

Kurt Schock**Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies.**

University of Minnesota Press, 2005, 224 pp.

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A frequent complaint by leading figures in social movement theorizing is that not enough macro-level comparative research has been done on movements. Much more prevalent are single-country studies, which, on their own, do not have the same capacity to build theory. Schock's book is an extremely well-written and sharply analytical response to this gap. Integrating the empirical work of other scholars, he analyses popular struggles for political democratization in six different authoritarian contexts during the last quarter century. The central question he addresses is why and how the movements in South Africa, the Philippines, Nepal, and Thailand won the democratic breakthrough they were seeking, while those in Burma and China were brutally squelched with no regime softening. Schock's explanation takes account of state and civil society dynamics at both the domestic and international level, and highlights the importance of both structure and strategy. Beyond the main comparative question that the book poses, Schock makes the overarching point that revolutionary violence is not the only path to regime transformation from below. Though he explicitly refrains from morally condemning armed insurrection, he argues that non-violent movement campaigns have a better chance of transforming authoritarian governments in the contemporary era.

As Schock points out, the sociology-dominated study of collective action has largely remained separate from research and theorizing on non-violent protest, which is more the purview of peace studies, philosophy, and political science. Sociologists studying movements, then, should find very useful the taxonomy of protest that Schock summarizes from the non-violence literature. He further builds the definition of non-violent insurgency by identifying and debunking a set of myths about it. Among the most eye-opening of his refutations are that non-violent activists do not try to make themselves the targets of violent repression; that non-violent movements succeed by forcing their opponents to act rather than persuading them on moral grounds; and that non-violence is a pragmatic choice, not a principled rejection of armed methods. Furthermore, as he underscores with reference to UDF and the ANC in South Africa, regime challengers that opt for the non-violent path may maintain supportive ties with violent currents of opposition.

Based on his analysis of these six "people's power" movements, Schock brings fresh and persuasive arguments to bear on one of the reigning paradigms in social movement theory, the political opportunity perspective. The answer that he offers to the "repression-dissent paradox" is one of the most insightful that I have seen. The fact that repression is found to stimulate protest in some movements and to demobilize it in others has long been the subject of debate among movement analysts. One major attempt to resolve the question of how repression affects protest depends on whether other dimensions of political opportunity (third party support; splits within the elite, etc.) are favourable to the movement.

But Schock argues that repression's impact depends as much on movement factors over which

activists exercise some control as it does on the political environment. These endogenous features include the organizational structure and tactical choices of a movement that enable its participants to evade or exhaust the state's capacity to control them. Among his six cases, the unarmed insurrections that proved most resilient to repression and that achieved political transformation they sought were decentralized rather than hierarchical, yet had some kind of loose umbrella coordination. Their protest actions were geographically dispersed and encompassed a diverse range of tactics from symbolic to non-cooperative to disruptive. As well, they devised methods of intra-movement communication that circumvented the regime's control over the mainstream media, allowing the diffusion of activist frames and the coordination of mass actions. These features, Schock shows, were absent in the movements that failed. Schock certainly does not neglect the political and economic factors that make regimes more or less vulnerable to movements and their allies. Perhaps the book's major strength, in fact, is that it demonstrates how movement strategy interacts with the national and international structures to affect outcomes in all six cases.

Some of Schock's arguments are sure to be contentious. For example, he asserts that the past quarter century has seen a shift in the predominant form of social movement challenges to governments throughout the global south, from armed to non-violent methods. The main reasons for this, in his view, are the states' growing advantage in the use of physical force to control their populations, the rise of a non-violence oriented international human rights movement, and new communication technologies that serve as non-violent protest tools. A number of exceptions to this first assertion, which is presented without systematic data, can be raised. But even where armed challenges have clearly given way in this relative time period to non-violent forms of protest, Schock's explanation may overlook some important causal underpinnings of the shift. In this respect, for example, William Robinson (2003) makes a strong case that neoliberal globalization and the rise of a transnational capitalist class played a role in defeating the revolutionary forces in Central America. Schock also suggests that Third World states' increased outsourcing of repression to death squads has discouraged protesters' recourse to arms. Though this is a minor point in the book, it will not sit well with many Latin Americanists because it ignores a wealth of literature documenting the development of revolutionary movements. In Central America, for example, guerrilla insurgents drew most of their participants from groups whose initially peaceful dissent was suppressed by the military and paramilitary violence. This point also signals a problematic silence in the book regarding the circumstances in which people have chosen armed methods of challenging non-democracies instead of non-violence.

The book is published as volume 22 of a thematic series on social movements and protest. Undoubtedly, a few minor shortcomings can be attributed to the length restrictions of the series. For example, Schock argues for the importance of tactical innovation and creativity, as well as activists' framing of their claims to various audiences, in the success of people power movements. But readers hoping for an analysis of the decision-making processes surrounding the transition from violent to non-violent tactics, or vice-versa, will be disappointed. The analysis is heavily structural. Even the key differences in movement strategy that he highlights are shown to stem largely from the nature of the network ties uniting the participants. This gives the analysis a somewhat mechanical feel. But clearly, macro-comparative sociology necessarily sacrifices some of the detail on the social psychological processes that make up the broader patterns.

Overall, the book is a tightly packed gem. It is a must-read for all those doing research on social movements and, I would argue, for those with a more practical interest in protest outcomes. Because Schock wants his work to be useful to activists, not just to academics, he cautiously draws out several lessons that his cases hold for future pro-democracy movement campaigns. Recent events in East Europe and Central Asia, such as the May 2005 uprising in Uzbekistan, point to the relevance of his arguments. Given the incompleteness of political democracy in most nations, Schock's analysis of the most effective strategies for resisting and changing authoritarian systems will be relevant to movements in virtually all settings.

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