Understanding Politics — Chapter 15 Student Practice Pack

Social Movements, Protest and Revolution

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About this pack

This pack follows the practice-chapter template: a movement-timeline exercise using a movement of your choice, and a research-design case on protest that does not happen. Answers are in the Instructor Pack, available to teaching staff from www.oxterpress.com. Student Pack, Chapter 15, version 1.0 (October 2026). © Oxter Press. CC BY-NC 4.0.

Chapter at a glance

Question	Approach	Key sources
Why do people act collectively at all?	Collective action problem	Olson (1965); Ostrom (1990)
What do movements need?	Resource mobilisation	McCarthy and Zald (1977); Morris (1984)
When do they emerge?	Political opportunity and process	McAdam (1982); Tarrow
How do they persuade?	Framing and identity	Benford and Snow (2000); Polletta and Jasper (2001)
What tactics work?	Disruption, nonviolence, repertoires	Piven and Cloward (1977); Chenoweth and Stephan (2011); Tilly (1978)
When do revolutions happen?	State crisis and revolts from below	Skocpol (1979); Goldstone (2001)

Exercise: build a movement timeline

Choose one movement from the last fifty years with good public documentation, in Ghana, the UK or elsewhere. Use at least three independent sources, such as news archives, movement statements and academic studies.

Date	Event	Opportunity or threat	Resources and organisations	Frame used	Tactic (repertoire)	State response

Aim for at least eight events. Then answer (400–600 words):

1. Which approach best explains the movement's emergence: grievance, resources, opportunity or framing?
2. Score its outcomes on Gamson's two dimensions: acceptance and new advantages.
3. Did repression increase or decrease mobilisation? What explains the effect?
4. Was the movement's organisation formal, networked or both? What did that cost or gain (Freeman; Tufekci)?

Case analysis: protest that does not happen

In the chapter's opening puzzle, many people are angry, but few protest. Design a study to explain why.

1. Name three explanations: Olson's free-rider problem, Kuran's preference falsification and Granovetter's thresholds.
2. For each, state one observable implication: what you would see if it were true.
3. What data could test each implication: surveys, list experiments, records of past protest, interviews?
4. Which explanation would you test first, and why?

Self-test

1. Olson argued that rational, self-interested individuals will not act for common interests unless:
    - A. They are well informed
    - B. The state funds them
    - C. The group is small or there is coercion or another special device
    - D. They are angry enough
2. Ostrom showed that communities can:
    - A. Govern shared resources through rules they design and enforce
    - B. Never solve collective-action problems
    - C. Only succeed through privatisation
    - D. Only succeed through central control
3. McCarthy and Zald treated social movement organisations as:
    - A. Irrational crowds
    - B. Political parties
    - C. Charities
    - D. Actors competing for resources in a movement sector
4. McAdam's political process model emphasises:
    - A. Individual psychology
    - B. Political opportunities, organisation and changing sense of what is possible
    - C. Economic growth

    - D. Foreign aid
5. Morris showed that the US civil rights movement drew on:
    - A. Black churches for leaders, networks and money
    - B. Trade unions alone
    - C. Federal funding
    - D. Television
6. Benford and Snow's three framing tasks are:
    - A. Planning, acting, reviewing
    - B. Recruiting, training, deploying
    - C. Diagnostic, prognostic and motivational
    - D. Local, national, global
7. Piven and Cloward argued that poor people's movements:
    - A. Succeed through formal organisation
    - B. Gain most through disruption, which organisation can dampen
    - C. Always fail
    - D. Need elite allies
8. Tufekci argues that digitally organised movements:
    - A. Are always stronger
    - B. Cannot mobilise
    - C. Avoid repression
    - D. Scale fast without building lasting organisational capacity
9. Chenoweth and Stephan found that, between 1900 and 2006, major nonviolent campaigns:
    - A. Always failed
    - B. Succeeded as often as violent ones
    - C. Succeeded roughly twice as often as violent ones
    - D. Were rare
10. Skocpol defines social revolutions as:
    - A. Rapid, basic transformations of state and class structures, carried partly by class-based revolts from below
    - B. Any change of government
    - C. Coups
    - D. Elections that change parties
11. Tilly's revolutionary situation is marked by:
    - A. Economic crisis
    - B. Multiple sovereignty: competing claims to rule
    - C. Mass protest
    - D. Foreign war
12. A 'repertoire of contention' is:
    - A. A list of demands
    - B. A protest song
    - C. A legal right
    - D. The familiar set of forms protest takes in a time and place
13. Kuran's 'preference falsification' helps explain:

- A. Election fraud
- B. Media bias
- C. Why widespread opposition can stay hidden, then appear suddenly
- D. Party switching

14. Granovetter's threshold model shows that:
    - A. Groups with similar average preferences can behave very differently
    - B. Everyone protests together
    - C. Thresholds are fixed
    - D. Leaders do not matter
15. Freeman's 'tyranny of structurelessness' refers to:
    - A. State repression
    - B. Informal elites forming in groups without formal structure
    - C. Bureaucratic rules
    - D. Online harassment

Short answers and essays

Short answers: (1) The collective-action problem. (2) Resource mobilisation versus political opportunity. (3) Framing. (4) Collective identity. (5) Disruption versus organisation. (6) Why nonviolent campaigns often succeed. (7) Repression and dissent. (8) Social revolution. (9) Revolutionary situation versus outcome. (10) Measuring movement success.

Essays: (1) Why do people protest when they could free-ride? (2) Is nonviolence more effective than violence? (3) Do digital tools strengthen or weaken movements? (4) What causes revolutions? (5) Can a movement succeed while failing to achieve its demands? (6) Why does widespread grievance often fail to produce protest?

Glossary

Term	Definition
Collective action problem	Incentive to free-ride on others' efforts
Selective incentive	Benefit available only to participants
Political opportunity	Openings in the political system for challengers
Framing	Interpreting problems, blame and solutions
Repertoire of contention	Familiar forms protest takes
Civil resistance	Organised nonviolent challenge
Social revolution	Rapid transformation of state and class structures
Preference falsification	Concealing true views under social pressure