Course content

While often seen in the US as a local product, Occupy Wall Street appeared at the end of a year of innovative mass protests, both in the Middle East (the “Arab Spring”) and Europe. Whereas Occupy mobilized primarily tent activists and met with a mixed public reception, the earlier protests of “indignant” youth in Southern Europe and Israel spurred mega-demonstrations and won broad public support. What explains the appearance of rare “encompassing” protests, and why did they occur in some countries and not others during the 2011 protest wave? Did participants in in mega-protests cross class, cultural and political boundaries more than the Americans who supported and participated in Occupy? The course will also raise two broad issues common to both Occupy in the US and the more encompassing protests elsewhere. First, do they signal a fundamentally new capacity of masses of strangers to launch mass protest movements from below, using digital communication devices and social networks? Second, what is the relationship between electoral politics and the post-2010 protests in different settings? Did they spawn new political parties and change election outcomes? The course draws on literature on social movements and contentious politics, and will look closely at diverse national cases, especially Spain and Israel.

Requirements and Grading

The course will be conducted in a seminar format and so requires student preparation and active participation. To make this work effectively, students should have done a careful reading of each week’s assignments prior to each seminar and come to class prepared to discuss the readings, the arguments and evidence they present, and points of similarity and difference between the papers.

To facilitate class discussion, every other week each student must post on bCourses a brief response paper (1-2 pages) commenting on the week’s readings. A Doodle poll will be provided for students to choose their preferred topics, and guidelines on writing response papers will be provided in our first class. Papers should be uploaded 24 hours before the session to which they are related, so that everyone can read them before class.

You must write two papers for this course. The first paper (10 pages) will require you to make an independent argument and critically analyze the course readings on the debate on the impact of digital communication and social networks on protest mobilization. Rather than serially summarizing the readings, you will write an integrated narrative focused on one or more themes that cross-cut them, showing your grasp of the big picture. The paper will be due 1 week after we complete our class discussions of this topic.

You must also write a long research paper (20-25 pages). The research paper is due on Friday December 9. The paper will deal either with the social basis of Occupy Wall Street (based on analyzing survey data), or with one of two other topics – “Occupy Wall Street in comparative perspective” or “The impact of Occupy Wall Street on electoral politics”. Further information on choosing topics and receiving guidance from the instructor will be provided when classes begin.

Grading: Grading will be based on the bCourses posts, (20%), class participation (20%), first paper (20%), second paper (40%).
A final word that is hopefully unnecessary: All work for this class should be original and carried out by the individual student. You also need to be precise and responsible in utilizing the work of others. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, there is a detailed description of university policies at http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Citations.html.
TOPICS AND READINGS

PLEASE NOTE:

1. You can expect to read 3 articles or chapters per week. The present list is provisional and readings have not yet been assigned to specific weeks. A finalized reading list will be made available no later than 1st August. While some specific items may ultimately be dropped or changed, any such amendments sufficiently in advance to prevent unnecessary preparation by students.

2. To the fullest extent possible, the readings will be made available to you for download from the course website or other internet sites.

Introduction to the course and the topic

Light reading prior to our first class, to give you some basic background:


The movements of 2011 - overviews


Occupy Wall Street


Romanos, Eduardo. 2015. “Immigrants as Brokers: Dialogical Diffusion from Spanish Indignados to Occupy Wall Street.” Social Movement Studies, Published online 26 Oct 2015.

Driving Forces


[Article surveying the key explanatory schools – resource mobilization, political process, etc.]


The contested role of digital communication and social networks

“OPTIMISTS”


“PESSIMISTS”


Diani, Mario. 2011. “Networks and Internet into Perspective [the Arab Spring].” *Swiss Political Science Review* 17(4):469-74.


Karp, David and others. 2014. [Comments and reply on an article by Bennett et. al on how OWS crowds were mobilized.] *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(2):261-275.

Who participates in protests?


The class basis of the 2011 movements

Della Porta, Donatella. 2015. Social Movements in Times of Austerity: Bringing Capitalism Back into Protest Analysis. Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity. Chapter 2 “Social Structure: Old working class, new precariat, or yet something different?”


Other factors shaping the encompassingness of protests


The political effects of the protests: Spain


Political commentaries on the role of the 15M in the rise of the Podemos party in Spain: Erica Sagrans in In These Times and David Ferreira in Novara Wire (plus sources current when we reach this topic)


The political effects of the protests: Comparative analysis


Explaining failed takeoffs of Occupy movements

