

Chapter 13

Social Movements

When a group of people organize in an attempt to encourage or resist some kind of social change, they create a *social movement*. People with little or no political power join together in order to acquire some. They hope to influence their community or their society by joining together. Ordinary people decide that “something must be done,” that they are the ones to do it, and go about trying to make it happen. Most collective behavior theorists consider social movements a type of collective behavior, but many social movement theorists consider them a separate phenomenon. This chapter will explain each of those positions and look at the similarities and differences between social movements and all other forms of collective behavior.

Social Movements and Social Movement Organizations

A social movement is rarely represented by just one organization. A “movement” includes any individuals or groups working toward some common goal. Most successful social movements are led by one or two large organizations, but there may be dozens of smaller ones as well. For example, the second-wave feminist *movement* that began in the United States in the 1970s included specific feminist *organizations* such as the National Organization for

Women (NOW), the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC), and the American Association of University Women (AAUW). Each of these organizations is a part of the social movement. Such groups often cooperate with each other and form coalitions to increase their power and visibility.

Some sociologists call social movements "collective action" instead of "collective behavior." They argue that social movements really aren't the same as other kinds of collective behavior. Other sociologists classify social movements as a form of collective behavior. They argue that the similarities outweigh the differences. There are arguments to support both positions.

Ways in which Social Movements Are Like Other Forms of Collective Behavior

Social movement participants do unusual and unexpected things that they would not do if they were not participating in the movement. Social movements alter people's behavior just as much as any other form of collective behavior.

As in all other forms of collective behavior, social movement participants do things that go against social norms and expectations. They engage in non-institutionalized behavior that may be considered odd or deviant. Protests, sit-ins, and petition drives are not a part of everyday life for most people. These things are typical in the daily life of social movement members. They may break laws, challenge authorities, and even publicly denounce powerful people or institutions. These behaviors are not expected of people in normal daily life. It is this perception that participants' behavior is "odd" or "wrong" that links social movements to other types of collective behavior. Like any other form of collective behavior, it is group deviant behavior.

Theorists such as Turner and Killian, and Smelser point out that the behavior of social movement participants is fundamentally different from the behavior of nonparticipants. Fads, crazes, riots, and social movements all entail people acting in ways that they would not act were it not for a common group definition of the situation and social influence from other group members. Participants in fads, crazes, riots, and social movements are all motivated; their participation serves some purpose for them. Finally, participation in any of these forms of collective behavior helps to reduce some anxiety or strain within the situation or society. For all of these reasons, classic collective behavior theorists included social movements in their analyses. They would see no significant difference between, for example, participation in Y2K hysteria and participation in a radical political organization.

Ways in which Social Movements Are Different from Other Forms of Collective Behavior

However, there are also important differences between social movements and the other forms of collective behavior that have been discussed so far. Researchers who specialize in social movements consider these differences more important than the many similarities.

Social movements are different from other forms of collective behavior in three ways: 1) they are organized, 2) they are deliberate, and 3) they are enduring.

Organized

Social movements are *organized*. Most collective behavior is unorganized. Riot participants might cooperate with each other for a short period of time in order to foil the police or gain entry into a store, but the episode is more a of free-for-all than a carefully organized event. Typical collective behavior leadership comes and goes quickly, if it exists at all. Whoever manages to grab a crowd's attention can influence the entire group's behavior.

However, social movement participants are often given specific tasks to perform. There may be a carefully designed strategy. Leaders often create jobs and make careers out of leading specific organizations dedicated to the cause of the movement. Participating in a social movement is in many ways similar to participating in a fad. People consciously choose to stand outside at four in the morning to buy a Furby, and they consciously choose to take part in a march to protest some social injustice. The factor that sets social movements apart is the level of organization.

Deliberate

Social movements are also *deliberate*. Most collective behavior episodes occur without anyone planning them ahead of time. Social movements, on the other hand, are intentionally created and participants carefully decide whether or not to join. There are often pledge drives and membership drives. Social movements seek publicity and attempt to get as many people as possible to support them. This deliberate planning is not present in most other forms of collective behavior.

Enduring

Finally, social movements are long-lasting or *enduring*. Most collective behavior episodes are brief. A riot may last for minutes, hours, or a few days. A fad may last for a few months. However, many social movements exist for

years or even decades. The smallest social movements form in order to create or resist one specific change within a particular community. They may only last for a few weeks. Social movements that seek to change an entire society often last for decades. There is an established nature to social movements that is embodied in things like letterhead, post office boxes, and so on that other forms of collective behavior do not have. Their goals are difficult to achieve and long-range in nature so they form with the full knowledge that it may take more than one generation to fully reach their goals. No other form of collective behavior lasts so long. Most are characterized by their brevity.

Because of these differences, many sociologists consider social movements a separate category of phenomenon. These researchers have developed their own theories, to be discussed in Chapter 14.

Types of Social Movements

There are different kinds of social movements. Some movements come about because people are interested in a specific aspect of their community. Some are created out of concern for an entire category of people or an entire group of laws and regulations. Some are intended to completely wipe out and replace the existing social order. Most social movements fall into one of the following four categories: alternative, redemptive, reformatory (progressive or reactionary), or revolutionary (Aberle 1966).



Like all alternative social movements, D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) seeks to change particular thoughts or behaviors in one specific target audience. In this case, they hope to prevent teens from using drugs or alcohol.

Alternative Social Movements

Alternative social movements want to create change in some people's thoughts or behavior in a specific area. Their goal is to change the way specific groups of people think about a particular behavior or category of behaviors. Alternative social movements are not concerned with topics outside of their stated focus. They are not terribly threatening to established social order because they only want certain people to change and only in one particular way.

For example, organizations such as the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) Program and Students Against Drugs and Alcohol (SADA) exist to keep young Americans from getting involved with the use of drugs. This entire movement is only aimed at one specific segment of the population (children, teenagers, and young adults) and only seeks to change one particular aspect of their behavior and attitudes, those relating to drug and alcohol use. A typical alternative social movement is not terribly concerned with issues outside of their specific focus. DARE does not try to change people's religious beliefs, dietary habits, or dental care practices. Like most alternative social movements, they have a specific area of interest and that is where their focus stays.

Redemptive Social Movements

Redemptive social movements want to create a more dramatic change, but only in some individuals' lives. Their goal is the complete transformation of certain people. However, the target audience is narrow and specific. They want to totally change the lives of their followers.



Religious revivals, a form of redemptive movement common in the United States, seek to completely transform the lives of a specific target audience. Converts must change every aspect of their life once they have been "saved" by joining the movement.



The Promise Keepers, a religious-based, men-only movement, swept the United States in the 1990s. The most recent redemptive movement in U.S. history, it attempted to transform the lives of those men who paid a fee to learn how to be better Christian husbands.

Examples of redemptive social movements would include any religious movements that actively seek converts, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and certain Christian fundamentalist and Baptist congregations. These groups want to totally transform the lives of the individuals they "save," but the only way to be saved is to join the movement. Those who join are transformed, but the rest of the population of the world remains unchanged. They don't want people to change just one set of attitudes or beliefs, they want them to become a part of the group in every way and to take on evangelizing as a way of life. Members of redemptive social movements see themselves as changing the world one person at a time.

Reformative Social Movements

Reformative social movements want to change an entire community or society, but in a limited way. Their goal is to change society's attitude about a particular topic or issue. Reformative social movements do not want to destroy or replace the existing government; they want the existing government to change in some specific way. Reformative movements are probably the most common category of social movement in American society.

Reformative social movements can be *progressive* (seeking to make a change) or *reactionary* (seeking to resist or reverse a change). Reactionary movements are often called "countermovements" because they usually form immediately after a progressive movement has succeeded in creating changes within society.



The Ku Klux Klan, a reactionary reformatory social movement, formed in the South after the Civil War in an attempt to resist social changes that were sweeping the region. They used terrorism and intimidation to effectively block most social change efforts.

The push against drunk driving in the 1980s and 1990s, led by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), is an example of a progressive reformatory social movement. The movement sought the change of laws and the attitudes of law enforcement officials, politicians, and citizens toward drinking and driving. The movement largely succeeded, as authorities and citizens are now much more likely to consider drunk driving a major crime rather than a minor infraction. Other examples of progressive reformatory movements would include the suffrage movement, the civil rights movement, and the feminist movement. All of these movements sought the change of society in one relatively specific area such as women's right to vote, racial discrimination and segregation, or gender discrimination.

The white supremacy/white separatist movement, anti-feminist movement, and militant right-wing movements are all examples of reactionary reformatory social movements. All formed to fight social change to return society to the way it was before those changes took place. DAMM (Drunks Against Mad Mothers) is a recently formed reactionary movement. DAMM seeks to relax some of the recent drunk driving laws and penalties and to return people's attitudes to be more accepting of drunk drivers. The Ku Klux Klan was created in the South after the Civil War to fight the social changes that were taking place. Both of these movements are typical reactionary reformatory social movements because they seek to reverse some specific social change that they oppose.

Whether they are reactionary or progressive, reformatory social movements want to create what they call a better society. They believe that one specific change is the key to improving every other aspect of society.



Revolutionary social movements like the current American Militia Movement seeks the complete transformation of their entire society. Many militias actively oppose local, state, and federal authorities in the United States and harbor dreams of revolution.

Revolutionary Social Movements

Revolutionary social movements want to completely destroy the old social order and replace it with a new one. Their goal is the total transformation of society. They want to destroy any existing government and replace all current leaders. Revolutionary social movements are the most threatening to existing social order, authority, and power. Sometimes they have specific goals, sometimes only vague utopian dreams.

There are “militia groups” in the United States that believe the federal government is evil and want to overthrow it. These groups, such as the Montana Freemen, could be considered revolutionary social movements. More obvious examples are those movements that have actually led to real social and political revolutions in their society. Fidel Castro’s socialist movement in Cuba, the French anti-monarchist movement in nineteenth-century France, and the Communist Revolution in China all succeeded in completely destroying the existing power structure and replacing it with a new, idealized social order. All of these revolutionary social movements were intended to create a perfect society by replacing the power structure with one based on different principles.

Resistance to Social Movements

Because all social movements want to change something or to keep something from being changed, there are always people who do not want the movement to succeed. The greatest resistance to social movements usually

comes from those who benefit if the movement fails. This often includes political or social leaders. If there were no resistance to the proposed change, there would be consensus and no need for a social movement. Society resists social movements in ways not often found with other forms of collective behavior. Revolutionary movements meet the greatest resistance, of course, but society also can be repressive toward some reformatory and redemptive movements. The more the goals or ideology of a movement go against the beliefs of society, the more opposition and resistance the movement faces. Several methods are used to resist social movements. The most common are ridicule, co-opting, formal social control, and violence (Roberts and Kloss 1979, Zald and McCarthy 1988, Schaeffer and Lamm 1998).

Ridicule

Ridicule can be a terribly effective way of resisting a social movement. Ridiculing a movement's leaders, followers, and/or goals belittles the movement in the eyes of everyone else in a community or society. Talk show hosts, comedians, and political cartoonists and commentators all tend to ridicule social movements that they do not like. If they can succeed in making the leaders of the movement seem like selfish buffoons, they can undermine those leaders' ability to be taken seriously by the public. If they succeed in making the followers of the movement seem like mindless idiots who are being blindly led by conniving outsiders, they can make it difficult or impossible for movement participants to have their concerns seriously addressed. Finally, if they make the goals of the movement seem trivial, foolish, or short-sighted, the entire movement may lose critical social support from outsiders. The use of ridicule is not an accident, it is carefully used to undermine the movement. Constant sniping makes any demand from the movement seem foolish and unimportant.

Ridicule over social issues can be two-way. Movement followers and supporters often ridicule their opponents in an attempt to counter their own loss of face. Leaders and followers of opposing movements often ridicule each other in an attempt to undermine the other side. This is easiest to notice when reading any publication that caters to a particular political orientation. It is particularly prevalent in newsletters published by social movement organizations.

Co-opting

To "co-opt" something means to take something over for one's own purposes or to lure an opponent to one's own side. In the case of a social movement, it refers to an established, relatively powerful group or organization neutralizing a social movement organization through what looks like cooperation. This can be accomplished in at least two ways. First, a group can form an organization that has a similar name to an existing social movement organization



MADD founder Candy Lightner, here standing with President Ronald Reagan and a host of other federal officials, left MADD in 1993 to work for a lobbying firm on behalf of the liquor distilling industry. This represents a serious blow to MADD's credibility and a major coup for the liquor companies attempting to resist tougher drunk driving standards.

and then release press statements. Second, powerful groups can sometimes bribe or otherwise tempt social movement leaders to join them.

Forming organizations with names similar to existing social movement organizations confuses the general public, who believes that the statements are coming from the social movement when in fact they are coming from the opposition. For example, manufacturing industries have formed organizations like the Southern California Air Quality Alliance and the American Crop Protection Association. The Western Fuels Association, a group of electricity and utility companies, formed the Greener Earth Society. The Greener Earth Society is dedicated to furthering the notion that carbon dioxide emissions do not cause global warming and are actually good for the environment. The names of these groups are clearly meant to create the impression that they are part of the environmental movement when in fact they are part of the opposition, the industries that produce pollution.

Another method of co-opting a social movement is to somehow tempt its leaders into joining the opposition. Leaders of social movements may be driven by righteousness, but they might also be seeking personal wealth, fame, or glory. Leaders whose motivations are less than righteous can often be persuaded to join the opposition. They may be offered large sums of money. They might be given high-status jobs within an organization, corporation, or bureaucracy. They may even be convinced that they will be able to do more good working

within the system than against it. Either way, that person's credibility is damaged and the reputation of the movement along with it. Once they get comfortable with their new high-paying, high-status position, they often become much more timid about criticizing the powerful forces that pay their wages.

The most notorious recent example of a social movement leader being co-opted occurred when Candy Lightner, the founder and original leader of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, accepted a job for a lobbying firm that worked on behalf of the American Beverage Institute, comprised of every major alcohol distiller in the United States. The American Beverage Institute was MADD's primary enemy in the fight to toughen drunk driving laws throughout the United States. Lightner's job as a lobbyist was to use political pressure in an attempt to keep any state from lowering the legal intoxication limit from .10 to .08 (Griffin 1994). MADD still exists and still enjoys a great deal of support, but the defection of their founder and former leader damaged MADD's credibility in the eyes of the public. The liquor distilling and serving industry essentially bought Lightner's name and reputation. Her defection is still used as ammunition by opponents of MADD who want to depict the group as a bunch of out-of-control radicals who have lost sight of their original purpose.

Formal Social Control

Social movements frequently meet resistance from existing authorities because they want changes that social and political leaders do not want. There are several different ways that formal social control by legitimate authorities can be used against social movements. Generally, they fall into two categories: legitimate force and laws/ordinances.

Legitimate Force

Police officers, National Guard members, and soldiers can all be ordered by their superiors to use *legitimate force* in order to quell any public activity. As long as it stays within reason and the force is not blatantly excessive, most citizens will not question this tactic. This means that social control agents can use force legitimately, but any force on the part of social movement members will be perceived as illegitimate. For example, police officers can physically push protestors out of a public park, but protestors cannot legitimately push the police at all. Authorities' use of force is considered legitimate as long as it stays within certain bounds. This allows elected and appointed officials to use the police and other agents of control, within limits, for their own purposes.

Laws and Ordinances

The most common use of formal social control is not physical. It has to do with over-enforcement of existing *laws and ordinances* and the creation of new ones. Leaders of various social movements throughout history have been



Cities and towns frequently pass laws, ordinances, and codes with the specific intention of preventing public protest, strikes, and picket lines.

arrested for minor crimes that usually would not result in arrest for average citizens. Public nuisance and disturbance laws, noise ordinances, and loitering laws can all be applied selectively to members of any kind of protest or demonstration. Jaywalking laws, rarely enforced in normal life, can be used to ticket people marching down a street. Cities may pass ordinances banning signs in particular areas, limiting the number of people who may walk as a group on sidewalks, or even make it an offense to stand on a corner for more than a few minutes. Obscure fire code violations can be used to justify shutting down a group's headquarters. Some communities allow for the confiscation of any equipment if a noise ordinance is violated. Property can be condemned, cars can be pulled over for safety inspections and impounded, and people can be jailed for littering, loitering, or disturbing the peace.

These are just some of the tactics that can be used against any group or individual at any time. Any social movement that police officers or their commanders do not like will likely find itself the target of all these tactics and more. The more a movement upsets or opposes existing authorities, the more of this type of resistance they are likely to face. The authorities technically do not violate any laws when they use this kind of tactic against a social movement. In fact, they can argue that laws are being vigorously enforced for the "betterment" or "protection of society."

It can be difficult for any movement to maintain momentum when followers have to worry about harassment from law enforcement officers and when every day the organization faces more legal difficulties. None of these minor offences will put anyone behind bars for long, and many of them only

amount to a small fine. This harassment can even bring a movement together and fire up their passion. However, if done effectively, constant legal harassment makes it difficult for members of the movement to actually get anything done. The constant cycle of being ticketed or arrested, appearing in court, and paying a fine or serving a short time in jail destroys the group's efficiency. Group members may also become known as criminals. This severely hinders their attempts to build a respectable reputation with outsiders.

Ideally, all groups would receive equal protection under the law. In reality, groups that upset or anger social control agents are likely to receive little or no protection and face a great deal of harassment, resistance, and even imprisonment.

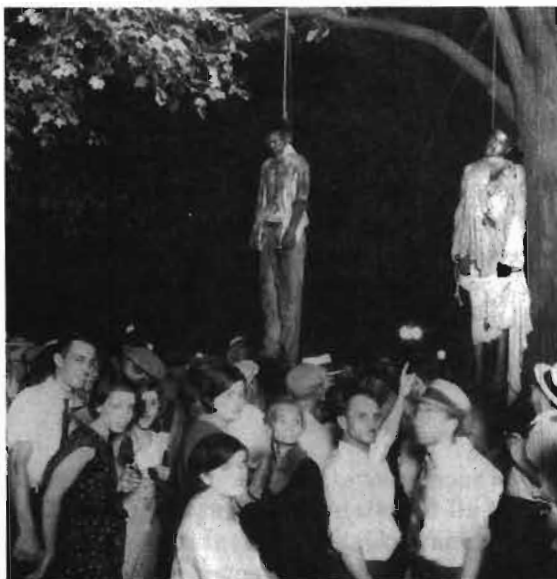
Violence

The most extreme form of resistance to social movements is physical violence. Sometimes violence is a last resort, but all too often it is a first line of defense against social movements. Violence against social movement leaders or followers can come from individuals, from other social movements, or from the government.

When an individual decides that abortion is murder and therefore it is okay to kill a doctor to keep him or her from performing abortions, violence may seem to be a logical next step. In the last twenty years, several pro-life individuals have killed, injured, or attempted to kill doctors and nurses in the United States (Blanchard 1994). Their goal is not just to stop that one individual, but



Blue-collar "hardhats" attacked anti-war protestors in New York City in 1970. This was an attempt by private citizens to use violence as a means of discouraging a social movement.



Lynching was used for decades as an extreme means of intimidation against those seeking racial progress in the South between 1870 and 1954. Notice the air of excitement and celebration on the faces of the participants in this photograph, taken in Indiana. The violence was not an hysterical outburst, but rather a planned and orchestrated event aimed at striking fear into the hearts of would-be opponents.

to scare other doctors and nurses enough to make them stop, too. Violence is aimed at a small number of people but is also intended to intimidate anyone else who may be sympathetic to the cause they represent. This use of violence as intimidation is a typical rationale for those who try to resist social movements through violence. Blacks were often lynched by white mobs in the rural South specifically with the goal of scaring all other blacks in the area into submission to the Jim Crow laws (Tolnay and Beck 1998). Lynchings and assassinations are the most extreme forms of violence against social movement leaders and followers. Beatings and threats are much more common.

Sometimes violence is part of an organized effort of resistance from a countermovement. As mentioned above, the Ku Klux Klan was organized after the Civil War to resist all of the social changes that were being brought by Reconstruction (Boyer et al. 1996, Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 1997). Members of the Klan carefully used terror, beatings, and lynchings to resist the move toward greater freedom and equality by Southern blacks. This technique was used again by racist groups like the Klan and the White Citizens' Council in the 1950s and 1960s to resist the advances of the civil rights movement (Halberstam 1993, Greenberg 1994, Salmond 1997).

Unfortunately, the violence sometimes comes from the same people who are sworn to protect and serve the citizens of the United States. This chapter already mentioned that the police and private security forces sometimes use force in resisting social movements. Sadly, they also sometimes use violence. Far too many individuals working on behalf of the labor movement in the 1920s and '30s and the public action phase of the civil rights movement in the 1950s and '60s were killed by police officers (see, for example, Halberstam

1993, Salmond 1997). Social movement leaders and followers can be victims of brutality and abuse that come from social control agents who are following orders from their superiors. In May of 1970, National Guardsmen shot thirteen anti-war protestors at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. Four of the protestors died. None of the students were armed and none of them were within fifty feet of the Guardsmen who fired high-powered rifles at them (Hensley and Lewis 1978, Lewis 1972, Tiene 1995).

This kind of violence from authorities is less common in the United States than in some other parts of the world, but it is not as rare as many would like to believe. Any time groups of people are actively engaged in activities that upset or directly threaten the power of authorities, they are in danger of violent retaliation by those authorities. Although video cameras and other communications technology have made it more difficult for social control agents to use violence against movement leaders and followers, it is still an ever-present danger. For example, the murder of Chinese dissidents in Tiananmen Square was recorded in its entirety on videotape. The presence of cameras acting as witnesses could not prevent the violence from taking place.

The goals of individuals, countermovements, and local, state, or federal authorities are always the same when they use violence to resist a social movement: They hope to scare leaders and followers so badly that they abandon their goals. They hope to limit the effectiveness of the movement by removing key leaders or "instigators." They hope to prevent social changes that threaten them in some way.

Why Social Movements Are Important

Social movements can influence the way an entire nation lives. They can alter national government policy. They can change the way that citizens view themselves, their society, or the world around them. They can even destroy a society. Social movements make history.

The Prohibition Movement succeeded in getting alcohol totally outlawed in the United States from 1920 until 1933 (Boyer et al. 1996). The Nazi movement in Germany began as a workers' social movement and led to the destruction of much of Europe (Kornhauser 1959). More recent American social movements like the fight against drunk driving, led by groups like MADD, have changed the way an entire nation views specific behaviors.

People's attitudes and behavior are always influenced by outside factors. When a movement sweeps through society, it tends to influence the judgement and perceptions of many people. Without social movements, social change would only occur when leaders and elites decide that it should. Whenever people with no individual political power join together and form organizations, they create their own power. Their ability to change their own society is increased by several factors. The more organized they are, the more

they understand the political and legal system that they operate within, and the more astute and determined they are, the more likely they are to succeed.

All citizens have the right to vote in a democratic society like the United States. However, elected officials do not always do what people want them to do. As the civil rights movement clearly showed, political leaders can be mean-spirited, shortsighted, or just plain stupid. For example, in 1957 the governor of Arkansas lied to the President of the United States and broke federal law for the sake of winning reelection. He told President Eisenhower that he would cooperate with the effort to desegregate Little Rock's Central High School. Instead, he ordered his National Guard troops to block the school doors and refuse protection to the nine black students who were to enter (Greenberg 1994, Halberstam 1993). Countless other city and state officials attempted to skirt federal law and encouraged their constituents to commit acts of violence, all in the name of preserving segregation (Bloom 1987, Greenberg 1994, Halberstam 1993, Salmond 1997, McAdam 1982). Social movements make it possible for citizens to change policies created by elected officials who do not follow their own oaths.

Not all social movements want to create positive change. Anti-immigration movements and white supremacy/white separatist movements have, as their primary goal, the oppression of others (Boyer et al. 1996, Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 1997). Some social movements are trying to better society, some are trying to exclude others from opportunities or liberties, and some just want to change things back to the way they believe they used to be. What all of these social movements have in common is the desire by ordinary citizens to have a say in the operation of their society.

Discussion

As one can see, social movements come in a variety of forms. Some have narrow and specific goals. Others have broad and general goals. Some seek to alter the attitudes or behaviors of a specific group of people. Others seek to alter their entire society. All of them are attempts by ordinary people to influence their lives and their society.

Social movements exist because a group of people wants something. They often meet resistance from those who do not want the same thing. Progressive reformative movements and revolutionary movements meet the most resistance because there are always people who just want to leave things the way they are. The broader their focus is and the more ambitious their goals are, the more resistance a movement is likely to face. The movements that meet the most resistance are those that threaten the power or position of authorities and elites in society. They not only face individuals and groups that oppose their goals, but official resistance as well.