Similarly, there was only one instance of regional convergence, with Sweden and Finland scoring high on the institutionalization dimension. Thus, assumptions that there are common patterns in women’s movements according to similar cultural/historical contexts may apply infrequently.
Change over time

Studying change is difficult. One problem is developing measures that will reliably work over different time periods. The other is to find a way to characterize change using the necessarily static methods of social sciences. To overcome these challenges, the dimensions of women’s movement change used here – mobilization and institutionalization – are defined in terms of the degrees of both participation and the presence of movement actors. The idea of “degrees” points to numerical measures – percentages – a tool that can be plotted over time to see increases and decreases. Thus we observe changes in structures for mobilization across the decades: higher frequencies in the 1970s to moderate ones in the 1980s and 1990s. As expected, there is an increase in the frequency of institutionalization over the decades, but this is not uniform across institutions with higher rates of women’s movement actors in trade union leadership, interest groups, and legislatures and lower in political parties and bureaucracies.

These findings regarding change in women’s movement strength defy claims that women’s movements have been in decline since the 1970s. Of course, overall mobilization was higher in the 1970s when compared to the 1990s; however, activism in policy campaigns and formation of new organizations is robust in all decades. Perhaps even more importantly, women’s movement actor presence has actually increased in all state and non-state institutions. The increasing institutionalization over time contradicts popular assumptions of a decline in women’s movement actors’ activities over time.

Finally, the two dimensions of strength used here permit exploration of the relationship between mobilization of activists and incorporation of actors into formal state and quasi-state institutions. The conventional knowledge on movement change predicts that movements follow a standard trajectory. First, activists mobilize women to confront the state. When they are successful there is a decline in activism replaced by increasing integration into the conventional political process. The results presented here, however, show no relation between women’s movement mobilization and institutionalization: they do not occur together, they are not successive, nor are they inversely related. These findings are in contrast to much social movement research that argues the trajectory of social movements is largely determinant: as social movements institutionalize they also become less radical and eventually fade (Jimenez 1999; Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Roth 2004). On the contrary, our analysis supports scholars who argue that institutionalization does not necessarily doom mobilization in social movements (Cowell-Meyers 2014; Martin 2008; Morgan 2008; Sawyer 2010).

Conclusions

Our approach to the conceptualization of women’s movement strength contributes to the scholarly endeavors to study women’s movement change cross-nationally and over time. At the same time, it is important to note that the findings of the study and the RNGS data-set are limited and fresh research is necessary to determine whether the propositions developed here reflect patterns in other policy sectors, time periods, and regions of the world, especially outside the West, a weakness identified in social movement research in general (Klandermans, Staggenborg, and Tarrow 2002) and women’s movements in particular (Beckwith 2013; Ferree and Tripp 2006). The challenge is to adapt aspects of this approach to movements and movement
strength to describe, compare, and assess change taking specific non-Western contexts into account while continuing to track movements in the West. Additionally, the RNGS data span the years from 1970 to 2003, at the beginning of the diffusion of candidate gender quotas, the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies and the politicization of diversity and intersectionality, all developments which could significantly change the dynamics of women’s movement mobilization and institutionalization. RNGS was also focused on the national level, thus, the data used did not assess movement activities at the sub-national and international arenas. Similarly, the data on mobilization and institutionalization were on women’s movements generally speaking and not the subset of feminist movements. These limits, however, do not deny the potential contributions of these fortified concepts and measures; we hope we have provided a strong argument for future research to adapt these approaches to other contexts, time periods, and types of women’s movements.

Separating women’s movement strength into dimensions of mobilization and institutionalization reveals several patterns that challenge theory regarding social movements. Social movement theorists would expect institutionalization and mobilization to vary inversely; however, this is not the case in the 13 Western postindustrial countries studied. In addition, this study indicates that women’s movements do not follow a cyclic pattern of development as suggested by the dominant social movement paradigm. In fact, the findings show that commonly used definitions of social movements that emphasize location outside of state structures fail to capture significant portions of women’s movement activity. Similarly, cultural context does not seem to be an important driver in the relative strength of women’s movements; there were few regional patterns found in the movement strength results, with the exception of the two Nordic countries on the institutionalization measure.

The framework for future study and analysis presented above focuses on defining and measuring variation in women’s movement strength. Adopting a similar approach is essential for scholars of gender and politics who include movements in their research designs. Whether the plan is to assess the impact of movement activities on the state or society or to explain variations in movements as a dependent variable, scholars must beware of accepting assumptions about resources and cycles from the conventional social movement literature. The critical first step is to come to terms with the basic processes of conceptual definition and measurement of the central topic – movements – in a systematic way (Goertz and Mazur 2008). The work described in this article – unpacking women’s movement strength into mobilization and institutionalization and their dimensions – is a useful approach. Digging into the general ideas of change promises more refined measures for understanding how women’s movements function and how they influence states and the public.

Finally, the development and application of a concept of women’s movement strength that travels reveals the complexity of state responses to movement demands by determining which actors in the movement present demands and which strategies they use. Building on these tools, future studies may very well produce more nuanced findings that meet criteria for sound theory building closer to the reality of movement change without repeating stereotypes of movements in different countries based on secondary analyses or national directories of social movement organizations. In the final analysis, careful conceptualization and systematic empirical analysis are essential to communicate among researchers in the enterprise of building empirically based comparative theory in a
range of areas of scholarship: the comparative politics of gender (Beckwith 2010), the comparative study of women’s movements (Beckwith 2013), and the comparative analysis of social movements (Klandermans, Staggenborg, and Tarrow 2002).

Notes
1. Scholarship has recognized differences between women’s movements and feminist movements (Beckwith 2000, 2013; Ferree and Mueller 2003; Htun and Weldon 2012). RNGS differentiated between the two based on discourse. This approach allows for studying variations in claims of movement actors cross-nationally and over time because there is no assumption of specific claims, for example regarding equal employment or prostitution; women’s movement ideas can vary within the general guidelines of gendered, woman-focused discourse. But it also means that any particular women’s movement actor could use feminist discourse in some situations and nonfeminist discourse in other situations. Such actors are women’s movement actors, but only sometimes part of the feminist movement depending on the situation. This discourse-based approach makes it difficult to locate the feminist movement, that is, actors who exclusively use feminist discourse in public life. For the analysis of feminist actors in the RNGS study, see McBride and Mazur (2010a, Chapter 6).

2. NSF grants no. 0084570/80 funded a portion of the research. Research teams formed in each of the 13 democracies in the study (North America and Western Europe). The RNGS research design spelled out the nominal and operational definitions of the key concepts in the study and the methods for individual researchers to gather the data in their countries. The RNGS process was marked by collaboration among researchers and all decisions were reached by consensus among the international group of feminist scholars. The unit of analysis in the study is the policy debate selected from five issue areas. Among the independent variables for explaining success or failure of movements and WPAs are characteristics of women’s movements at the time of each debate. Some involve characteristics of women’s movement actors involved in specific debates but others pertain to the characteristics of the movement as a whole. This article is based on the data collected on these movements as a whole. The specific data-set developed for this article is available on demand. For the RNGS project description, quantitative results – data-set, codebook, and text appendices in the RNGS data-set suite – and other project information, go to http://libarts.wsu.edu/pppa/rngs/. McBride and Mazur (2010a) also cover the approach and final multimethod findings from the project.


7. Some recent sectoral work includes: anti-sexual violence (Baker 2008; Frank, Hadinge, and Wosick-Correa 2009; Montoya 2012; Weldon 2011, 2002a; Zippel 2009); reproductive rights (Engeli 2009; Gelb and Shogan 2005; Munson 2008), cultural minorities and
intersectionality, (Bustelo 2009; Lepinard 2010; Lombardo and Verloo 2009; Krizsan, Skeije, and Squires 2012; Sauer 2009; Verloo and Walby 2012); miners strikes (Beckwith 2001; Vasi 2004), gender mainstreaming (Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2009; Kim and Kim 2011; True 2008); health (Grey 2008a); family (Kittelson 2008; Morgan 2009) and political representation (Celis 2009; Krook, Franceschet, and Piscopo 2012).

8. For more specifics on operational definitions see Appendix 1.

9. It is important to differentiate between this definition of institutionalization from ideas of individual bureaucrats who support movement goals (e.g., Banaszak 2010) or as staff in women’s policy machineries (Bustelo 2009; Kim and Kim 2011; Lombardo and Verloo 2009) or broader ideas about feminist institutionalism (e.g. Krook 2010; Mackay and Waylen 2009). Some of the sociological research on the topic follows the RNGS approach of identifying women’s movement actors as they move into formal institutions both inside and outside of the state (e.g., Andrew 2010; Suh 2011).

10. See Htun and Weldon (2012) for a similar approach to periodization of the women’s movement.

11. The five values were collapsed into 3:1 and 2 became 1; 3 became 2; 4 and 5 became 3.

12. The Chi Squares are flawed because the frequencies often below 5 are in the cells. We use them only to suggest propositions for further study.

13. Evidence for this assertion includes: dimensions of movement discourse and actors; focus on actors; careful definition of types of actors; dimensions of movement change as mobilization and institutionalization; careful operational definitions of structures of mobilization and institutionalization.

14. See McBride and Mazur (2011) available at the RNGS website http://libarts.wsu.edu/pppa/rngs/ which addresses the conceptual steps necessary to adapt conceptual tools developed for Western democracies to other regions.

15. Although the core definition of the women’s movements was to cover the activities of all women’s movement actors as they represent the complexity of women.

Acknowledgements

In 2012, an initial version of this paper was presented at the ECPR workshop on “Thinking Big About Gender Equality,” prepared for delivery at the American Political Science Association meetings in 2012 and delivered at the Northwest Political Science Association Meetings. We would like to thank the members of the ECPR workshop for their helpful feedback as well as Pauline Stolz, Lahra Smith and Sandra Reineke who all served as discussants of the paper at the three conferences. We would also like to thank the various anonymous reviewers who have given us priceless suggestions as well as the editors of Politics Groups and Identities for deciding to make this piece an object of a research forum. Special thanks go to S. Laurel Weldon for her careful and crucial comments in the final stages of producing the article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

References


APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Construction of the Scales for Mobilization and Institutionalization
Appendix 2. The 43 Periods/Cases for Analysis of Women’s Movement Activities
Appendix 3. Charts and Tables of Women’s Movement Activism and Institutionalization
Appendix 4: Sample Women’s Movement Strength Worksheet: Excerpts From France
Appendix 1. Construction of the Scales for Mobilization and Institutionalization

Each country director completed worksheets about women’s movement characteristics for their country (See appendix 4 for example). The composite Mobilization Scale is based on the range of results produced from the women’s movement actor worksheets about these structures:

- **Informal Networks**: Middle level structures that are more or less organized and are a means by which groups and individuals take action beyond their usual activities.
- **Protests**: Instances of spontaneous or planned demonstrations on behalf of women’s movement goals.
- **Local Movement Communities and Cultural Centers**: Diffuse and autonomous forms of activism centered in municipalities dispersed throughout the country.
- **Formation of New Organizations**: Formation or expansion of formal organizations.
- **Policy Campaigns**: Specific and organized efforts to effect a particular policy goal such as campaigns against domestic violence, pornography, or for pay equity.

Steps in scale construction:

Develop scale for degree of WMA activism from one to ten based on the range of results produced from the women’s movement actor worksheets. The scale values are a composite of data on the five mobilization structures; thus there may be variation in the data for each structure for cases with the same scale value. The procedure involved using the following steps:

1. Summarize the information from the worksheets through each major mobilization structure for each country/period (hereafter called cases);
2. Using summary sheets for each case that do not identify the country or period, coders separately sort the cases as high, medium and low;
3. Coders compare classifications and agree on solutions to any differences, then sort the cases from 1 to 10, forming the WMA activism scale (see below);
4. To assess inter-case reliability, coders compare the supporting data for cases with similar values (all the 1’s, 2’s, etc);

In an effort to dig more deeply into the processes of mobilizing women to achieve movement goals, we developed a scale for each of the five mobilization structures that enabled us to observe their frequency and patterns over time and across countries. We followed the following steps (October 2011):

1) Assemble observations from women’s movement actor worksheets according to degree of activism in each structure.
2) Assign values from 1- to 5 delineating a scale from low to high.
3) Check validity of categories and reconcile differences, returning to the original worksheets in cases of differences.

Here are the variables in this new dataset with names of values in parentheses:

**INFORMAL NETWORKS**

1. None or indeterminate (None)
2. One or Two at National Level (One)
3. Some National Plus local networks (Some)
4. Increase in the number of Networks (Expanding)

---

¹ No new activity during the period; generally activity continued as it was in the previous period.
5. Large Number of National and Local Networks (Larger)

PROTEST
1. None
2. Few
3. 1-4 per year (1-4)
4. More than 4 per year (More 4)
5. Too to count (100s)

LOCAL and community centers
1. No Growth (None)
2. 1 or 2 (1-2)
3. Expansion of Specific Types/issues (Expansion)
4. Expansion of Various Types/issues of Local Organizations (Variety)
5. Multi functional and Widespread (Widespread)

NEW ORGANIZATIONS
1. Little or No Growth (None)
2. Few organizations, but also loss (Few)
3. Some growth (Some)
4. Substantial Increase (Subs)
5. More than 30 and Widespread (Widespread)

POLICY CAMPAIGNS
1. No policy campaigns (None)
2. 1-2 policy campaigns (1-2)
3. 3 policy campaigns (3)
4. 4-5 policy campaigns (4-5)
5. More than 5 policy campaigns (5)

Institutionalization Scales:
Constructing the institutionalization scale relied on information from the women’s movement worksheets completed by each country director, for each period, about the degree of presence of individuals and organizations with links to movement mobilization structures inside the following formal institutions: Legislatures; Bureaucracies/Higher Civil Service; Political Parties; Trade Unions; Interest groups and Lobbies; and Academia. The coders developed rankings for women’s movement presence in each of these institutions reflecting the range of responses for Low, Medium, and High. Here are the measures (these are based on the worksheet responses and the range of values for the 43 periods):

Legislatures:
LOW: 0-4% WMA in parliament
MEDIUM 8-11%
HIGH 17-25%

Bureaucracies/Higher Civil Service:
LOW None, few, or up to 4 persons
MEDIUM Some; 6-13 persons; or 3%-5%
HIGH 15% - 40%

Political Parties:

For legislatures, we used the % of women in the legislature without knowing for sure whether all the women MPs were women’s movement actors.
LOW  few connections; informal connections; declining connections; a few leaders
MEDIUM: women’s sections have some connections to WMAs; feminists work through parties
       to gain goals;
HIGH   long established women’s sections with close ties to WMAs and WMAs work through
       parties to successfully achieve goals

Trade Unions
LOW  -- No WMA entering or very few with no policy or organizational shifts in the trade
union and no presence of unions at WM events outside of the group.
MEDIUM – Individual WMAs or several enter, with some policy and organizational success and
presence at women’s movement events; a first incursion of WMAs with some results, usually
setting-up real changes down the road, but not any significant and systematic presence in
leadership positions.
HIGH – Significant numbers of WMAs enter and have real political clout on policies and
through women’s sections, women in leadership positions in the unions rank and file women get
involved with women’s strikes; unions are participating in women’s events.

Established Lobbies in Policy-making Arenas
LOW – None or several minor interest groups in lobbies or campaigns actively working with the
state.
MEDIUM -- 5-10 active interest groups in lobbies or campaigns actively working with the state
OR 1 or 2 groups/campaigns that address a broad sweep of issues- with significant activity in
policy formation -- agenda setting, problem definition, formulation, implementation.
HIGH--10 or more interconnected single issue groups and over 5 broad based groups with
significant activities on policy formation.

Academia
LOW – None or isolated classes at a few universities- none or very few women’s sections in
academic groups.
MEDIUM-- Offering women’s studies classes on a regular basis at most universities, individual
women’s studies faculty appointments, research positions on gender, some women’s sections in
academic associations.
HIGH – Presence of women’s studies programs/curricula at many universities, permanent
research programs set-up, women’s studies departments/units, women’s sections of academic
groups and women’s studies associations.

Operational Definition
1. Use the periodization for each country (see Appendix 2) List the degree of presence
   of individuals and organizations with links to movement mobilization structures
   inside the following formal institutions for each period.
   • legislatures
   • bureaucracies
   • political parties
   • unions
   • well established lobby coalitions
   • academia.
2. Country teams will describe the degree of presence in these various institutions based on secondary sources. These are not expected to be numerical figures, except for legislatures. For each of the above institutions, there will be a paragraph describing available information for the period.

3. Determine degree of presence in terms of a scale from 1-10 based on the range across the countries and periods. To develop this scale the coders took the following steps:
   - For each institution, coders use information from worksheets to develop rankings of WMA presence – Low, Medium and High (see above)
   - Each case (country/period) received a score: Low = 1; Medium = 2; High = 3. The scores for all institutions were summed to achieve a “presence” score ranging from 6 to 18. These scores were decimalized and placed from 1-10 for coding.
## Appendix 2. The 43 Periods/ Cases for Analysis of Women’s Movement Activities
(Based on Periods of Women’s Movement Activities from the RNGS Study)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Periods</th>
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<td>Italy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1997-2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1966-77, 1978-85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1989-2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>1985-88</td>
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<td>1990-2000</td>
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<td>1970-79</td>
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<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1980-88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1988-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1995-2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1985-88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1988-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1995-2002</td>
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Appendix 3. Charts and Tables of Women’s Movement Activism and Institutionalization

ACTIVISM

Chart 1

Chart 2

Chart 3

Chart 4

Chart 5

Chart 6
### TABLE 1 INFORMAL NETWORKS BY DECADE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Few/One</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Expanding/ Large</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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### TABLE 2 PROTESTS BY DECADES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
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<th>1-4 over period</th>
<th>More than 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>43%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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### TABLE 3 LOCAL AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS BY DECADES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>None/Few</th>
<th>Expansion</th>
<th>Variety/ Widespread</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>55%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
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<td>1990s</td>
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<td>41%</td>
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### TABLE 4 NEW ORGANIZATIONS BY DECADE

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>None/Few</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Substantial/ Widespread</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
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<td>1990s</td>
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### TABLE 5 POLICY CAMPAIGNS BY DECADE

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38%</td>
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<td>28%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
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<td>1990s</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td></td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>43</td>
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### TABLE 6 INFORMAL NETWORKS/POLICY CAMPAIGNS

#### Policy Campaigns

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<tr>
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<td>7%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>Some</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>33%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding Large</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>43</td>
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### TABLE 7 INFORMAL NETWORKS/PROTESTS

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<td>Some</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>20%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>49%</td>
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#### The more informal networks, the more policy campaigns

### TABLE 8 LOCAL COMMUNITY/NEW ORGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Organizations</th>
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<th>Some</th>
<th>Many/Widespread</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>Local/Community</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>66%</td>
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<td>29%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>9</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>49%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>13</td>
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#### The lower the local organizations, the lower the new organizations
### WMAs in Bureaucracies by decades

<table>
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<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
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<td>1970s</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
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</table>

### WMAs in Legislatures by Decades

<table>
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<th>High</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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### TABLE 11

<table>
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<th>High</th>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</table>

### TABLE 12 WMAs in Trade Union Leadership by decades

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<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
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### TABLE 13 WMAs in Formal Interest Groups by decades

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<th>High</th>
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<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43</td>
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### TABLE 14 WMAs in Academia by decades

<table>
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<th>Low</th>
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### Table 15

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The lower the legislature, the lower the bureaucracy

### Table 16

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The lower women in parties, the lower in the legislatures
### Table 17
**PARTIES/TRADE UNIONS**

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### Table 18
**TRADE UNIONS/ LOBBIES**

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</table>

*Higher lobbies go with higher trade unions*

### Table 19
**LOBBIES/ ACADEMIA**

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<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Low academic and low lobbies*

*High academia goes with high lobbies.*
ACTIVISM:

Period 1: 1972-1980

Describe the women’s activism by answering each of the following:

A. Informal networks: Social movement scholars define networks as “meso or middle” level structures that can be more or less organized. They are a means by which organizations and individuals can take action beyond their usual activities. They might be similar to campaigns in some countries. Describe the extent to which you find informal networks promoting women’s movement goals during the period under study.

TOTAL NEW WOMEN MOBILIZED = 5090

Informal networks tended to be the norm during this period with shifting combination of groups being organized through collective groups—MLA-MLAC, MLF. Collective du Viol, Collectif of Prostitutes which organized various part of the new women’s movements and coalition of groups coming together to organize around specific policy campaigns on abortion, rape, prostitution, uniting the left, defending workers rights (Groupes des femmes). All of these networks had disappeared by 1980. Most of these groups were new second wave feminist groups or younger feminists within established trade unions and parties who sought to change their organizations agenda. One of the major tools of these shifting collectives and coalitions were public demonstration and to a lesser degree occupation of headquarters, ministries and strikes.

More established women’s groups or non women’s movement groups held meetings to discuss women’s rights during this period. These are counted under a separate rubric. One women’s movement action which was not a part of the new wave feminism was the platform of union drawn up by 20 established women’s movement groups and one new group—Choisir, at a conference attended by 1500 women. (Le Monde 5/22/75). The Platform of Union was not included under a policy campaign since it cut across women’s rights issue in general and there was no follow-up or sustained campaign as there was for the rape, prostitute and abortion campaigns after the meeting.

In all of the activities of these networks, approximately 5090 -- 1500 (Platform of Union) + 3590 (MLF/MLAC/ Rape and Prostitute Collectives) were mobilized. Note that, the 3590 figure is the actual number of members for the MLF groups counted above. Many of these fluid groups probably did not have dues paying members, rather these were the people who most active in organizing the collectives and probably as we shall see below the ones who went to the demonstrations.

B. Protests: Some scholars have used newspaper accounts to do counts of protest events. If such information exists for your country during this period please describe results and give a citation. If not, then from your own observations, describe instances of protests and demonstrations on behalf of women’s movement goals during the period

TOTAL NON MLF WOMEN MOBILIZED = 48,093

The following is a list of major demonstrations and occupations listed in Maison des femmes (2003), Delphy (1981) and Maruani (1979). In all, there were 21 actions identified by the two sources from in nine years. This indicates a very high level of protests.
In terms of raw numbers, to be sure the core number of MLF participants, 3590 were actual mobilized for many of the larger demonstrations. And many of the core people probably attended more than one demonstration. Much of the literature on the second wave feminist movements discusses the relative small group of Paris based women being involved with the various collectives, policy campaigns and demonstrations of the second wave. I have tried to identify numbers of women who came out beyond the core of 3590 MLF activists. If I had no record of numbers in newspaper articles, I relied on secondary sources.

1971 Manifeste 343 – women – Many of these women who signed this manifest were not in the MLF, so add this on top

1972 Protest against mother’s day 100 (Le Figaro 5/15/72) counted in the MLF core
1972 Workers go on strike at Department store in Thionville—MLF supports + 15
1972 Demonstrations around Bobigny abortion Trial to attract attention to it by Choisir, MLF and MLA MLF CORE
1972 Two Day of action/conference against crimes against women Mutuality (Organized by MLF, MLAC, Choisir and the MFPF) 4000 (Le Nouvel Obs 5/22/72) I have added 1000 extra here, to go beyond the MLF core.
1972 Occupation of Council of the Order of Doctors MLF core
1972 MLF/MLAc organizes protest at time of discussion of abortion laws—interrupts parliamentary session MLF Core
1973 Feminist Protest Against Vietnam MLF core
1975 Protest against governments’ Organization of International Women’s Days (MLF core)
1974 Abortion Protests (MLAC, Groupes Femmes, Rouges, Revolution and lutte ouvrieres) 100 extra left-wing women
1974 Women’s Strike 200 people—“very disorganized” Le Monde 6/10/74)
1974 Women go on strike at watch factory in a feminist context +25 (Maruani 1979)
1975 First take back the night march in Paris – MLF core
1975 Prostitutes occupy church in Lyons (Mathieu 1999) +150
1975 Demonstration against the film Histoire d’O
1976 Demonstration on Rape “10, 000 according to Maison des Femmes” – probably not the case. Picq indicates that there was demonstration beyond the MLF core, but looked like usual supporters for left-wing feminism so no new people in this march, particularly since it was a controversial issue.
1975-77 Women occupy a shirt factory + 50 (Maruani 1979)
1978 Occupation of Paris Match Headquarters by Rape reform feminists
1979 Retake the night March (2500 Stetson 1987: 183) not beyond MLF core
1979 Abortion Demonstration for second law 50,000 (Delphy 1981: 97 and Jenson and Sineau 1994 and Picq 1993) +46410
1979 A second Abortion Reform Demonstration, this time with men includes unions and political parties
1980 Demonstration from opening an abortion clinic in Paris
1980 Demonstration against part-time work MLF core = Left-wing women covered below
1980 Demonstrations of Lesbians against all forms of discrimination
C. Local movement communities and cultural centers: These are diffuse and autonomous forms of activism. Studies of women’s movements usually include discussion of these structures, but if not, please describe your understanding of the growth of these communities and centers during the period. Have new ones been established? If so, can you estimate how many?

TOTAL NON MLF WOMEN MOBILIZED = 450

In general, the second wave mobilization during this period was primarily based in Paris, with the exception of the film festivals listed below which were actually outside of Paris and the groupes femmes, which consisted of small groups of women workers who gathered together to voice concerns about work conditions within the context of their work place (Maruani 1979). The groupes femmes would add another 400 people and perhaps an additional 50 new people for the film festivals.

Groupes Femmes, 400 mobilized throughout France -Not counted yet
1974 First Women’s Film Festival in Paris
1975 Film Festival for Women in Paris
1979 National Women’s Film Festival in Sceaux
1980 National Women’s Film Festival becomes annual
Women’s presses were created during this period – Cote femmes Edition, Edition Femme, Edition Tierce
Also Librarie des femmes, feminist book store in Paris- perhaps 1980s

D. Formation of new organizations: taking steps to form a new organization represents an increase in activism. Estimate the number of new organizations formed during the period. If there is a decline in organizations, indicate that as well. Do not include organizations in well-established lobbies.

Out of the 98 women’s movement groups catalogued during this period, 64 were created during this period, three quarters of the groups, although this only accounts for ¼ of the total membership. This is obviously an extremely high level of group formation. It would be interesting to see if any other countries saw so many new groups formed in a given period. This period in France might be the high point of comparison in a comparative assessment of the formation of new organizations.

E. Policy campaigns: specific policy campaigns promoting women’s movement goals, for example, against pornography or domestic violence are an indicator of activism. Describe the campaigns you are familiar with and estimate the total number of campaigns.

All of these were already accounted for in the network and protest section. Still relative high for the French case. The numbers of people in the policy campaigns listed below do not go beyond the core the numbers of women already counted.

1975-1980 Anti rape campaign -Occupation of Chateau to create battered women refuge/ Occupation of SDCF and discussion with her
1977 MLF women begin a campaign against sexist advertisings and media
1974-76 Abortion Reform
INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Period 1: 1972-1980

1. Briefly describe the degree to which individuals and groups with links to women’s movement mobilization structures (informal networks; protests; local movement communities and cultural centers; women’s movement organizations; policy campaigns) are found in each of the following institutions during the period. Wherever possible cite your sources.

A. Legislatures: here if you have a number or percent, that would be great.
National Assembly – Average of 8 -- 1.6 (1973) + 18- 3.7 (1978) – 2.65 % -- (Sineau 1997, 104).

B. Bureaucracies: Look for femocrats who are outside the women’s policy agencies.
Women in top administrative positions in 1983 in the Grands Corps – 6% in top decision-making positions, including prefets – 3% (Pionchon and Derville 2004, 55).

Not only were there very few women in decision-making positions, but for the most part women upper civil servants adopted the gender-neutral approach to policy, eschewing any links in ideas or in political activism with women’s movements. In addition given the formal, generalist training of upper level civil servants through professionalize and elite schools like ENA, French upper level civil servants tend NOT to have ties to specific political groups—so overall the presence of femocrats outside of WPAs, would be very low anyway.

Women’s movement base bureaucrats for all intents and purposes were found in the WPAs. The Women’s Work Committee- active until 1978 did develop a system of administrative correspondents across a variety of ministries who were mid level bureaucrats sympathetic to the feminist stances on public policy – this was according to Marcelle Devaud and Martine Levy in the CTF. In this purview, there were probably about 10-20 women bureaucrats who could be identified with taking women’s movement positions – some of these probably had links to the older women’s groups, but not the new ones.

C. Political parties: Give your judgment as to whether the women’s sections of the political parties are connected to movement mobilization structures listed above.

Probably 1/4 of the women in the PS had ties to the new women’s movement and ¼ were older PS feminists – see below.
There was a major shift of the women’s movement, both old and new into the political parties by the end of the 1970s. Across all parties, a new generation of women who had been involved with the women’s movements, both the MLF and the more organized and old movement entered the parties—by the early 1980s many of them had been forced to leave or left on their accords—but this period was marked by a relatively high level of individuals with connections to the women’s movement. The PS and the PCF both had significant numbers of young women come and challenged dominant party doctrine on women—the courant g in the PS and elles voient rouge in the PCF. The young feminists in the PS began their own publication in 1979 that ran until 1984.
Alongside the new young feminists in the PS was an older generation of feminists that had not been active in the MLF—Roudy, Aubry and Buron—these were the women who formed the backbone of the women’s section of the party and worked alongside the newer feminists during this period. There was also a new group of Paris based PS feminists who created a new group outside of the party to try to pressure change. And the sister associations on the right Femmes Avenir and others, were also infused with younger women who wanted to change dominant party doctrine.

D. Unions: Give your judgment as to whether the women’s sections of the labor unions are connected to movement mobilization structures listed above. Similar to the political parties, women from the MLF entered into the CGT and the CFDT to bring new women’s movement ideas into the trade unions—both unions shifted their agendas in the late 1970s—although the CGT according to most observers kicked out the young feminists by 1979. One of the women who left Christiane Gilles took a position in the Roudy ministry and worked on the 1983 law. The women’s section in the CFDT, headed by Jeannette Laot—who had been in MLAC retained a more feminist faces until the late 1980s, with relatively close connections to the socialist feminist and the women’s policy machineries.

E. Lobbies: Information on the extent to which there are a set of strong women’s movement related organizations who work with the state through conventional means such as petitions, lobbying and public relations campaigns. While most of the new women’s movements of the period, were quite anti system and preferred taking two the streets, the older more established movement—CILAF, UFF, CNFF sought to work with the government and some of the new groups too LDF and Choisir, took a more reform oriented approach. But it is important to note that for the most part the movement was quite anti system and the bulk of the work of the WM activities during this period were demonstrations and protests.

F. Academia: Information on women’s studies programs and women’s caucuses in various professional organizations would be useful here. There was a blossoming of women’s studies groups, most of which were focused on research and feminist consciousness raising with very little focus on curriculum. 14 new university based groups were created during this period. And about ¼ of all of the new feminist publications were focused on feminist research issues. There were no women’s groups created in any academic associations.
Comments in response to “Comparative strength of women’s movements over time: conceptual, empirical, and theoretical innovations” by Amy G. Mazur, Dorothy E. McBride and Season Hoard

Anne Costain

To cite this article: Anne Costain (2016) Comments in response to “Comparative strength of women’s movements over time: conceptual, empirical, and theoretical innovations” by Amy G. Mazur, Dorothy E. McBride and Season Hoard, Politics, Groups, and Identities, 4:4, 677-680, DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2016.1211941

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2016.1211941

Published online: 09 Aug 2016.

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We should all welcome the addition of a new data set consisting of comparable multi-national variables on a range of factors important for sustaining strong women’s movements. Professors Mazur, McBride and Hoard (2015) have structured the Research Network on Gender Politics and the State (RNGS) using a comparative politics research design that is consistent with the work of a number of social movement scholars – especially Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and the late Charles Tilly (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001). Not unlike RNGS, McAdam (1982), Tarrow (1998) and Tilly (1995, 2004) link modern movements to the development of the state form as a central target of contentious politics and claims making. Therefore using RNGS data is likely to foster a productive cross-national, cross-movement and cross-disciplinary dialogue to uncover similarities and differences between the choice of tactics by women’s and other types of movements.

As a political scientist I feel that in developing and interpreting these results, its authors and those using the data should be aware of some of the issues directed at state-centered approaches by social movement scholars generally – particularly those concerning gender. My comments draw on a number of these criticisms to warn of some possible omissions and pitfalls that may complicate interpretation of RNGS conclusions about women’s movements. So while I generally support the effort to link women’s movements more closely to research on a wider range of social movements, I believe that there are some missing variables deserving incorporation or at least consideration in analyzing results from these data. RNGS data in its title and construction focus on the state as they seek to measure the mobilization and projection of power by women on a range of public policy issues. First this approach risks overlooking the culturally charged environments that often break new ground prior to movement mobilization (Meyer 2004). Although the old convention that sociologists study movements before they begin to engage the state and political scientists take over once they do is gone, there is still a residue of this perspective embodied in tendencies to overemphasize movement/state interactions while neglecting the broader social contexts in which they occur (Goodwin and Jasper 2012). Critics have pointed out that by concentrating on government processes and opportunities presented by the political system findings are often too structural and thus give
short shrift both to individual actors and cultural shifts that may play important roles in
determining the timing and framing of policy debates (Goodwin, Jasper, and Khattr 1999; Meyer 1999; Baker 2002).  

Second, Mary Katzenstein (1998) in her highly regarded book *Faithful and Fearless* observes that movement acts carried out by women both within women’s and other social movements are often highly gendered and should be understood in this context (see also, Dubois 1975; West and Blumberg 1990). Women who intentionally disregard social expectations in dress, speech and behavior in public spaces are committing direct action and protest even when males carry out these same activities without notice or even political meaning. At the same time movement scholars are beginning to warn about the ways that women protesters in movements may become historically invisible even when they have left written records and appeared in photographs of movement activities. Students of the American civil rights movement are in recent decades starting to open the history of that movement to acknowledge the predominance of women in organizational work and in flouting social and political convention inside movement groups where male leadership, decision-making and press coverage long overshadowed women’s efforts to disrupt the status quo (Blumberg 1990; Payne 1990). The relatively few well-known women including Rosa Parks honored for her refusal to give up her seat on the bus to a white man and Viola Liuzzo providing a ride to two young black men and murdered along with them for her effort are the exceptions to the invisibility of many female demonstrators and dissidents who performed common acts that were uncommon for women and were generally disregarded. The importance of identifying women’s resistance is crucial to understanding the relative strength of women’s movements cross-nationally. Although Mazur, McBride and Hoard should be complimented for creating variables that trace women’s gendered discourse through movement and policy debates with the state, this may not be sufficient. When government and the media fail to recognize the actions and speech of most women’s movement actors as political, movement strength may go unreported. This is not to suggest that women or women’s movements are themselves exceptional in ways that thwart cross-national comparison, but to point out that context is unusually important when evaluating women’s actions and the strength of their movements – as it often is for civil rights movements.

A third issue is the lack of attention to public opinion in the design of RNGS. People’s attitudes about subjects presented and fought by women’s movements are important components in setting the context in which movements must mobilize and create pressure for policy change. Opinion is usually treated as an intervening variable that affects policy outcomes (Costain and Majstorovic 1994; McCammon et al. 2001; McAdam and Su 2002; Soule and Olzak 2004). However, it is increasingly being viewed on its own as an important dependent variable. Recent work (Van Dyke et al. 2004) focusing on protest by American movements between 1968 and 1975 finds that all of the movements in their data set directed some protest at the state, but civil rights, gay and lesbian and women’s movements unlike many of the others were more likely also to target public opinion and non-state institutions. Walker et al. (2008), in addition to considering the variety of targets selected by movements, provide evidence of linkages between their tactics and their preferred targets.

A fourth concern about a state-centered research design is whether it is able to identify game-changing contexts. Although there are scholars who might suggest that social
movements themselves do change nations, more would agree with Alberto Melucci (1996, 1) in concluding that movements are just better than most other actors in recognizing and aligning themselves with change as “prophets of the present.”

In conclusion, Mazur et al. have created useful conceptual tools to compare women’s movements across a variety of countries. The authors focus on the strength of these movements in mobilizing and institutionalizing their presence as they seek to change public policy in specified areas. Most of what the data set measures is contentious interaction between movements and states. In using this new source of data, I recommend the following. Much empirical work on women’s movements has found that tactics directed at states often constitute less than half of their public presence. Non-state (including cultural, corporate and educational) institutions along with mass attitudes attract significant amounts of group resources (Katzenstein 1998; West and Blumberg 1990). The tactics employed in changing opinion on women’s appropriate roles or influencing corporations to hire more women in executive positions may be quite different from those used to lobby executives and legislatures. Consequently, it is a very good idea to include these new data within a context that stretches significantly beyond a state-centered approach. By expanding the number of variables considered, ability to achieve meaningful cross-national findings will be enhanced.

Notes

1. See for example, Alberto Melucci’s (1996) discussion of how movements and their collective identities prefigure change that has occurred while directing attention to future change in society and politics.

2. Similarly among historians studying the American Woman Suffrage movement, a number have felt the need to justify the role of “great women” when academia has by and large lost interest in “great men.” In the case of the movement for woman suffrage much of the story appears to hinge on the leadership and longevity of Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Sojourner Truth, Carrie Chapman Catt, Alice Paul and a number of others (among them children, nephews and nieces of the early suffrage advocates) carrying the fight forward through the 70-year struggle for the vote (Dubois 2002).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

References


Commentary on “Comparative strength of women’s movements over time: conceptual, empirical, and theoretical innovations”

Amrita Basu

To cite this article: Amrita Basu (2016) Commentary on “Comparative strength of women’s movements over time: conceptual, empirical, and theoretical innovations”, Politics, Groups, and Identities, 4:4, 681-683, DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2016.1211938

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2016.1211938
Scholarship on women’s movements emerged historically from feminist activism. Writing by predominantly white, middle class feminists about women’s movements that were led by the same demographic, generated critiques and alternative understandings of feminism by women of color and LGBT groups. Activists with different understandings of feminism played a crucial role in expanding our understandings of women’s movements. Feminist activism also inspired paradigm bending scholarship that advanced alternative epistemologies, methods and theories critiquing social science and calling for engaged, normative and interdisciplinary approaches. That was then. Today there is a trend toward making scholarship on women’s movements more rigorous and systematic by developing measurements which yield results that can be broadly generalized. Mazur, McBride and Hoard (2015) characterize this trend as the attempt to close the persistent gap between feminist and non-feminist research. While I do not reject their attempt to generalize and value their comparative approach, I believe there are costs to ignoring the epistemological and normative questions that emerge from feminist research. I also believe that we should devote more attention than they do to the political and economic context associated with the emergence and changing character of women’s movements and the relationship between these movements transnationally.

Drawing on data from the Research Network on Gender Politics and the State (RNGS), Mazur, McBride and Hoard seek to explain variations in women’s movements’ strengths over three decades in 13 democracies in Western Europe and North America. One of the major goals of their ambitious research agenda is to develop valid, reliable and systematic ways of studying women’s movements across time and place. Their methodology rests on a comparison between two key dimensions of women’s movements, mobilization and institutionalization.

One of their major findings is that institutionalization does not lead to demobilization in any of the 13 countries they examine. Rather, they argue that the presence of women’s movements has actually increased in all state and non-state institutions. My first point is that the argument appears to be tautological because the authors consider institutionalization both an indicator and an outcome of strong women’s movements. In other words, the very activity that women’s movements engage in, namely institutionalization, is also the outcome of their efforts. The fact that women’s movements have become increasingly
institutionalized cannot be assumed a priori to signify success – or failure. We must ask
what difference institutionalization makes to feminist goals, strategies and identities.
That is, institutionalization is a means to an end. To simply consider it an end in itself
disregards the many important normative questions that have enlivened feminist scholar-
ship. Does institutionalization narrow the demands, goals and constituencies of women’s
movements? How do women’s movement activists avoid being marginalized by male
dominated institutions? From a transnational perspective, there is clearly no one
answer to the question. The answer depends on the character of the state, in particular
its receptiveness to women’s movements’ demands, the strength of women’s movements
outside the state, and the links between femocrats and autonomous women’s movements.
Some of the most successful examples of participatory state feminism exist in places where
women’s movements retain one foot in activism and the other in institutions (Basu,
forthcoming).

The authors argue that women’s movements mobilized more actively in the 1970s than
two decades later and their research demonstrates that women’s movements are cyclical in
nature. This argument raises my second set of observations. There is a contradiction
between the authors’ argument that women’s movements have become stronger over
time and that they are cyclical in character. Furthermore, it would be useful to know
how and why changed economic and political circumstances contributed to weakening
women’s movements in the 1990s. A plausible explanation is that the demise of Keynesian
welfare states, amidst the Thatcherite and Reagan counter revolutions, had negative con-
sequences for women and women’s movements. The strongest allies of women’s move-
ments – social democratic states, left wing political parties and labor unions – became
weaker in the 1980s and 1990s. Thus women’s movements were on the defensive in
seeking to protect past gains.

My third question concerns the complicated and much debated question of how to
define women’s movements (Beckwith 2012; Ferree and Tripp 2006; Molyneux 1985).
The authors opt for a broad definition, “collective action by women organized explicitly
as women presenting claims in public life based on gendered identities as women.” This
deinition, they explain, does not focus on a specific set of women’s ideas or goals. Nor
does it assume that women’s movements are necessarily feminist or necessarily engage
in protest.

At one level this approach is refreshingly inclusive for it recognizes the diversity in the
forms of women’s organizing. However, precisely because women’s movements, thus
defined, include such a complex mix of networks and groups, their boundaries are
fuzzy and their relations to feminism ambiguous. If protest activities are not a necessary
part of women’s movements, are they movements at all? If we focus exclusively on public
activities, should we exclude from consideration women who mobilize unobtrusively
within the US military and the Catholic Church? (Katzenstein 1999) If women’s move-
ments need not be feminist, then presumably they can include right wing women who
have organized women’s groups to oppose same sex marriage and reproductive rights
in the US and Europe (Bacchetta and Power 2002; Blee and Deutsch 2012). Without
further specification about what constitutes a women’s movement, particularly with
respect to its normative goals, it is difficult to assess the impact of women’s movements
on public policy and political change. Liberal and conservative women’s organizations,
and advocacy organizations and autonomous movements differ with respect to their intentions and impacts.

A fourth question concerns the national focus of this study. The authors concede that “Mobilization of women as actors for movement claims is more likely through local organizations and community centers, informal networks and protests than through policy campaigns and new organizations.” However, “RNGS focused on the national-level, thus, the data used did not assess movement activities at the sub-national and international arenas.” I share the authors’ belief about the pre-eminent significance of the national context. However, women’s movements are among the most global movements in the world and it seems important to analyze their engagement with transnational forces. In the European context, especially amidst the growth of the European Union, regional influences on national women’s movements have also been crucial.

Mazur, McBride and Hoard seek to close the persistent gap between feminist and non-feminist research by creating uniform measurements of movement success that can generate empirically tested theory. I submit that this approach abdicates to social science some valuable contributions of interdisciplinary, feminist epistemology and methods. We should subject to more critical scrutiny the concepts we use in order to understand what constitutes empowerment, broadly and ambitiously defined, for all women.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

References

Ambiguities and challenges in measuring women’s movement strength

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To cite this article: Aili Tripp (2016) Ambiguities and challenges in measuring women’s movement strength, Politics, Groups, and Identities, 4:4, 684-689, DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2016.1211939

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2016.1211939

Published online: 09 Aug 2016.

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Ambiguities and challenges in measuring women’s movement strength

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In their insightful article, “Comparative Strength of Women’s Movements Over Time: Conceptual, Empirical, and Theoretical Innovations,” Mazur, McBride, and Hoard (2015) suggest new ways of studying and measuring women’s movement strength comparatively, focusing both on mobilization and institutionalization. They draw on insights and data from the Research Network on Gender Politics and the State (RNGS) project, which examined movements in 13 Western democracies, from the 1970s to the early 2000s. Women’s movement strength is defined, as it was in the RNGS project as, “the ability of women’s movement actors to accumulate political and social assets to support their claims.” This essay explores some of the challenges of measuring movement strength in cross-national comparisons, especially when considering non-Western democracies.

Although the authors are focusing on a specific time frame within 13 Western countries, they hope that their approach can be modified and applied elsewhere to facilitate more comparative work. This essay examines some of the challenges of doing so, particularly within the contexts I know best in Africa, and in an historical context where the forms of mobilization have changed significantly from the colonial, to the post-colonial period of single-party rule, and then again to the period of multiparty rule after the 1990s. Many of the contextual differences make cross-national comparisons challenging, something Mazur et al. fully acknowledge.

Mazur et al. adopt combined measures of institutionalization and mobilization as a way of determining movement strength. The measures Mazur et al. regard as institutionalization include presence of women’s movement actors in legislatures, bureaucracy/higher civil services, political parties, unions, and academia. They are interested in showing the compatibility of institutionalization and mobilization in the countries they studied. But in authoritarian and totalitarian regimes these could be seen as measures of state or ruling party cooptation and control of women’s mobilization. In most African contexts immediately after independence, one found autocratic governments ruled by single parties, dictators, and/or military cliques. They constrained women’s mobilization much in the same way that colonial governments had restricted autonomous civil society mobilization. This continued until the 1990s, when political space began to open up and multipartyism began to take hold across the continent. Even in the post-1990s period of multipartyism, many ruling parties continued to assert their control through allocating patronage positions to various groups and individuals, including women’s organizations.
and leaders. Today, for example, almost all women’s mobilization and civil society mobilization in Angola, which is authoritarian, is in one way or another tied to the ruling party, Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola or People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).

It is the extent to which women’s organizations are independent of the state and ruling party that would be one of the most appropriate measures of movement strength in authoritarian and hybrid regimes, moreso than the extent to which women’s rights activists are represented in the party, unions, or higher levels of government ministries.

Autonomy is not only a concern in autocratic contexts, although it is heightened by the lack of democracy. Weldon (2002) also found that autonomous women’s movements, together with women’s policy agencies, were primarily responsible for the adoption of reforms in the area of gender-based violence in 36 democracies in 1994. Htun and Weldon (2011, 2012) further highlighted the importance of autonomous mobilization in their study of the adoption of women’s rights policy in 70 countries (1975–2005), finding that countries with autonomous feminist mobilization were more likely to adopt gender equal family laws and violence against women reforms.

Moreover, to understand movement strength, one has to consider exogenous factors that constrain and facilitate that strength. The size and activities of movements are also determined by external or structural factors. It is not simply a matter of agency on the part of women’s rights activists. As mentioned above, party and or state attempts to check women’s autonomous mobilization might be one restriction. Islamist, and conservative Salafist – also violent groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al Shabaab in Somalia, and Ansar Dine in Mali – have attempted to restrain women’s mobilization in various African countries, but sometimes they have also given rise to new forms of women’s rights mobilization. Conservative Christian groups have played a similar role in limiting women’s mobilization. In some countries, some of these conservative groups are tied to or supported by the state formally or informally, and some are independent of the state.

Other circumstances have strengthened women’s movements. Conflict and postconflict contexts have given rise to women’s movements (often in the form of peace movements) in many African countries. The economic crisis and structural adjustment programs inspired new forms of women’s mobilization in the 1980s. Political liberalization after the 1990s autonomous movements was reinvigorated. Women’s organizations garnered support from other civil society actors, sometimes from legislators, UN Women (earlier UNIFEM) and other UN agencies, foreign donors, regional organizations outside of Africa (European Union, the Commonwealth) and within Africa (African Union). In some authoritarian contexts like Tunisia under Ben Ali, the women’s rights reforms were implemented in a top-down manner and became associated with authoritarianism. These exogenous factors matter in considering Mazur et al.’s claim that regional factors are not important.

Although Mazur et al. may be right that regional factors are not evident in examining Western women’s movements (although a Nordic pattern is hinted at), a global perspective may point to a greater role for the influence of region as movements respond to common threats and influences. There was a common thread of women’s mobilization within the anti-colonial movements of the 1950s and 1960s in Africa. One later saw regional influences with democratization in Africa but also Latin America and Eastern Europe. This changed the way women mobilized because of the new political space
within which they could mobilize. As mentioned earlier, the end of numerous conflicts has had regional impacts in Africa, profoundly shaping women's mobilization (Tripp 2015). Diffusion in the Maghreb countries has resulted in common patterns of mobilization around similar issues relating to quotas, violence against women, the personal status code, whether women can pass citizenship to their children, and other such concerns in ways not evident in other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Certainly these exogenous factors would have bearing on the strength of movements. These are just a few examples of regional influences.

Mazur et al. measure both formal and informal structures for women’s activism, including informal networks, protests, local movement communities, and cultural centers, formation of new organizations and policy campaigns. But how does one measure movement strength when there are multiple women’s movements that converge around some issues and not others? In Morocco, for example, Islamic women’s rights activists, who have considerable influence, have agreed with secular feminists on some issues, such as quotas for women parliamentarians, but have disagreed on other issues such as the personal status code (Salime 2011).

Feminists pressed for reforms in the Mudawana Personal Status Code and in 2004 they were passed, giving women the right to divorce, raising the legal age of marriage from 15 to 18 for girls, allowing women free choice of their spouse, and curtailing polygamy. While the reforms might be considered a victory for the women’s movement, they were opposed by Islamist feminists, who vigorously mobilized against them. Demonstrations against the reforms were larger than those supporting the reforms, but the secular feminists had the support of the king. The king capitalized on a critical moment right after the Casablanca bombings of 2003 by an extremist Salafi group to shepherd the reforms through parliament.

While secular and Islamist feminists disagreed about the Mudawana at the time, they agreed on other issues such as quotas. In fact, the largest number of elected women (16) came from the Islamist ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (PJD) in the 2011 election after the introduction of the new 15% quota in the constitution. There was a 7% increase in the number of women in parliament in 2011 over the percentage that won in the 2007 section, raising the percentage of women to a total of 17%. How does one determine the strength of the women’s movement in this case, when the movement is split around some issues and unified around other concerns? Which representatives does one account for in determining movement strength, the secular feminists or the Islamist women’s rights activists, who reject key demands of the secular women’s movement and support others or who have markedly different understandings of solutions to problems of violence against women and other such concerns?

In other cases there is agreement on some of the goals but not on the policy outcomes. For example, in Nigeria there are tensions between various advocates for child rights who agreed on passing the Child Rights Act of 2003, but for different reasons. They agree on raising the age of marriage under the Child Rights Act of 2003 and have had to jointly confront obstacles to the ratification of the act. Federal laws that are passed at the national level are required to be passed within the State Houses of Assembly. By 2007, 10 state assemblies had adopted the Act. However the Islamic Supreme Council says that if the Act is passed by state assemblies it will destroy the very basis and essence of the Shar’ia and Muslim culture in a country where half the population is Muslim and nine states
have adopted Shar’ia law. The controversial sections of the Act include provisions that make it illegal for parents to marry off their daughter if she is younger than 18 and to consummate a marriage with a child under 18 years of age. Proponents of the law see the age limit as a way of ensuring that girls complete their schooling, which has implications for women’s economic status and for development in the country more generally. The law also gives both boys and girls equal inheritance rights.

However, the conflict around the act is not only between forces supporting and resisting it, there are tensions between those who share a common agenda. At the end of military rule in 1999, women’s groups in Nigeria found themselves with competing notions of rights and competing bases for appealing for women’s rights. Some groups saw women’s empowerment in terms of promoting family welfare, while feminists (e.g., women in Nigeria) saw women’s rights advancement linked to equality and opposition to discrimination. For some Islamic women’s groups women’s empowerment was tied to educating people and building awareness of women of their rights under the sharia, which included reinterpreting the sharia. Still other Muslim women’s organizations wanted to improve the rights of women and girls by appealing to Islamic law itself. The Federation of Muslim Women Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN) sees Islamic family law as historically constituted with well-defined notions of rights that can be reformed, but they can only be reformed within the Islamic legal system (Toyo 2006). These are all women’s movement actors supporting the same piece of legislation affecting girls, but with very different analyses of the problem and divergent solutions.

Mazur et al. remain agnostic about the types of goals women adopt and argue that these should be determined by empirical observation. But how does one measure a “movement” when there are competing women’s movements like the ones for and against the Mudawana in Morocco that then converged around other issues like quotas? How does one measure movement strength when there are vastly different understandings of the same problem and solution, even among women’s rights activists, as evident in the Nigerian case around the Child Rights Act. What does it mean for the movement to have strength in such a context where there are multiple movements? How does one measure coalitions of such movements, which have become especially common around issues of quota adoption, for example? Does one measure one movement or multiple movements with divergent goals?

Problems of measurement are also of concern in authoritarian contexts or contexts of war where the media and the flow of information more generally is restricted. This may limit the reliability of measurements, thus making cross-national comparisons more difficult. Under Idi Amin’s Uganda, non-state women’s organizations were banned in 1978 and forced underground. They existed but they were not visible. They purposefully did not register. How they would be measured is difficult to say in a context where surveys and public opinion polls were not carried out, data collection in general was limited, and the media was severely restricted. In less extreme cases, women’s organizations operate informally but in ways that make their strength difficult to assess, especially historically. Finally, there is the issue of women’s movements mobilizing in concert with other actors. Women’s movements are not discrete entities that operate in a vacuum. They work closely with other civil society organizations and political parties on women’s issues and other concerns that strongly affect women but are not exclusively women’s issues. Not only do women’s rights organizations work together with other actors, but
women’s rights activists also lead other movements working on issues that have bearing on the lives of women. For example, in Uganda, women’s rights activists have led organizations that are concerned with land, debt, poverty, LGBT rights, peace, and disability, all issues which have profound effect on women but are not solely women’s issues. At the same time, women’s movements are supported by other non-movement actors. For example, Alice Kang and myself had initially hypothesized that women’s movements were key to the passage of quota legislation in Africa, but soon discovered that almost all the quota legislation passed in Africa occurred after the formation of a coalition consisting of two or more organizations which worked together with other actors like women’s policy agencies, advocates within political parties, a women’s parliamentary group, academics, United Nations agencies, especially UN Women (previously UNIFEM), and donors. How does one tease out women’s movement strength when women’s movements cannot be easily disentangled from other movements? How does one look at the intersections of various movements?

Conclusions

Mazur et al. have helped advance our understanding of women’s movement strength and have put forward important observations regarding Western cases. In examining women’s movements in non-democratic contexts, numerous issues make cross-national analysis more challenging and sometimes even impossible in cases where data is nonexistent or hard to come by. One of the most important challenges in authoritarian contexts is that the very measurement of institutionalization used by Mazur et al. in Western countries is more likely to reflect movement weakness and the extent to which women’s mobilization is coopted by the ruling party or state. At best, it is a reflection of the ambiguous nature of leaders who may be straddling loyalties to both the movement and to their political patrons, who generally take precedence. Thus, autonomy of the movement may be an important measure of its strength in such contexts, whereas this may not be of as much concern in a democracy.

Movements themselves may be divided, such as the movement in Morocco, which is divided between secular feminists and Islamist women’s rights activists who agree on some issues and disagree vehemently on others. When measuring the strength of women’s movements, which movement are we measuring when there are multiple and competing movements and how does one measure the strength of forces supporting divergent agendas? This is not just a problem in non-democracies. Women’s movements have been polarized on issues such as sex-work and trafficking, quotas, pornography, and many other concerns. Or they may have different ways of thinking about the issues and differences in emphasis or strategy. Whose strength are we measuring? The examples from Morocco and Nigeria beg the question strength of one view or multiple and opposing organizations and movements?

Finally, women’s movements do not act alone in a vacuum. Women activists are leaders in other movements addressing issues that affect women in particular but not exclusively, such as land access for the vulnerable, LGBT rights, environmental concerns, and microcredit. Women’s movements also work in coalitions with other movements to advance women’s rights. The question then becomes, how important is women’s movement strength given these realities?
All of these concerns bring us to the question: can cross-national comparisons be made? I would say, yes, but with the caveats raised in this essay. Before we can get there we need to think more carefully about the meaning of the measures in particular geographic and historical contexts and within different regime types.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Women in their complexity

Erica Townsend-Bell

To cite this article: Erica Townsend-Bell (2016) Women in their complexity, Politics, Groups, and Identities, 4:4, 690-694, DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2016.1211940

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2016.1211940

Published online: 23 Aug 2016.

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Mazur, McBride, and Hoard’s “Comparative Strength of Women’s Movements Over Time” (2015) is the product of extensive data collection, and intensive work with that data, and social movement and women’s movement theory. The result of this work is a new and significant conceptualization of movement strength, operationalized as the interactive product of mobilization and institutionalization, and measured across multiple, empirically observable, indicators. The longitudinal focus of the analysis allows for explicit consideration of movement activity across space and time. It also turns out to lead to the possibility for a variety of new types of empirical inquiry, and some really interesting findings. For instance, the authors suggest that institutionalization is not an indicator of movement decline, but instead a common phenomenon that can signal the maturation of movements with enhanced access to, and exercise of, political power. Because this well done piece is working with and through a significant amount of cross-national and cross-sectional data it is largely conceptual and propositional. Thus, it opens up considerable space for future exploration of those propositions, as well as new data and new research. As such, I will spend the bulk of my space here in scrutiny of one of the base assumptions underlying the collection of data and execution of methods, which drives the findings and propositions thus far, and which has implications for future research. My comments are primarily organized around the definition of women’s movement, movement strength, and the potential underestimation of mobilization. I follow with a discussion of the analysis’ capacity for non-Western travel.

At the foundation of this analysis is a new definition of women’s movements that the authors pick up, one that attempts not to delimit the arena to particular kinds of goals and interests. Here the women’s movement is understood as “collective action by women organized explicitly as women presenting claims in public life based on gendered identities as women” (p. 11). This definition takes the very important step of trying to minimize attention to narrow and stereotypical understandings of women’s interests and preferences, and it continues to move us beyond unproductive conversations about women’s priorities. It is progressive in its attempt to shift away from more traditional definitions of women’s movements, which tend to assume and circumscribe women’s goals, preferences, and priorities. The definition is not the authors’ original contribution but they do take the important step of furthering its usage and entry into the social movement conversation. It is also the definition which frames the Research Network on Gender Politics and the State data...
that forms the basis of their analysis, and drives their findings and propositions for future empirical work.

Progressive though the definition may be, it does retain a set of implicit assumptions that may increase the likelihood that mobilization is underestimated, because it is still exclusionary. The authors note that, “women’s movement activities provide a means for women, in their full cultural and ethnic complexity, to make their gender conscious ideas public, to participate in achieving their goals, and to change public policy and the state” (p. 2; emphasis mine). They point out that they “seek to capture the full complexity of movements over time and across different cultural settings” (p. 4; emphasis mine). Both of these comments signal an interest in capturing the widest amount of activity possible by the greatest number of women. That is, they wish to capture women in their diversity; as should be the case. But across 13 cases, at least two – the United States, and Canada – have long standing and well-documented issues with researchers and activists recognizing the diversity of women who actually make gendered claims, the spaces in which they choose to make them, and even what constitutes a gendered claim (Crenshaw 1991; Dhamoon 2009; Townsend-Bell 2012). The issue of intersectionality was apparent at the time of data collection, and has certainly grown in importance and attention since, due to increasing claims made by, and about, ethnic and cultural minorities in Europe. These ethnic and cultural minority women have made similar claims of exclusion, or distortion, of their gender concerns by mainstream women’s movements (Brah and Phoenix 2004). Mazur et al. do note that this issue was less of a widely recognized concern through 2003, the last year included in their dataset, and that intersectionality and diversity were topics at the dawn of politicization in Europe at that time. But, I would suggest that disclaimer does not erase the issue of overlooked movement diversity during the years included in the data set. A brief methodological aside sets up my assessment of the possible underestimation of movement diversity, particularly as relates to mobilization.

With regard to specific methodological concerns, the article raises a few questions. First, a brief discussion of controls and treatment of the data would be welcome. The data set includes uneven time periods, ranging from 2 to 10 years, as well as uneven numbers of periods, ranging from 2 to 4 observations per country. Moreover, these periods are determined by clusters of policy campaigns occurring “across all issues over time” (p. 14). The meaning of this is unclear – the content of the policy campaigns and how comprehensive they were is not discussed within the article or the appendix. It is similarly unclear how to interpret the scale of the policy campaigns. “None” or “one” policy campaigns score at the lower end of the scale (they are scored 1 and 2, respectively), while “4–5” and “more than 5” policy campaigns score at the higher end of the scale (they are scored 4 and 5, respectively). Whether this scaling best maps the range of actual policy campaigns across the 43 periods, or a conceptual range of many and few campaigns, is unclear.

And to return to an ongoing theme, it is unclear how closely the policy campaigns correspond with the full array of movement activity, particularly since the bulk of the activity is occurring at the local level. That is, the level at which women’s movements tend to be the most differentiated and diverse. The authors maintain that it is difficult to observe the full range of movement discourse empirically, and thus they restrict their attention to movement actors’ speech. Fair enough, but policy campaigns frequently target major, nationally oriented mainstream issues, and ignore more specific, local, or segmented concerns (Strolovitch 2007). So, how much of the findings about what the movement is doing, and how
strong the movement is, are driven by the delimited focus on policy campaigns? In the end precisely what are we learning about the activity of movements and the disparate groups, organizations, and women who form them, not to mention the variety of interests and goals subsumed within them? There is an implicit, but really, explicit (by dint of the definitions and focus chosen) political focus underlying the data collection and analysis that seems to leave us with both a more mainstream (e.g., non-diverse, or insufficiently diverse), and narrowly political (e.g., also insufficiently diverse) understanding of movement strength than may be reflected in the wider country movements. For example, the French case included in Appendix 4 indicates that all French movement activity in the 1970s was Paris based, with the exception of a few presumably Paris organized film festivals. It is unclear how representative the French case is within the dataset, but the assertion that almost all women’s movement activity across an entire decade was restricted to the capital during this decade is … troubling. And it begs the question of what, or who, else may have been overlooked.

In short, though the goal is to incorporate the variety of women who make gendered claims from a variety of distinct perspectives, there is a real possibility here that measuring movement strength through policy campaigns may underestimate the range of women, issues, goals, and activity incorporated in the movements measured. Of course, while this is a significant concern that will hopefully be addressed in future data collection and analysis, it would appear that more accurate estimation would only strengthen the authors’ findings, especially in regard to mobilization.

The other major point of inquiry that I would like to consider is how this comparative work might travel. The authors are explicit that their findings, and even propositions, are limited to the Western cases, and would not work wholesale in other settings. Still, given the comparative nature of the project, the temptation to consider both possibilities for travel, as well as potential roadblocks, is compelling. And there are certainly a lot of roadblocks to extending this comparative project outside of the target countries. First, shifting geography will mostly just tell us about the middle-income or “second world” countries we already know something about, and leave out the ones we do not, due to a lack of reliable data. And the comparisons will generally need to remain regional or perhaps even subregional given the need to shift the type and/or the content of the indicators. Similarly, the definition, or rather, the importance, of movement strength will vary. Where institutionalization is all around low, for instance, recognition that the women’s movement scores low on the institutionalization index has a much different meaning. In other cases, given different, or shorter, democratic histories; different ways of doing politics, etc. it may be that having key players in specific spaces is more meaningful movement “asset,” than larger numbers of woman (Dahlerup 2006).

Another important point of consideration, besides significant concerns about the availability, accuracy, consistency, and thoroughness of the data, is attention to the assumptions of the definition. As I have indicated, this is an important point to remember with the Western cases but it may be even more important if we want to capture women’s movement activity in non-Western cases. There especially, the questions of what constitutes gendered activity and the parameters of the women’s movement are central, as made clear by works such as Molyneaux’s (1985) classic and still controversial division of women’s activism into practical and strategic interests. The isolation of women’s activism as explicitly the domain of those who make collective claims as women may or may not be reasonable, given the
conflation of class, tribe, religion, and other interactions with gender, not to mention the impact of more conservative trends in women’s organizing like that exhibited in authoritarian Chile and contemporary authoritarian China, just for a start. Finally, there is the ongoing concern perhaps most famously introduced by Alvarez (1999) and echoed many times over, about who is actually driving women’s movements in non-Western cases, given both the influence of Western donors, and blurred lines between states and movements (Strolovitch and Townsend-Bell 2013). Indeed, it may be that the very definition of mobilization, which is understood as the “accumulation of assets through participation of women as activists outside the state to further movement discourse and policy goals in a variety of formal and informal structures” (p. 12; my emphasis) is compromised in those non-Western settings where the connection between states and movements is a less autonomous and more hybrid phenomenon.

So the potential roadblocks are considerable, though not necessarily insurmountable. Where the data are available, or could be collected, the possibility of continued comparative exploration is exciting and compelling. In particular it would be interesting to consider some of the authors’ propositions for future research and how they might work in non-Western settings. For instance, in regard to the first proposition that mobilization is more likely through local groups, community centers, informal networks, etc. I have already raised the question of whether such mobilization needs to be autonomous. The second proposition, that there were higher levels of mobilization strength in the 1970s than in the 1990s seems certain to be wrong outside of the Western world, given the explosion in civil society that has occurred in that time period (Strolovitch and Townsend-Bell 2013), but the real question is whether we might see other kinds of patterns elsewhere and if so, of what type? Third, the authors propose that Western women’s activists have had stronger political party and trade union presence than bureaucratic, lobby-based, legislative, or academic presence. Is this pattern maintained when we move the geographic lens? In particular, the role of gender quotas and the import they might have for this finding is a major question.

In conclusion, this is a really interesting piece which does some important conceptual work, linked with data that gives us both a nice glimpse of how movements look in the West across space and time, as well as a variety of helpful insights for thinking about non-Western cases. The new assessment of movement strength introduced here is both innovative and positively disruptive. It turns the old social movement truism that institutionalization equals decline on its face, and instead helps us to track some of the ways in which movements shift and mature. It will be interesting to see what the researchers might do with more contemporary data, and particularly how the consideration of diversity might affect new findings.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Contribution to dialogue on “New directions in studying women’s movement strength”

Silke Roth

To cite this article: Silke Roth (2016) Contribution to dialogue on “New directions in studying women's movement strength”, Politics, Groups, and Identities, 4:4, 695-701, DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2016.1212715

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2016.1212715

Published online: 09 Aug 2016.

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The comparison and change of social movement strength is of great interest not only to social movement scholars, but also to comparative sociologists and political scientists. Mazur, McBride, and Hoard (2015) present a rigorous strategy to compare the strength of women’s movement mobilization and institutionalization across 13 Western democracies (Austria, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and U.S.A.) and over time (1970s to early 2000s). Their definition of women’s movements – “women act[ing] collectively to present public claims based on their gendered identities as women” – has two dimensions: first, the discourse or claims of women and second, efforts of women to insert these claims in public life. The strength of women’s movements also has two dimensions: mobilization or formal and informal structures of women’s activism and institutionalization or the inclusion of women’s movement actors in government and quasi-government institutions. Women’s movement actors are distinguished from other women in government by their connections to formal or informal women’s organizations. The data revealed that mobilization tended to be higher in the 1970s and that institutionalization became stronger over time. Variations for both dimensions were found but no clear regional pattern for either mobilization or institutionalization nor the relationship between both. Mazur et al. (2015) provide an impressive set of conceptual tools and data which are useful not just for scholars of women’s movements, but also for social movement scholars more generally. The question how mobilization and institutionalization are related is important for all social movements and it would be helpful to have a framework that allows to compare different movements with each other. The following comments are aimed at pushing this research agenda and to elaborate on some of the caveats that Mazur et al. (2015) have already identified.

1. Women’s movements

Mazur et al. (2015) rightly distinguish between women’s movements and feminist movements and are aware of the enormous diversity and heterogeneity of women’s experiences and claims. Their inclusive definition of women’s movements also avoids problematic distinctions between “pragmatic” and “strategic” gender interests (Molyneux 1985). However, combining the great range of women’s interests – across class, ethnicity, religion,
age, marital status, sexual orientation to name but a few – in one broad category presents difficulties for a comparative perspective on women’s movements. Such a comprehensive category obscures conflicts among women’s movements, for example, liberal, radical and socialist feminists and different positions on prostitution and pornography. Moreover, such a broad definition not only includes women’s movements advocating gender equality and equal rights for women and men, but also conservative and traditional counter-movement promoting gender differences and restrictive roles for women. For example, as Agustin (2012) shows, women’s organizations might support the “choice of women to stay home to take care of their families” sharing the concerns of conservative and right-wing groups. In addition, it is not quite clear who is included in the category “women” – is it restricted to cis-women or does it include transgender and transsexual women? So what are the advantages and disadvantages of employing a very broad, but somewhat vague definition of women’s movements? The advantage of speaking of women’s movements rather than feminist movements is that it includes those who mobilize on behalf of women, but who distance themselves from the label feminist. However, Martin (1990) considers an organization as feminist if it meets certain criteria, including feminist goals and outcomes, regardless whether the organization considers itself feminist or not. An organization might not adopt the label “feminist” for strategic reasons because members feel that they might alienate supporters or they resent that women’s interests are primarily defined by gender rather than by other forms of privilege and disadvantage. While the concept feminist movements encompasses a vast variety of claims and interests, it explicitly excludes those promoting unequal gender relations and anti-feminist agendas. Speaking of “gender equality movements” (rather than women’s movements) would distinguish progressive from conservative “women’s movements” while capturing a variety of claims without invoking the label “feminist”. Moreover the notion of “gender equality movements” allows us to include men and exclude women with anti-egalitarian agendas. It is important to clarify, whether Mazur et al. (2015) understand women’s movements as gender equality movements, regardless of whether they identify as feminist or not or if they include anti-egalitarian movements in this definition. This definition has significant consequences for measuring movement strength. Including movements and counter-movements, for example the pro-choice choice and the anti-abortion movements, would result in high movement strength. In order to explain regional patterns in women’s movement strength, it is necessary to distinguish between gender equality movements and other women’s movements rather than to implicitly equate women’s movements with gender equality movements and assume that all women’s movements support gender equality. Also, I think it is worth considering to what extent men provide support for women’s equality claims.

2. Gender regimes

Resource mobilization and cycles of protest are extremely valuable concepts and approaches for analyzing the change of women’s movement strength. In order to explain regional variation of mobilization and institutionalization, it might be helpful to employ also another crucial concept for the comparison of social movements: political opportunity structures (POS). This brings me to my second point: to what extent is the success of women’s movements related to different gender and welfare regimes? And to what extent do does it
depend on allies in political parties and other actors, in particular trade unions? Political opportunity structures influence the choice of strategies of social movements and their likely success (Kriesi 2007). Thus, political opportunity structures should have a significant impact on the mobilization and institutionalization of women’s movements (Ferree 2012). Mazur et al. (2015) explain that their measure of institutionalization does not assess women’s political representation. However, women’s political representation – the inclusion of women in parliaments and governments – correlates to some extent with the adoption of gender equality policies and might influence the mobilization of gender equality movements. For example, the Nordic countries have long been characterized by a high proportion of women in public sphere (both in political structures and paid employment) and strong equality policies. Sweden is characterized by a strong emphasis on equality and an official discourse on gender equality that – perhaps ironically – makes it difficult to address issues of gendered power relations and has impeded the development of an autonomous women’s movement (Hobson 2003; Sandberg and Rönnblom 2013). On the other hand, a lower representation of women in political parties, parliaments and governments and the marginalization of women’s issues in the political agenda can result in strong, autonomous women’s movements. Furthermore, variations in the institutional-level constructions of gender can be distinguished, which include gender egalitarian, gender polarized and male-dominated forms (Bolzendahl 2014). A comparative study of women’s groups in the UK, France and Germany (Poloni-Staudinger and Ortbals 2011) found that POS are gendered and that women’s groups react differently to changes in POS than other social groups, in particular environmental groups (74). Thus, while the participation of women in the public sphere must be distinguished from the institutionalization of women’s equality movements, Mazur et al. (2015) might elaborate on their model by considering POS. Such an approach might include drawing on Walby’s (2004) notion of gender regime. Walby (2004) distinguishes different forms of gender regimes and degrees of gender in/equality and identifies three main types: market-led (U.S.), welfare state-led (Nordic countries) and regulatory polity-led (European Union) (10–11). These gender regimes represent different POS for women’s (equality) movements. In order to explain regional patterns in movement strength with respect to mobilization and institutionalization it is necessary to consider the inclusion of women’s political representation. The exclusion or underrepresentation of women in conventional politics might result in a higher degree of autonomous mobilization while high proportions of women in government organization might boost institutionalization. This would require to carefully distinguish women’s movement actors from other women in governmental and non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, institutionalization is narrowly defined if it only refers to government and quasi-government organizations.6 Social movements (in general) and women’s movements (in particular) have created a wide range of organizational forms and networks (Ferree and Yancey 1995), which also include consciousness-raising groups, music festivals, cooperatives and other forms of social movement culture which sustain social movements in times of social movement abeyance (Taylor 1989).

3. The West and the rest

Considering POS in addition to resource mobilization and cycles of protest is also useful when the conceptual framework is extended beyond Western democracies.7 Encounters of
women from the Global North and the Global South at the World women’s conferences demonstrated that women’s interests and identities are far from universal. Women in Africa, Asia and Latin America were concerned with the consequences of colonialism, poverty and development policies that affected gender relations. For example, women participating in the World Women’s Conference in Nairobi in 1985 sought to convince Western delegations that apartheid and Palestinian rights were women’s issues (Berger 2014). Thus, a definition of women’s movements is needed which is useful as it is elastic enough to include women involved in peace and national liberation movements as well as women involved in religious movements or concerned with health issues (Tripp 2016). However, a typology of women’s movements might be more fruitful in order to understand regional patterns in mobilization and institutionalization. After the end of the Cold War, the interaction and relationships between women’s activists in Central and Eastern European countries and women from Western Europe and North America to some extent resembled the contentious relations between North and South (Roth 2007). Western foundations and governments supported the emergence of civil society organizations in post-socialist societies. Ghodsee (2004) strongly criticized the activities of Western feminists in Eastern Europe warning that Western funders that focus on body politics undermine post-socialist women’s emphasis on mobilizing around economic issues and consequently promoting neo-liberalism. Donor support resulted in NGO-ization and undermined grassroots organizations (Lang 1997). Funk (2006) critically reviews non-feminist and feminist imperialist criticisms of Western NGOs engagement in Central and Eastern Europe. Women’s movements in East and South differed from Western women’s movements by emphasizing differences between women and commonalities and solidarity with men. However, this is also true for Western working class women and women of color. In their measure of institutionalization, Mazur et al. (2015) include the presence of women’s movement actors in “well-established lobby coalitions, unions”. These women might identify first and foremost as trade unionists (Roth 2000, 2003) or their ethnic identity might be as much or more important than their gender identity (Roth 2004). Regardless of whether the comparison is restricted to Western women’s movements or whether it is extended to women’s movements in post-socialist and post-colonial societies, an intersectional perspective on mobilization and institutionalization might help to further develop and differentiate what is meant by women’s movements.

4. Conclusions

Mazur et al. (2015) provide a solid and well-conceptualized framework for the comparison of women’s movements. Expanding the comparison to non-Western movements promises to test the robustness of the conceptualization and enhance the analytic acuity of the concepts. A broad definition of women’s movements has the advantage of including (cis? trans?) women with a very wide range of interests and experiences. However, the disadvantage of such an elastic approach is that it does not allow to identify these different interests and experiences which conceptualize “women’s interest” differently relative to their situation which might be shaped by a lack of political rights in repressive regimes, the lack of resources in regions affected by poverty, by experiences of racial, ethnic or sexual discrimination or by experiences of privilege of being sheltered from conflicts, disaster and poverty. Thus, I would
encourage Mazur et al. (2015) to use the framework in order to develop a typology of women’s movements which might have more potential to explain regional variations in women’s movement strength. As noted above, gender intersects with class, ethnicity and other aspects of privilege and disadvantage and thus impact on solidarities and boundary-making.

Notes

1. The data documenting institutionalisation were based on the assumption of the 13 country directors of the research network that women in these institutions had connections with women’s movement organisations.

2. Throughout the article, Mazur et al. (2015) refer to women’s movements without explicitly stating that they understand women’s movements as gender equality movements. Gender equality movements are not necessarily women’s movements, but might include men supporting gender equality whereas women’s movements do not necessarily support gender equality, they might also advocate gender differences.

3. Cisgender refers to gender identity that aligns with assigned gender at birth, that is woman who based on biological criteria has been categorised as female at birth and who identifies as female in contrast to transgender people who do not identify with the sex categorization and gender assignment at birth. Since the end of the twentieth century, taking cis-gender women as the unquestioned norm is increasingly criticized in addition to earlier criticism of heteronormative assumptions and the marginalisation of lesbian women in women’s and feminist movements (see, for example, Rich 1980).

4. Gender equality movements include movements that emphasise gender equality as well as gender difference (Tripp 2016). Of course, I am not suggesting that gender equality movements are primarily composed of men or male actors. But it needs to be stressed that not all feminists are women and not all women are feminists.

5. POS and gender regimes need to be analytically distinguished although occasionally, they might overlap empirically. POS can be defined as “dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure” (Tarrow 1998, 85). Walby (2004, 10) – see also below – develops a complex model of gender regime which encompasses four levels of abstraction including the overall social system, a continuum from domestic to public, degrees of gender inequality, series of domains (economic, polity and civil society) and series of social practices.

6. Restricting institutionalization to parliaments, political parties and other mainstream organisations and focusing primarily on the state results in a very narrow vision of politics and activism. Women’s and gender equality movement formed because women were excluded from (narrowly defined) institutionalized politics and formed new organizational forms (see Clemens 1993) to enter the mainstream as well as built alternative institutions.

7. Mazur et al. explicitly restrict their framework to Western democracies and make no claim that it applies to gender equality movements in other regions.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

References


