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**Modern Activism in the United States: A Historical and Political
Analysis of Protest Movements from 2010 to the Present**

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Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization**

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the people who have supported us during our higher education. I, Youcef DEBBAB, dedicate this work to my parents, my children, and my wife, who spare no effort to direct me during my academic career. May Allah reward them with goodness. I, Ali KHOUAZEM, dedicate this paper to my beloved ones, my family, and those who believed in us, as well as my true friends.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the development and influence of protest movements in the United States from 2010 forward. It investigates the adaptation of activism to technical, cultural, and political transformations, highlighting significant movements such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, March for Our Lives, and climate activism. The research explores changes in organizational frameworks and strategies, and their overall impact on civic engagement and democratic processes. This qualitative approach integrates historical research, thematic content analysis of digital media, and case studies. The data sources comprise activist declarations, policy documents, media stories, and scholarly literature. Research indicates that digital channels have revolutionized mobilization by enabling swift information dissemination and enhancing the visibility of disadvantaged voices. Movements are progressively embracing decentralized leadership and crowdfunding for organization and financing. Although these movements have facilitated legislative reforms, workplace modifications, and heightened youth voter participation, difficulties such as activist fatigue, reliance on institutional financing, and governmental surveillance persist. The dissertation asserts that contemporary activism both draws from and alters previous social justice traditions, highlighting the essential function of ongoing civic engagement in democratic countries.

Keywords: activism, civic participation, digital platforms, protest movements, social equity

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

BLM	Black Lives Matter
CIRCLE	Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement
CRM	Civil Rights Movement
CRT	Critical Race Theory
GFM	Go Fund Me
NDA s	Nondisclosure Agreement
OWS	Occupy Wall Street
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SHN	Say Her Name
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

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General Introduction

1. Background of the Study

The United States has seen growing activism at the grassroots against a backdrop of disillusionment with social and political circumstances, coupled with growing digital activism and popular demands for justice in areas such as racial, gender, economic, and environmental injustice since 2010. Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and Occupy Wall Street-March for Our Lives pioneered their protest tactics through the use of social media, leveling up their visibility and enabling them to mobilize millions in countries around the world. Movements, frequently focused on issues such as racial injustice, sexual harassment, and gun violence, have reshaped national debate, approaching those in power from the outside and demanding social change. Still, even with massive name recognition and resources at hand, there are many questions to be answered about the long-term political effects of these movements, whether they can continue as organizations, and whether they can figure out how to translate a protest movement into legal change.

The efforts have resulted in a growing recognition among the public but receive less scholarly attention to their impacts on American institutions and political practices as well as on legislative decisions. The other side of technology in enhancing the voices of activists and empowering mass protests leads to questions behind online activism's lasting effects in real life and whether it does have the potential to become "performative activism" that may not make a difference after a while.

The study explores contemporary activism in the context of American protest movements and links current efforts to past revolts, including the Civil Rights Movement, and anti-war protests. This work charts movements such as BLM, #MeToo, and climate change activism in order to explore how 21st-century protests look different than those of the past and yet have similar impacts. This examination will assess the political, social, and cultural impact of both of

these movements via their means, strategic realization and the policy implements they have in place; it will also explore the obstacles they encounter on the way to reach their goals.

2. Statement of the Problem

Modern activism in the United States has seen a rise in movements challenging deep-rooted societal structures; however, its effectiveness and concrete political ramifications remain underexplored. While these movements are often considered catalysts for social change, there is a lack of systematic and nuanced analysis of how they influence norms and public policy. Additionally, the role of new media in mobilizing these movements and the dynamics between grassroots activism and institutional politics have not been fully explored. This research will investigate how these movements have evolved, their methods of political engagement, and their impact on American society, politics, and policy.

3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The main research question of this dissertation is: **How have protest movements in the United States from 2010 to the present influenced political, social, and cultural transformation?**

To explore this overarching question, the following sub-questions will guide the analysis:

1. What have been the key historical developments and shifts in the strategies of U.S. protest movements from 2010 to the present?
2. How have movements like Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and March for Our Lives influenced U.S. legislation, elections, and public discourse?
3. How have protest movements strategically utilized digital platforms and social media to mobilize and spread their messages?
4. To what extent have selected protest movements achieved their goals in terms of policy reform, public awareness, and societal change?

In conjunction with these questions, the study proposes the following hypotheses to guide the analysis:

1. U.S. protest movements since 2010 have undergone significant shifts toward digital platforms reliance for organization and mobilization, compared to traditional protest methods seen in earlier movements.
2. Movements such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and March for Our Lives have had substantial impacts on U.S. political discourse, influencing legislative changes, swaying election outcomes, and reshaping national conversations around issues like racial inequality, gender justice, and gun control.
3. The strategic use of social media and digital platforms has been critical to the success of U.S. protest movements, facilitating rapid mobilization, wide-reaching global engagement, and increased visibility of social justice issues.
4. While all movements have succeeded in raising awareness, there is variation in their effectiveness to enact tangible policy reforms, with Black Lives Matter seeing the most legislative changes, while #MeToo and March for Our Lives have primarily influenced cultural and social shifts.

4. Aims of the Study

This study seeks to examine the development and influence of protest movements in the United States from 2010 to the present. It aims to delineate the historical progressions and strategic transformations of pivotal movements such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and March for Our Lives. The study investigates the impact of these movements on political discourse, legislative reforms, electoral engagement, and wider cultural transformations. It also examines the tactical utilization of digital platforms and social media in mobilizing activists and disseminating protest messages. The study assesses the efficacy of these movements in effecting policy change and enhancing public awareness, while recognizing persistent problems such as maintaining momentum, obtaining money without sacrificing independence, and confronting societal and governmental opposition. This research intends to elucidate the role of modern activism in influencing civic engagement and democratic participation in the digital age.

5. Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the existing research studies related to protest movements in America. This contribution is provided through informing a deeper understanding of the historical and political analysis of this phenomenon and then analyzing the existing policy, strategies, and measures utilized to address the issue. The research also attempts to fill the gaps and bridge the missing pieces available in the existing body of knowledge by providing new perspectives and offering solutions and better ways to address activism in the US. Data analysis and findings of this research could indicate directions to future studies by identifying unexplored areas or suggesting additional studies to build upon the current findings.

6. Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive-analytical methodology to analyze contemporary protest movements in the United States from 2010 to the present. This approach is fundamentally based on the historical method, which facilitates the examination of the beginnings, evolution, and changes in activism through a critical analysis of both historical and contemporary social movements. This research contextualizes contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and March for Our Lives within a wider historical and socio-political framework.

Data collection predominantly depends on document analysis, utilizing various sources. This encompasses activist declarations, policy documents, media stories, academic literature, and digital content, including social media posts relevant to the movements under investigation. This diverse compilation guarantees an extensive comprehension of both offline and online activism, illustrating how these movements convey messages, coordinate efforts, and shape public conversation.

The study employs thematic content analysis to identify and comprehend recurring themes, strategies, and patterns in the data collected for analysis. This approach facilitates the methodical classification of qualitative data, uncovering insights into the organizational frameworks, strategies, and effects of the movements. Additionally, the study employs

comparative historical analysis to juxtapose modern activity with historical movements, highlighting continuities and transformations across time.

7. Structure of the Study

This dissertation is organized into two main chapters, preceded by an introduction and followed by a conclusion and reference list.

Chapter One provides a detailed exploration of the development of contemporary activism in the United States. It begins with a historical overview, comparing modern protest movements such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and March for Our Lives with earlier social justice movements. The chapter examines the evolution of organizational structures, leadership models, and the growing influence of digital technologies in shaping activism strategies.

Chapter Two is dedicated to the impact and future trajectory of these protest movements. It focuses on the political and social effects of activism, ranging from legislative change, changes in public discourse, and changes in electoral participation. The chapter explores the barriers faced by activists, such as fatigue, financial concerns, and surveillance, and upholds new methods and technologies that movements employ to sustain their efforts.

Together, these chapters provide a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms, evolution, and influence of contemporary protest movements in American culture. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings, reflections on the significance of new media advocacy, and suggestions for further research. Digital media has transformed mobilization.

CHAPTER ONE

The Development of Contemporary Activism

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Introduction

Historically, protests have always been a feature of American culture, fighting for issues they felt were unjust. One of the largest protests happened in the 1960's when protesters protested Civil Rights and the Vietnam War. Women were advocating for equality. Adding technology, specifically phones and social media, significantly changes how issues are organized. Overall, while it feels easier to alert the public about something that happened, it also feels like things are happening much faster.

Essentially, activism pops up when people see something wrong and decide they can't stay quiet. Some protests are loud, with crowds in the streets. Others are quieter, just people talking and planning in their communities. It's not always clear what will work, but trying matters. Change doesn't happen overnight, but history shows it does happen.

1.1. Historical Context and Evolution of Activism

1.1.1. Comparing Past and Present Movements

Back in the day before 2010, protests in the U.S. usually focused on big political stuff or civil rights (Tilly, Charles.1978). You had the Civil Rights Movement in the 50s and 60s, all those people marching against the Vietnam War later on, and then the feminist push in the 70s. Remember those anti-globalization protests like the one in Seattle in 1999. Additionally, there were numerous rallies focused on immigration during the mid-2000s. People mostly organized the old-school way back then - handing out flyers, meeting up in person, that kind of thing. The internet was around, sure, but it wasn't like now, when everything happens online. It was primarily about attending events in person and making one's presence known in a visible manner. Things just felt different back then, you know. The environment was less digital and more tangible.

Prior to 2010, U. S. protest movements were generally concentrated on political or civil rights issues, e. g. the Civil Rights Movement (1950s–60s), Anti-Vietnam War protests (1960s–70s), Feminist movements (Second wave feminist movement in the 1970s), Anti-globalization

protests (e. g. Seattle WTO protests in 1999) and Immigration reform rallies (mid–2000s). These protest movements often relied heavily on grassroots organizing, printed materials, and face-to-face meetings. The Internet itself did not yet serve as an effective organizing media, making personal engagement a critical factor.

In contrast, post-2010 movements harness digital technologies to supplement and sometimes supplant traditional organizing. This shift entails a reconfiguration of mobilization tactics, enabling wider reach and rapid responsiveness, though it also raises questions about the depth and sustainability of engagement (McAdam et al., 2010).

Therefore, it is crucial to note this distinction when discussing shifts in protest strategies in relation to technological and cultural contexts, as we need to focus on both continuities and innovations in activism.

1.1.1.1. Leadership and Tactical Differences Between the Civil Rights Movement and Black Lives Matter

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and the Civil Rights Movement arose as two important social justice movements. These movements have significantly influenced historical events in the United States. Both movements advocate for racial equality as well as for justice. They differ in strategies. The two movements emerged in different historical contexts. Applied strategies are also different. This section analyzes the concepts and differences between the Black Lives Matter movement and the Civil Rights Movement, focusing on their leadership and tactics. The CRM had centralized leaders, whereas BLM operates as a "leader-full" but decentralized network (Ransby, 2018).

Historically, the 1960s Civil Rights Movement did indeed have strong, centralized, and prominent leadership. Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches and activism inspired many and they provided important leadership in shaping the movement's national focus. Organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) helped develop the direction and strategies for the movement. Leaders generally were leading in hierarchical ways and knew recognized leaders were making the decisions while speaking mostly.

In contrast, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is decentralized and possesses a grassroots framework. It lacks a singular identifiable leader. The black-led campaign was initiated by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi in reaction to George Zimmerman's conviction for the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2013. The three original founders are still influential within the movement today, but the idea behind BLM is local organizing and chapter autonomy. Nevertheless, BLM has been largely decentralized with several leaders and local chapters. The focus is on grassroots organizing, as this allows for a greater variety of voices and perspectives to enter the movement. Black Lives Matter has come to be a leaderless movement with a focus on collective action and shared responsibility. Such an approach means that the movement can have many different voices and priorities within the larger movement. (It is said that the lack of one leader, or purveyor of unity, makes it difficult to communicate a unified message, while others believe this to be beneficial because it fosters inclusiveness and is less susceptible to the vulnerabilities associated with a hierarchical structure. Clayton, J. (2018)

Both the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Lives Matter Movement championed the rights of African Americans. Their methods, however, significantly differ, as does the position of women in both campaigns. The initial item to examine when comparing the Machelessen /21 role of women in the two revolutions is leadership and leadership paradigms. The Black Lives Matter movement is a grassroots initiative, wherein community mobilization and local action are paramount. The two distinct leadership paradigms influence the position of women in both movements. Ella Baker recognized that women thrived and had greater opportunities for leadership in group-centered or decentralized movements, rather than hierarchical movements dominated by male leaders (Lawson, 407).

CRM used sit-ins and marches; BLM combines street protests with hashtag activism (Freelon et al., 2016). Although the two movements share the ultimate goal of destroying systemic racism and achieving equality, the tactics they use are strikingly different based on their historical context, the technologies they have access to, and their generational attitudes toward what protest looks like. This brief essay analyzes how these two movements differ in many of their tactics. The Civil Rights Movement used television and print media to propagate their message and created events that had a large degree of visibility, such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the March on Washington, knowing national media attention would be drawn to it. BLM uses social media platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, to mobilize supporters quickly, document police brutality in real-time, and start public conversations.

Hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName have acted as rallying calls, enabling the movement to capitalize on current digital communication channels and go viral while sharing its messages with a global audience. Civil Rights activists relied on a form of nonviolent civil disobedience that included sit-ins, freedom rides, boycotts, and marches, which were based on Gandhi's practices. Often, civil rights actions were strategically designed to demonstrate the moral superiority. BLM also condones nonviolent protest, yet it embraces, and combines, a much larger array of activities, including street protests, digital activism, die-ins, and calls to forward police. Protests affiliated with BLM have sometimes become confrontational, perhaps reflecting activists' frustrations at perceived slowness of institutional and structural change, and differences in how to confront those institutions.

Consequently, this comparison highlights an essential tension: while digital platforms exponentially increase reach and immediacy, they may also sacrifice the depth of interpersonal connection and sustained commitment fostered by traditional organizing. The author invites us to critically consider what is gained and lost as activism migrates into the digital realm—a question that remains central to contemporary social movement theory.

1.1.1.2. Shared Objectives of Equality and Justice Across Movements

Both movements focused on achieving racial equality and justice for black people. From the 1950s to the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement endeavored to guarantee legal and political rights for African Americans, including desegregation, voting rights, and equal access to public facilities, education, and employment. Conversely, the Black Lives Matter movement, which originated in the 2010s, concentrates on issues such as systematic racism, racial profiling, and police brutality. Both movements demand systemic change, but BLM focuses more on police abolition (Taylor, 2016), while CRM sought legal equality (McAdam, 1982).

BLM also promotes societal transformation by confronting fundamental racial disparities that sustain racial injustice. Both movements share the fundamental objective of attaining racial equality and justice for African Americans: the Civil Rights Movement. Civil Rights Movement The civil rights movement transpired during the 1950s and 1960s, enabling African Americans to attain legal and political rights for the first time, primarily through desegregation, voting rights, and equitable access to public facilities, education, and employment.

The Black Lives Matter movement was created in the 2010s and has a continued purpose of changing the epidemic of racially-based police brutality, race-based police profiling, and systemic racism. BLM is more extensive in its social change objectives because, in part it strives to challenge structural injustices that enable racial inequality to persist. But, importantly, while the Black Lives Matter movement and the Civil Rights Movement share similar aims with respect to achieving racial equality, justice, and freedom from oppression, their historical legacies, tactics used, and organizational structures are starkly different. The Civil Rights Movement accomplished milestones in legal and political victories while the Black Lives Matter movement is still successfully countering structural racism as part of its awareness work in the world today. Overall, both movements provide an important space for ideas to be understood about racial justice and in different ways have inspired generations to pursue equity and justice. But while the two protests address different specificity issues within different historical

contexts, both are underpinned by the same fundamental fight for a society where Black people are treated with equality, dignity and justice. (Branch 1988).

Figure 1 Civil Rights Leaders



Figure 2 Black Lives Matter Movement Uses Creative Tactics



1.1.2. The Impact of the Digital Revolution on Activism

The "Digital Revolution activism movement" in the United States has become digital activism—far beyond the utilization of new online platforms for online mobilization for social missions. This movement has transformed traditional, local activism while also allowing for mass instant transmittal of information, and links communities globally beyond any geographical base. Such activist messages have reached millions and have sparked enthusiasm for many pressing concerns, thanks to social media. Black Lives Matter, among other movements, has used digital tools to coordinate protest activity. Learning how social media, for instance, Twitter and TikTok, has changed activism into something freer, instant, and far-reaching in the USA (Laer et al., 2010). Digital activism's dual nature necessitates a nuanced analysis, as structural vulnerabilities and questions of political efficacy temper its empowering potential.

In particular, this section captures the revolutionary potential of digital platforms but rightly tempers enthusiasm with an awareness of the fragility and complexity of digital activism—signaling a critical and balanced academic approach.

1.1.2.1. Social Media's Transformative Role in Activism

Undoubtedly, the Digital Revolution has significantly influenced activism in the USA, with social media platforms such as Twitter and TikTok playing a pivotal role. They have been effectively utilized to garner support for social and political initiatives. An example is Amplification of Voices: With social media, activists can reach millions almost immediately, circumventing traditional media gatekeepers. Hashtags, such as #BlackLivesMatter, have inspired global movements. Besides,

Moreover, social media has revolutionized modern activism by enabling rapid information dissemination. Platform care chirrup leaves activists to deal with real-time updates around events, proChecks and developments, which is relevant for quick mobilizing dwell and coordinative actions along the base. Twitter accelerated BLM protests after Ferguson (Tufekci, 2017). These platforms also help bypass traditional media gatekeepers allowing activists to offer alternative narratives and share videos that document events such as police brutality which can rapidly galvanize public opinion.

Additionally, social media enhances organization and mobilization, as it allows for decentralized webs of activists to support social movements. Strung together by hashtags as practical encounter points, users can connect Information and coordinate actions without relying on hierarchical structures alone. These platforms are also useful for publicizing events and structuring user participation in activist rallies and other forms of off-line activism. The last lifeless problem launch, for example, using traditional social media to build large demonstrations.

Furthermore, gregarious mass media amplifies marginalized voices away from the AMP program where underrepresented communities get deal their Encounters and perspectives flat with amp wider hearing bypassing conventional force structures that get bear historically suppressed them. It also plays a important role in raising awareness and shaping public discourse through hashtag activism. hashtags care #metoo and #blacklivesmatter bear sparked round

conversations and Made joint spaces for intimate stories and mass activity. Visual storytelling on platforms like TikTok further Improves engagement allowing activists to present compelling narratives educational content and calls to action in formats that resonate with diverse and younger audiences. Gen Z activists use short videos to spread messages (Jackson, 2021).

Finally, social media serves as a mechanism for activists to ensure accountability for those in power. It allows for a direct interaction with institutions, elected officials, and other public figures, making demands for accountability and change. Because of the more visible and open nature of social media, public pressure and scrutiny of individuals and institutions often have real consequences for the targets of a viral campaign and public outrage.

Despite these strengths, digital activism also faces challenges. Misinformation performative activism and concerns across censoring and recursive prejudice raise questions around the dependability and legitimacy of online movements. Nonetheless, the influence of social media activism is undeniable. from influencing state discussion to pressuring corporations and governments to answer these platform bears established that digital tools get run to real-world shifts. In conclusion, the digital revolution has Indelibly changed the way activism roles in the United States. Chirrup and ticktock bear the right tools for lifting consciousness organizing activity and reshaping gregarious and governmental narratives (Boyd, 2014).

This nuanced view avoids technological determinism by celebrating digital media's empowering capacities while acknowledging inherent vulnerabilities. The analysis reflects sophisticated engagement with contemporary communication theory and social movement studies.

1.1.2.2. Benefits and Challenges of Digital Protest Strategies

Extensive research by scholars such as Tufekci, Castells, Morozov, and Taylor (2021) found that online protests have become a hallmark of modern activism in the U.S. As digital platforms—including Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok—diverge from more traditional modes of civic engagement, activists are afforded novel approaches to coordinating people,

communicating openly, and challenging power. Digital platforms provide activists with new and valuable resources; however, they also present accompanying challenges. Digital platform users, including social movement theorists, have examined the potential and impediments of online protests in the work of scholars like Zeynep Tufekci, Evgeny Morozov, Astra Taylor, and Manuel Castells.

One of the most meaningful advantages to online protests in the U.S. is the mechanisms leveraged to amplify marginalized people's voices and foster inclusivity. In her discussion in *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (2017), Zeynep Tufekci identifies some of these mechanisms and argues that digital platforms are democratizing activism by reducing barriers to participation. As Tufekci illustrates, people who might not otherwise be able to participate in protests, because of distance, disability, or fear, can communicate and advocate when the discussion is taking place online. In advocacy and social movements, such as the #BlackLivesMatter movement, social media plays a crucial role in promoting moderation and giving meaning to black lives by challenging systemic racism and police violence.

One of the key advantages is the speed and scale of dissemination. In *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (2012), Manuel Castells describes how online platforms can help movements reach massive audiences almost instantaneously, enabling a group of protesters to respond to a situation and mobilize thousands (if not millions) of people in a very short time. The police shootings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor spurred internet calls for protest, resulting in some of the greatest demonstrations in U.S. history. The characteristics of online platforms facilitate swift reactions to political occurrences, the distribution of counter-narratives, and the quick propagation of visual evidence such as films and depicting police violence (Castells, 2012).

Nevertheless, the characteristics that make online protests successful also provide sources of pernicious vulnerabilities. One critical concern is the lack of durable organizational structure. Tufekci argues that while online protests can mobilize quickly, they often lack the deep-

grounding plans and coordination to have sustained impact. Because they do not have centralized leadership or a strategy, movements may experience difficulty maintaining momentum or transitioning from outrage to policy. Many U.S.-based online movements have gone viral but resulted in little more than symbolic change and faded without making a clear legislative or institutional impact.

Misinformation, algorithmic suppression (Benjamin, 2019). Surveillance and digital repression also represent a serious threat to activists. Evgeny Morozov, in *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (2011), warns us that governments and law enforcement can use the very same tools that activists rely on to surveil, track, and undermine protests. In the U.S. we see documented instances of police departments surveilling activists' social media accounts for online data collection during the 2020 Black Live Matter protests.

A second problem is the purveyance of performative activism and misinformation. In Astra Taylor's *The People's Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age* (2014), the author critiques the commodification of social media platforms that valorizes showy and flashy creativity. Just like many online protests become "clicktivism," easily devolving into nomination challenges, users end up sharing hashtags or infographics instead of being coherent users and educating themselves on the issue. In the U.S., such behavior raises critical concerns about political engagement. Media activism becomes superficial and is more about the appearance of being active and politically conscious rather than actually being effective at creating social pressure for change. Lastly, misinformation and manipulated content can simply go viral, jeopardizing the credibility of authentic movements. (Taylor, 2014). This critical perspective demonstrates the author's balanced approach—celebrating digital activism's democratizing promise while refusing to gloss over its weaknesses and threats.

1.2. Organizational Structures of Contemporary Movements

The structure and organization of protest groups have experienced considerable shifts recently, mirroring broader social and technological advances. Numerous current movements

prioritize decentralization, grassroots involvement, and networked collaboration, in contrast to previous movements that were marked by centralized leadership and hierarchical structures. Digital communication tools have significantly shaped this transition, facilitating swift mobilization and a variety of perspectives. This section examines the organizational structures of contemporary organizations such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, emphasizing leadership styles, resource mobilization, and the innovative techniques that underpin their activism within a complicated and frequently tough political landscape.

1.2.1. Leadership Paradigms in Modern Activism

According to McAdam et al. (1996), the achievements and setbacks of social movements are inherently connected to the leadership styles employed to realize their objectives effectively and alter the dynamics of power. In recent decades, the study of leadership has become central in the literature on social movements and organizations, requiring a knowledge of leadership's influence on social movement outcomes and its function in promoting social change.

Alicia Garza asserts that no single leadership style is preferable; rather, the adopted forms must be authentic and flexible to their respective contexts. This methodology highlights the exploration of leadership paradigms within the Black Lives Matter movement and the civil rights movement of the 1960s, concentrating on both decentralized and centralized leadership structures. Alicia Garza, 2020.

Significant differences exist in the function and execution of leadership between the Black Lives Matter movement and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Initially, Black Lives Matter, often compared to Occupy Wall Street, was described as a "decentralized leaderless movement." According to Patrisse, Opal, and Garza, decentralizing leadership does not imply the elimination of leaders.

Decentralization refers to the distribution of leadership across the organization rather than its concentration in a single individual or a select few. Thus, they concur with Ganz (2000), who defines leadership as the assumption of responsibility to create interpersonal, institutional, and

procedural conditions that enable others to achieve a shared goal in the face of uncertainty. Ganz conceptualizes leadership as a relational process established between leaders and their constituencies, wherein leaders furnish resources to address the interests of their constituents and vice versa. According to Ganz, a sociologist from Harvard, effective leadership necessitates the engagement of individuals' "heart" (values), "head" (strategy), and "hands" (actions), as well as the mobilization of their emotions and principles (Ganz, 2010).

1.2.1.1. Decentralized Leadership within the Black Lives Matter Movement

The decentralized leadership of the Black Lives Matter Movement is more pragmatic and politically efficacious than the centralized leadership of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The leaders of the Black Lives Matter Movement were committed to their own pursuits both within and beyond the movement, requiring supplementary assistance to create a strong network. It was also political, as it had the capacity to level power distribution. Unlike the centralized leadership of the 1960s, the decentralized leadership of the Black Lives Matter Movement enabled those often marginalized or excluded from leadership positions to assert themselves openly.

Decentralization would enable a diverse exercise of authority, allowing numerous individuals rather than a limited few to choose the project's direction. The centralized leadership of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, defined by one leader, inhibits groups from recognizing the contributions of all individuals. This leadership advocates the notion that one leader, or even three, can represent and make decisions for all individuals. The SCLC, the Nation of Islam, and the Black Panther Party for Self Defense did not accommodate a variety of political viewpoints. Hierarchies are prone to corruption and exploitation when a person or a small group exerts disproportionate power. If the Black Panther Party for Self Defense had functioned as a decentralized organization, it may not have been as easily dismantled by centralized leadership. Faye The Black Lives Matter movement (2013) and the Civil Rights Movement (1960s) in the

United States share a similar narrative, but with different nomenclature and methodologies. (Faye, 2023).

1.2.1.2. #MeToo Movement: From Personal Narratives to Global Advocacy

The #MeToo Movement was initiated in 2006 by Tarana Burke to validate the experiences of sexual assault and abuse, particularly for women of color in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. In addition to providing support to survivors, the #MeToo Movement encourages women to speak up about their experiences of sexual harassment and abuse and works to hold offenders accountable. The movement gained considerable momentum after multiple actresses accused Harvey Weinstein of sexual harassment and abuse over several decades. The #MeToo campaign inspired many survivors of harassment to reveal their experiences, frequently for the first time. Survivors believe that, although recounting their experiences may not lead to legal consequences, it is empowering and fosters solidarity with others. In certain restricted instances, survivors are initiating legal proceedings to bring their harassers to accountable, while the movement is recognized for its influence on individuals in Hollywood and beyond. (Burke, 2025).

The #MeToo movement exemplifies how individual stories can shift from being personal testimonials to being a global call for justice. Individual stories of sexual harassment and sexual assault began as personal accounts but morphed into a collective howl for justice, demanding accountability from those who caused harm and emphasizing that this issue spans all industries and cultures worldwide. The low murmur of individual stories that had been silenced by fear or social stigmas, suddenly snapped into a scream of a worldwide movement with only a hashtag to articulate it: #MeToo. It ignited from a couple of personal stories about sexual harassment and sexual assault, shared online, in October 2017 after allegations of sexual harassment and sexual assault against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein and rapidly changed into a worldwide movement. The essay will investigate how the courage to share their stories of individuals, transformed into a collective consciousness and dismantled the culture of silence around sexual

violence while also igniting global cultures to hold people accountable and demand change (O'Donovan, 2018).

This special edition, entitled “#MeToo Movement” examines the complications associated with sexual harassment as experienced by clients. This issue contains several recurring topics across its pieces. Initially, there is an awareness of the pervasive nature of sexual harassment and abuse, manifesting across various countries, regions, and methodologies. The concept of categories and their contestation is evident throughout the articles, particularly regarding the identification of individuals who can be subjected to harassment or abuse (both women and men). Articles demonstrate a discernible transition from individual concerns to broader societal topics, including patriarchy. Recovery from sexual assault necessitates a focus on accountability and a deliberate application of language to challenge widely accepted narratives and misconceptions. Integrating this into the therapeutic setting requires engagement with the broader community and facilitating dialogues—through the deliberate use of inquiries—to assist clients (be they survivors, perpetrators, or family members) in interrogating prevailing narratives to foster healing and comprehension (Kantor, 2017).

What began as a murmur transformed into a worldwide clamor. The #MeToo campaign, established by activist Tarana Burke in 2006, sought to assist survivors of sexual violence, especially women of color. However, in 2017, the phrase exploded into mainstream consciousness when countless individuals—celebrities and everyday people alike—shared their personal experiences with harassment and abuse using the hashtag #MeToo. These individual stories, raw and deeply personal, revealed the systemic scale of sexual misconduct across industries and geographies (Farrow, 2017).

1.2.2. Funding and Resource Mobilization

Traditionally, there are two funding and support sources. Protest organizations have used a blend of grassroots energy and financing to remain viable, remain activist-organizations and create change. Below are two of the more prominent forms of support and funding seen in the

movement strategies of 2020-2021: the popular use of crowdfunding small dollar donations and large organizations providing support. These funding streams speak to the decentralized nature of contemporary activism or movements and growing readiness of institutions to associate with social justice movements. (Bennett et al., 2012).

1.2.2.1. Crowdfunding as a Strategy for Resource Mobilization

Crowdfunding has emerged as an important tool for protest movements since it permits people the opportunity to contribute directly to causes they support. Activist organizations and new social movement organizations utilize digital crowdfunding platforms (like GoFundMe, Patreon, and PayPal) for rapid fundraising for bail, legal help, medical support, supplies for protests, and community outreach. In the case of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, grassroots organizers were able to raise millions of dollars, even while navigating the normal limitations of online crowdfunding platforms, of which a percentage funded local bail funds and mutual aid organizations. The key to success in crowdfunding this way is to curate resources with relative efficiency, speed, and visibility—almost anyone with internet access can provide and share campaigns—which signifies a form of shared responsibility and solidarity among donors and organizers. Nevertheless, there may be some challenges related to these arrangements. Commonly, there are questions over transparency, how the funds will be used, and how platforms may limit organizations actions, especially related to campaigns that may be perceived as controversial or liminal within more contested political contexts (Gerbaudo, 2018).

1.2.2.2. Institutional Support and Partnerships

Simultaneously, a number of large institutions—from corporations to charitable foundations—are increasingly supporting protest movements financially and logistically. Corporations like Nike, Ben & Jerry's, and Twitter have publicly endorsed racial justice campaigns and made donations to charities pursuing systemic change; meanwhile, philanthropic organizations like the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Foundations have invested ridiculously large sums in grassroots organizing, as well as legal and policy initiatives. These

donations often provide stability and infrastructure that small donations lack. Large organizations may also offer something beyond money—such as legal support and media, as well as connection to powerful networks. But institutional support may also be viewed with cynicism, as critics argue that corporate support can only water down radical demands or be a performative action—more in a public relations sense than in terms of meaningful change—when motivated by capital. (Soergel, 2020).

This delicate balance of grassroots crowdfunding and institutional funding demonstrates the ongoing evolution of mobilizing resources for American protest movements. While small donations demonstrate the collective power people can bring, funding from large organizations provides legitimacy and visibility to a cause that may not have broken through the noise otherwise. Both are critical and when linked together provide a stronger possibility of being able to sustain the movement over the long haul. It is also important for activists to balance accepting financial support without losing sight of their central values or goals. To summarize the findings, the integration of digital fundraising and institutional backing represents a new stage of activism in the United States. There are ways to incorporate both of these options for generating resources, and they will need to be balanced as new issues arise for protest movements in the digital age, as they continue fighting for social transformation (Jasper, 2011).

Conclusion

As what has been dealt with in this chapter, contemporary activism draws from the longer history of activism, specifically the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Both contemporary activism and activism from the Civil Rights Movements can be compared in a number of ways, and while there are clear differences, there are also recognizable similarities. The Civil Rights Movement used sophisticated and centralized leadership and networking, while contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter are decentralized and use digital resources to network supporters and create mobilization. Even with these differences, the commonality of the pursuit

of justice, equality, and systemic change is evident across both contemporary and historical activism.

In section two, the discussion focuses on how the digital revolution has changed the way movements function, making activism more immediate, accessible, and more substantial. With platforms such as Twitter and TikTok, everyone can share their stories and organize protests to raise awareness of issues like never before. Despite all the gains that digital activism creates in terms of accessibility and participation, it also creates other challenges, such as misinformation, temporal engagement, and harassment among engaged individuals. However, while these realities add complexity to how we understand technology with respect to modern protests, they altogether highlight the way technology shapes movement strategies and outcomes, and often in contradictory ways.

CHAPTER TWO

Impact and Future of Activism

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Introduction

Since 2010, protest movements that emerge and grow in the U.S. have reshaped the terrain of civic engagement, policy debate, and public accountability. This chapter shifts attention from the earliest history of movements and organizations that was described and analyzed in Chapter One to a sober analysis of the concrete successes and ongoing problems of contemporary activism. While historically scholarship focused on episodic protests (Tarrow, 2011), the recent round of activism (Black Lives Matter (BLM), #MeToo, March for Our Lives, and global climate strike) underlines a more sustained and varied type of social mobilization that both exceeds traditional notions of time, space, and dependence on institutional involvement (Taylor, 2021; Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2018).

The main purpose of this chapter is to analyze demonstration movements as political actors. Political outcomes are important to reflect on through legal systems, activist participation in elections, and the way people have advanced cultural and social shifts. For example, the unique and sustained pressure of the BLM movement produced localized police reforms, elevated media coverage of issues related to racial injustice, and inspired a reexamination of the depths of institutional racism spanning all social sectors (Clayton, 2018; Ransby, 2018). Likewise, the #MeToo movement has added regulations about the workplace, naming systemic harassment as violence, and changing parameters about gender, power, and accountability (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019). The youth-led climate activism and gun control movements have not only generated new constituents in voting but have recast voting demographics and priority ideas about policies (Han & Sheingate, 2021; Fisher & Nasrin, 2021).

Two sections organize the chapter. Section 2.1 takes inventory of the political and legislative effects of contemporary demonstration movements to note whether there are new/revised policies and legal frameworks of importance, as well as to consider the changing connection between activism and electoral politics. Section 2.2 considers the work still to do, including activist burnout, financial concerns, partisanship, and increased risks to digital

security. This section notes how movements are innovating around decentralized organizing, using secure communication platforms, and pooling resources at the transnational level and shed light on how they are practicing to navigate challenges. In summary, the chapter raises the stakes within the context of the efficacy and sustainability, and ongoing strategic evolution within activism.

2.1 Political Outcomes of Contemporary Activism

Protest movements in the United States have progressively established themselves as significant political entities, seeking to effectuate concrete change within legal and governmental systems. The political ramifications of these movements encompass not just heightened awareness but also the formulation of legislation, the alteration of election dynamics, and the reconfiguration of public policy agendas. This section analyzes the tangible political accomplishments of modern movements like Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and March for Our Lives, emphasizing the reforms they have instigated and their impact on the political scene. It also examines the wider ramifications of these findings for democratic participation and social equity.

2.1.1 New Laws and Policies

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has had a profound impact on conversations and actions surrounding police reform in cities across the United States. The protests that erupted in 2020 - and continued in 2021 - were initiated in part by the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Michael Brown, and served to sharpen public demands for substantive change in policing (Ray, 2020).

2.1.1.1 Black Lives Matter and Police Reform Initiatives

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, inspired by the unnecessary deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others, was an important stimulus for police reform efforts across the United States. These highly publicized events exposed significant issues with law enforcement, and, through sustained protests, led to various legislative or administrative changes in

metropolitan and state counties. Minneapolis acted swiftly when the City Council voted to renegotiate the police's charter provision or "authority" after the death of George Floyd. Minneapolis' action represented a substantially more aggressive response to police brutality than other U.S. cities. For example, multiple large cities, such as New York City and Los Angeles City reallocated portions of their police budgets to socially beneficial programs that supported the root causes of crime and moved away from the reliance upon armed officers or officers in general. In a significantly larger number of jurisdictions, specific states passed laws that limit or prohibit chokeholds and no-knock warrants, both of which are linked with excessive use of force. For instance, the governing body in Minneapolis, Minnesota prohibited neck restraints and chokeholds, which is a related, but distinct issue. Another example is B

Transparency and accountability emerged as the primary demands of the movement. As a result, various jurisdictions implemented or expanded the use of body-worn cameras or enhanced the data that gathered on police stops, police use of force, and civilian complaints. These efforts aimed to create trust while ensuring greater oversight of police actions. Meanwhile, departments began to revise use of force policies to include de-escalation as a primary tactic and also required police officers to intervene if they saw misconduct on the part of any officer. Despite these changes in policies, BLM had a sizable impact on the conversation beyond changes in policing practices. Awareness of racial bias and police brutality has been elevated to a new level of public consciousness. Polling data suggest that there have been significant changes in public beliefs about policing systems, indicating a shift toward acceptance among many white individuals that policing has systemic issues. While the totality of issues around policing remains neither exhaustive nor free from problems, substantive reform is not an effortless road to navigate. Critics of the movement suggest that many of the changes made by police departments have been superficial or otherwise symbolic, lacking real change in police practice. Comprehensive federal legislation on policing, such as the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, faced impenetrable meaninglessness in political discourse. The internal dynamics of institutional imperatives from

police unions, the funding for police work from various sources, and the divided public opinion indicate that achieving meaningful reform will remain challenging.

While public confidence in the police remains high relative to the overall population and still higher when broken down by demographic groups, trust can also act as an obstructive force to more robust transformation. Accordingly, with the momentum created by BLM, some successes have emerged, but they vary in occurrence and magnitude. It is also fair to say that, while the movement has irrevocably reshaped the national conversation about policing, we do not yet know how deep or lasting the structures established through it will be. Critics argue that many reforms are symbolic or insufficient. While some momentum led to proposed federal legislation such as the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act, political gridlock has stalled more comprehensive national changes (Lowery, 2021).

2.1.1.2 The #MeToo Movement and Workplace Policy Changes

The #MeToo movement has revolutionized the fight against sexual harassment and assault, influencing workplace policies and the normative culture of professional environments. The movement came about through the public sharing of personal experiences, thus breaking down barriers of silence, shame, and fear associated with sexual misconduct. It allowed thousands of individuals to share their stories, which in turn led to a global awakening about the extent and pervasive nature of harassment, as well as the impunity with which it often occurs across professional environments. There has been a collective awakening to the seriousness of the issue and its consequences, and this awakening has meant sweeping changes for organizations regarding how they handle sexual misconduct, how they can prevent it, or how they can ensure that they maintain safe, equitable, and respectful workplaces. the #MeToo movement's founding in 2017, most organizations had very few or no policies, procedures, or mechanisms in place that properly dealt with sexually inappropriate behavior. Very often, complaints about inappropriate behavior were minimized or dismissed; survivors were silenced and prevented from speaking out by NDAs, and sexual harassers usually faced little to no consequences for their behavior. The

legal system also operated in a manner that placed a heavy burden of proof on the victim for behaviour that was wrongly framed as "harassment" by a prudential legal system - with narrow definitions of sexual harassment that often define behaviors narrowly as "severe or pervasive" leaving many forms of misconduct with no legal

As previously stated, one of the most notable has been the re-evaluation and strengthening of workplace harassment policies. Many companies have implemented clearer and more inclusive definitions of inappropriate behavior, more avenues for making complaints, and more robust procedures for following up on them. Trauma-informed lenses are now often incorporated into the complaints process which may mitigate the risk of re-traumatizing survivors and serves to support survivors. Finally, there has been a shift toward transitional measures. Training on sexual harassment, bystander intervention, and respectful workplace abuse is now mandatory, common place and more comprehensive. These types of programs do not simply focus on compliance with the law and requirements. They focus on cultural change by empowering employees to recognize, prevent and confront misconduct at the moment it occurs.

In conclusion, the #MeToo movement has not only taken significant attention to the matter of workplace harassment that has been ignored for long enough but has also created structural and cultural changes. There are still challenges related to accountability and sustaining momentum, but the movement has clearly altered the state of play related to workplace behavior, with hope for more equitable and inclusive workplace settings. (Weinstein, Cuomo) show that social norms around workplace power and gender are evolving, though challenges persist in sustaining change (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019).

2.1.2 Electoral Impact and Voter Mobilization

The impacts of elections on U.S. protest movements from 2010 to now have been multi-dimensional and mixed. Elections have influenced and have been influenced by activism to shift the goals, strategies, and energy of protests. Below is an overview of the suggested effect in an academic style.

Black Lives Matter (2013-present): While the initial protests that sparked BLM were rooted in police violence, the protests and political engagement drastically increased after the election of Donald Trump in the fall of 2016, whose administration was largely viewed as hostile to the cause of racial justice. After the election of Trump, BLM mobilized supporters to protest in response to his words and actions surrounding policing in general and (in particular) Trump's defensive rhetoric following white supremacist violence (Taylor, 2016).

Women's March/#MeToo (2017-present): Donald Trump was elected in 2016 notwithstanding multiple allegations of sexual misconduct through his life and, consequently, women and feminist activists began to mobilize massively, in part from fear of the implications of his presidency by bringing women together on a larger scale than ever before (Chenoweth & Pressman, 2017). The Women's March in January of 2017 is still considered one of the largest protests for a single day of action. The Women's March helped spark and inspired momentum for the #MeToo movement, with women's advocates proclaiming the failure of the electoral process in protecting women's rights (Chenoweth & Pressman, 2017).

2.1.2.1 Youth Voter Mobilization Following Climate Strikes)

Youth, Climate Strikes, and the 2020 Election: Young Voters in U.S. Protest Movements (2010–Present) In the past ten years, young people in the United States have developed into a key constituency in many protest movements across the country. From the anti-corporate protests of Occupy Wall Street to the decades long racial justice activism of Black Lives Matter, youth participation has altered the strategies, narratives, and outcomes of contemporary activism. Among the largest and most politically significant youth movements is the climate strike movement, which played a prominent role in mobilizing young voters during the 2020 U.S. presidential election.

The climate strike movement in the U.S. began to take place in 2018, influenced by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg and supported by larger organizations like Fridays for Future and the Sunrise Movement. Hundreds of American students, predominantly from high schools

and colleges, initiated school walkouts and substantial climate demonstrations to highlight the existential threat of climate change and the inaction of government authorities. In September 2019, well over four million individuals engaged in the Global Climate Strike, with significant participation in cities throughout the United States.

The youth-led nature of the climate strike differentiated it from prior conservation and environmental activism initiatives and campaigns: these were urgent, intersectional, and political by design, with expressed commitments linking climate justice, racial equity, and economic equity (Fisher & Nasrin, 2021).

Youth activism was on the rise during this period and coincided with a political change. Climate change became a prominent issue during the lead-up to the 2020 election. The Sunrise Movement, a group which primarily utilized Gen Z and Millennials in their organizing efforts, was a recognized and significant advocacy group that pressed the Democratic Party to embrace and adopt more progressive environmental principles. For example, the Biden campaign covenanted to support a \$2 trillion investment in clean energy (i.e. climate). Young activists held elected officials to account on climate change through digital campaigns, direct actions and policy scorecards that made climate change important to voters. These developments played out similarly when we examined youth voter turnout in the 2020 election.

According to the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), the voter turnout rate for Americans ages 18-29 was 50%; an 11-point increase over 2016 and one of the highest in the past 20 years. In this context, climate change was one of three leading issues that young voters cited, particularly among Latinx and Asian young American voters, as we know they were directly engaged in local environmental justice efforts (CIRCLE, 2020). Also, a youth vote helped provide us a Biden administration that was on relatively good terms with a few of the youth-led movements, as well as a few members of Congress often referred to as "The Squad."

Overall, the climate strikes of the late 2010s did more than bring people together; they provided youth protest the opportunity to convert protest into electoral power. Youth transitioned from protest to policymaking by voting in high rates for candidates who shared their demands, and continuing that mobilization following the election for accountability and to enact legislation. Ultimately, these developments underscore youth activism and youth voting as increasingly complementary practices, pointing to a more developed political consciousness among young Americans characterized by a pronounced blending of climate change, racial justice and the stability of democratic systems. The United States is not overcoming these challenges, and youth—on both the street and the ballot—continue to play a vital role. The climate strikes and 2020 election mark a critical inflection point in this process where young people's actions turned into political stakes. Both events pave the way for sustained engagement, which could propel the advancement of a vision for our nation's future.

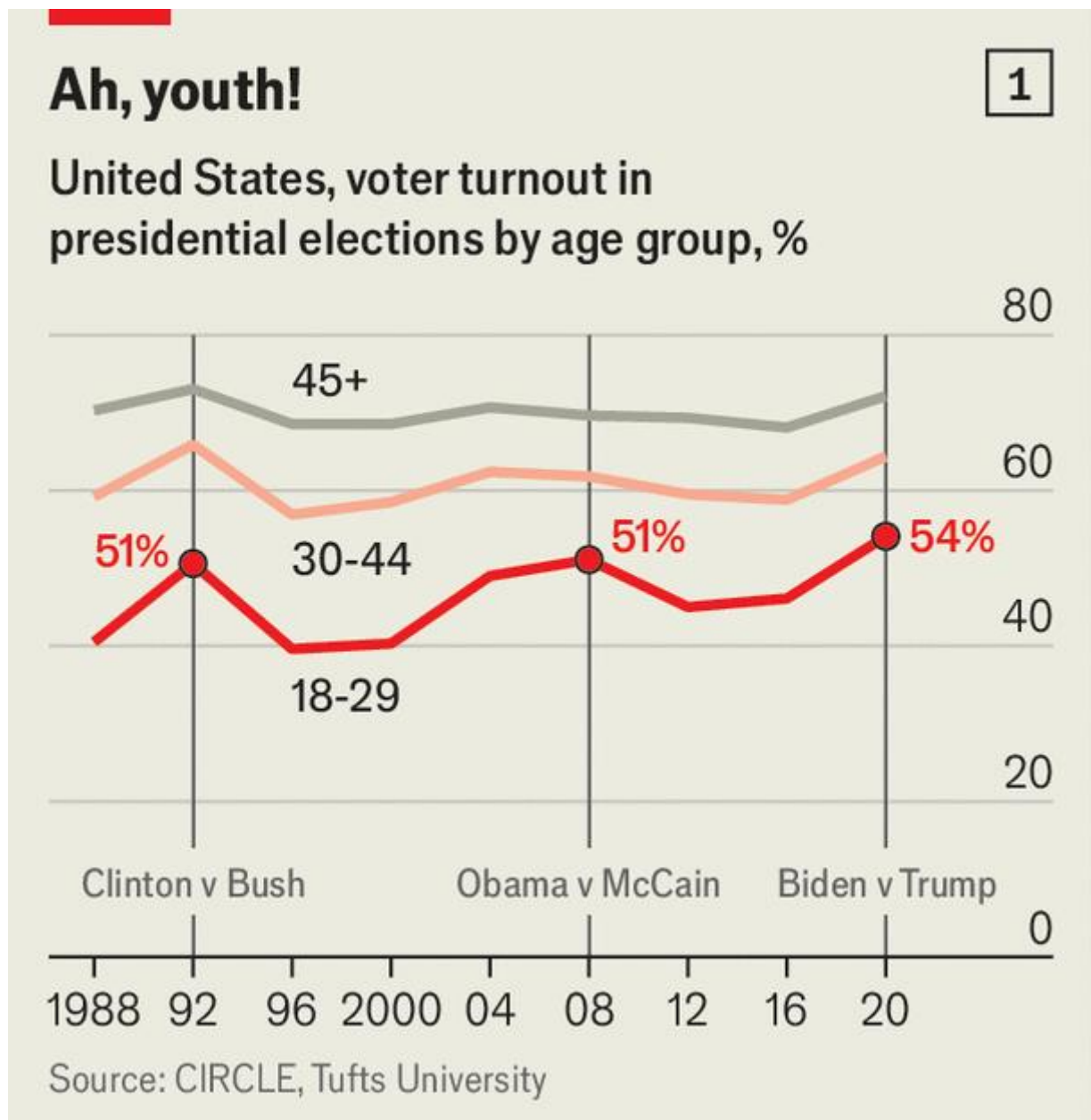


Figure 3 Young voters strongly favor Joe Biden, but will they turn out?

2.1.2.2 Conservative Backlash and the Emergence of “Anti-Woke” Legislation

Conservative Reactions to Protest Movements in the United States (2010–Present): The Rise of “Anti-Woke” Laws

Roots of the Conservative Backlash

Conservative reactions to protest movements since 2010 have drawn on a presumption that progressive social movements, especially around questions of race, gender, and sexuality, set a dangerous precedent for traditional American values and institutions. The emergence of the Tea Party movement

following the 2008 financial crash and election of President Obama gave us an early glimpse of this backlash that, while initially focused on economic issues, regularly transversed cultural and racial territory, paving the way for subsequent conservative mobilizations against social justice movements.

The Black Lives Matter movement, which began to emerge as a national phenomenon with the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014, became a particular touchpoint. Critics on the right alleged that BLM was anti-police and anti-community, which led Republican lawmakers to introduce legislation seeking to criminalize certain forms of protest such as blocking roadways or defacing monuments (Inazu, 2020). The election of Donald Trump in 2016 further mobilized the right-wing resistance to progressive activism. Trump regularly characterized social justice movements as radical threats to law and order, and his administration took further actions to both legalize dissent against "woke ideology" and suppress it.”

Legislative Responses and the "Anti-Woke" Agenda There is a long list of laws that have been passed or proposed since the summer of 2020 in state legislatures, mostly in Republican states, that are collectively called "anti-woke laws."s. These laws include legislation targeting curriculum and other activism-related discourse and practices (such as bans on any kind of DEI, limits on LGBTQ+ rights, how race, gender, and histories of America can be taught in school and taught in government training programs, etc.). The most noteworthy are the proliferation of anti-CRT laws—which, at their base, are a legal academic framework to interrogate systemic racism—and which, while very little CRT is actually taught in K-12 schools, have become a kind of catch-all for any curriculum that affects racial injustice in general.

As of 2023, more than 18 states have passed state legislation or executive orders limiting how race and history can be said and discussed in K-12 classrooms (Sawchuk, 2023). A prime example is Florida's "Stop W.O.K.E." Act (S. Bill 148) which prohibits educators and employers from promoting and subjecting (for instance, as a practice or activity, any DEI, or DIS) an individual as as inherently or systemically racist or sexist or privileged on account of their race,

gender, or sex (Florida Senate Bill 148, 2022). There have been similar efforts in LGBTQ+ rights, particularly in K12 education. Numerous states have passed laws colloquially known as "Don't Say Gay" laws, which ban discussions in the classroom about sexual orientation and gender identity, asserting that these issues should not be addressed with students at a young age, and infringe upon the rights of parents. Trans youth have also been in the crosshairs of similar legislation with dozens of states proposing or passing anti-trans laws banning gender-affirming care, banning access to bathrooms, or banning participation in sports activities (ACLU, 2024).

The explanatory framing of "anti-woke" legislation draws on some populist and nationalist themes. Proponents of anti-woke legislation argue that they are defending children, upholding free speech, and even protecting Western civilization from the moral decay of public education. Slang "woke" was a term of awareness and social consciousness in African American vernacular English but has been reframed as a pejorative to be used by the right to dismiss progressive activism as overzealous, irrational, or authoritarian (Rogers, 2021).

These laws exemplify a political strategy aimed at mobilizing conservative voters by amplifying cultural grievances. By framing their agenda as protecting traditions from elite liberalism, Republican lawmakers have used anti-woke rhetoric to spur electoral benefits, including in rural and suburban areas with high disbelief in mainstream media and higher education (Friedman, 2022). Concurrent efforts have centered on LGBTQ+ rights, especially within the context of education. States have passed or are considering "Don't Say Gay" legislation that imposes restrictions on discussions in classrooms about sexual orientation and gender identity, based on the argument that discussing sexual orientation and gender identity is inappropriate for young children and violates the rights of parents.



Figure 3 Conservatives Update Platform to include Omitted 'Anti-woke' Promise

2.2 Challenges and Prospects for Future Activism

Notwithstanding their considerable achievements, modern protest groups encounter various substantial obstacles that jeopardize their sustainability and enduring influence. Activist burnout, resource limitations, political opposition, and heightened surveillance hinder the maintenance of momentum and the attainment of enduring social change. This section analyzes the principal challenges facing contemporary activism and investigates how movements are adjusting through novel techniques, technical resources, and cooperative initiatives to maneuver within a changing and frequently adversarial landscape.

2.2.1 Obstacles Confronting Contemporary Movements

Protest movements in the United States from 2010 to the present have impacted discussions, changed public conversation, and influenced public policy. continue to be substantial and transformative challenges: these movements have The phenomenon of Activist Burnout in Contemporary U.S. Protest Movements (2010–Present) highlights a significant internal challenge faced by these movements.

Perhaps the most significant internal challenge facing modern American protest movements is activist burnout, defined as a state of psychological and emotional weariness due to prolonged participation in social and political activism. Activist burnout has become more apparent in movements where participant activists, like Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter (BLM), #MeToo, and March for Our Lives, constantly faced demands for participation, social and political emotional labor, and exposure to traumatic content.

In practice, burnout among activist actors is usually the result of prolonged exposure to stress, over-commitment, and a lack of supportive organizations and transitions. For example, activists in the Occupy Wall Street movement (2011) did not have formal leadership structures, and the continuous occupation of public spaces contributed to fatigue and conflict between individuals (Milkman, 2017). In addition, activist actors were, through ideology and process, often expected to assume significant personal time and resource commitments which over time became exhausting and eventually resulted in emotional exhaustion and disengagement.

2.2.1.1 Activist Burnout and Emotional Exhaustion

Likewise, Black Lives Matter (BLM) organizing groups have described having to cope with psychological strain from being exposed to police violence, structural violence, racism, and the exhaustion of ensuring national mobilization. M. Taylor and S. Moten (2017) contend that "the mourning, and confronting of racial violence is endless, and can be exhausting to even the most dedicated of spirits." The stress is compounded by the digital landscape of BLM's organizing strategies, where social media acts as a space of possibilities as well as harassment, surveillance, and resulting mental fatigue (Cunningham, 2020).

The #MeToo movement is another example that exposes the toll of activism, especially for survivors of sexual violence who are now in the position of leadership, or publicly sharing testimony. Activists operating in this space often experience re-traumatization and diminishment due to re- recounting their own lived experience of sexual violence and the act of supporting another to be able to disclose. The fact that little system change has occurred in response to

social or digital activism despite broad public interest in sexual violence, can also lead to feelings of helplessness, despair, and disillusionment (Gill & Orgad, 2018). Youth-led movements such as March for Our Lives (2018 to present) exemplify a different aspect of burnout: this time, it is the emotional cost to young people who are fighting for life-or-death policies (e.g., gun control). Students who survived school shootings and became national advocates have spoken publicly about the depression, anxiety, and tiredness they felt. Emma Gonzalez, a recognizable face in the movement, even requires public time away for her mental health (BBC, 2019).

Burnout may also be exacerbated by the cyclical nature of activism with ebbs-and-flows of activism and backlash. Activists feel a need to "keep the momentum" going, which creates an undervalued culture of rest. Lastly, a large majority of grassroots movements do not have the support infrastructure to provide mental health support or distribute workloads sustainably (Jaffe, 2021).

To counter burnout, some movements have begun to incorporate community care, collective healing and intentional rest as practices of activism. One good example is the "Nap Ministry" which was founded by Tricia Hersey and is being endorsed by many Black activists because it frames rest as a mode of resistance against exploitation. This growing emphasis on community care highlights that sustaining activism requires considering mental health alongside political agendas. Activist burnout is still a relevant and alive threat in the post-2010 protest landscape of the United States. Even strong and remarkable movements face the risk of attrition and collapse if they fail to acknowledge the emotional and psychological impact of activism and account for political fatigue. As social movements develop over time, it might be useful to build in networks of support, intergenerational leadership, and appropriative rest to sustain mobilization and influence.

2.2.1.2 Balancing Financial Support and Organizational Independence

Financial Need versus Organizational Independence in U.S. Protest Movements (2010–Present) One major point of tension that has shaped contemporary protest movements in the United States since 2010 has been the desire to secure funding - and make use of established systems of funding - without compromising their political and ideological independence. Movements like Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter (BLM), and March for Our Lives all face the question of whether or how to accept funding that won't jeopardize their values, authenticity, or grassroots authenticity.

The Occupy Wall Street movement was an extreme response to institutionalized funding and a leaderless way of operating. When it emerged in 2011 as a radical horizontal leaderless movement in reaction to corporate greed and economic inequality, it avoided established political parties and enormous funding not only to be inclusive but also by threatening their autonomy (Gitlin, 2012). Their push for financial independence contributed to their credibility, but detracted from the organizational sustainability; there was no capacity for sustained funding, planning for facility support or long-term support for participants, which contributed to its disintegration.

The Black Lives Matter movement has certainly had its complexities in relation to funding. Black Lives Matter (BLM) emerged as a national force in 2014 in the wake of the Ferguson protests, and established itself in 2013. Given this, the movement immediately drew considerable philanthropic interest, financial support from activist celebrities, and extensive grassroots donations. This zeitgeist of fundraising, combined with organizing, digital infrastructure and political campaigns, enabled BLM to build a national movement and to mobilize, attract scrutiny, and create internal tensions among decentralized chapters. Critiques resurfaced about how transparent and accountable the funding received by the national organization, and by extension the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation, was (Ray, 2020). Local chapters also oftentimes felt distanced from funding distributions and at times skeptical towards external

funding altogether, which sparked debates around the centralized control of funding and serious concerns about bringing a diluted radical message to local organizing.

Meanwhile, the #MeToo Movement is largely decentralized and driven by survivors. Despite receiving extensive media exposure and informal support, the #MeToo Movement failed to secure any significant institutional funding. The lack of any centralization enabled a widespread grassroots response that mostly took shape as a social media phenomenon and in local communities, but without formalized funding and administrative structures. The lack of a conventional centralized organization made it difficult to provide legal, psychological or financial support for those who came forward with accounts of harassment or assault.

Some of the affiliated movements, like the Time's Up Legal Defense Fund, did attract considerable corporate investment, although this, too, produced criticisms of supporting hands of Hollywood and major corporations (Kantor & Twohey, 2019). In another example, March for Our Lives is a youth-led movement that formed in the aftermath of the 2018 Parkland school. In addition to raising funds from some of the most prominent names in Hollywood, such as George Clooney and Oprah Winfrey, the movement was able to carry out major mobilizations across the country, voter registration efforts, and raise their voices to advocate for passage of gun safety legislation. However, given this financially motivated dynamic, the leaders of the Eat movement were aware of the potential pitfalls of money diverting their narrative and marginalizing their grassroots supporters. By creating transparent pathways for donations and prioritizing educational outreach, the organization still tried to balance financial viability and the legitimacy of their activism (González, 2019).

The ongoing tension exemplifies a challenge that is common across contemporary activism: the fact that organized funding may enhance capacity potential, recognition, and policy influence, but it also has the potential to bureaucratize your movement, co-opt radical demands, and reinforce reliance on elite interests (Jenkins, 1987). Typically, grassroots organizers have to weigh options prudently, deciding between immediate needs or strategic position for the long

term. To respond to these challenges, many contemporary movements have adopted hybrid approaches: crowdfunding, small monthly donations, and alternative cooperative economies. Crowdfunding platforms, such as Patreon and GoFundMe, and platforms such as ActBlue that allow for grassroots fundraising, have all enabled movements and charities to raise money directly from their supporters, they have also allowed movements to lessen their dependency on funding from corporations and/or government. Although these examples are limited, they represent different pathways to financial autonomy and independence.

To sum up, the financial versus independence dilemma remains an integral aspect of modern U.S. protest movements. The ability to have funding and maintain freedom is not just a logistical issue it is a political issue that is tied directly to how movements define legitimacy, solidarity, and accountability in an age of neoliberalism.

2.2.2. Emerging Strategies and Innovations in Activism

Protest movements in the United States from 2010 to the present have adopted several innovative strategies that reflect both technological advances and evolving political realities

2.2.2.1. Utilization of Encrypted Communication for Activist Security

New Directions in Modern Activism: Encrypted Communication and Private Apps:
Encrypted Communication and the Safety of Protesters: The Use of Private Apps Since 2010, U.S. protest movements have increasingly made encryption and private communication channels an integral part of their strategy. In particular, the app Signal, an open source end-to-end encrypted messaging app, has established itself as a key app for organizing, coordinating, and securing protests. The emergence and widespread adoption of Signal and private apps show a clear trend towards newly developing forms of activism that are focused on digital security and privacy against the backdrop of state surveillance and far-right doxxing.

Signal drew attention when thousands used the app as a communication tool and to coordinate decentralized protests during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests following George Floyd's murder (Zuboff 2020). The security protocols of Signal provide assurance to third

parties (including the government and even Signal creators), that their information will stay as private as possible to prevent or at least not surveil their communication (Marlinspike, 2017). This allows for a level of privacy that is critical for preserving operational security as well as the physical safety of activists, particularly in metropolitan areas where police have been known to surveil their communications digitally.

furthermore, we can view the reliance on encrypted platforms aligned with the broader anti-surveillance methodology adopted by activists. Protesters regularly disable their location services, utilize temporary phones, and rely on encrypted messaging platforms for each step of the process to limit the potential for digital tracking or retaliation (Kretschmer & Hope, 2021). During protests with a high-profile element, such as during Standing Rock (2016–2017) and the Women's March, concerns regarding surveillance and police overreach led organizers to formally recommend apps such as Signal and Wickr for the purposes of the remaining internal communication. The fact that these tools were recommended demonstrates how the digital revolution in activism has shifted capabilities away from simply broadcasting on social media to organizing securely and secretly.

The reliance on Signal, as opposed to other encrypted messaging platforms, also highlights how so many contemporary movements have embraced decentralization and leaderless-ness. In contrast to previous eras of protest, today activists have a difficult time accepting vertical - hierarchical - leadership in favor of horizontal, networking-based models. Secure group chats facilitated by apps like Signal allow activists to efficiently circulate updates in real time, poll their followers, and coordinate timely spontaneous actions, all the while maintaining anonymity and limiting the visibility of core organizers (Tufekci, 2017).

Nonetheless, the technological shift does have downsides. The reliance on secure apps can create a barrier to participation for less tech-savvy participants and may more sharply isolate these movements from the general public. If not sufficiently strict throughout a campaign, a

reliance on encrypted platforms also opens organizers and participants to infiltration— pointing to the importance of ongoing digital literacy training in activist networks (Greenberg, 2019).

Ultimately, access to and the strategic utilization of encrypted communication/ discussion platforms, such as Signal, has become essential to the practice of U.S. protest movements since 2010. Organizers of protests have demonstrated they can still make challenging decisions, engage efficiently, maintain anonymity and keep their actions invisible to law enforcement and opponents. Encrypted communication facilitates a radical shift in protest activity that combines privacy with political resistance in an entirely new digital space.

2.2.2.2. Transnational Collaboration among Climate Activists

The Global Collaboration of Climate Activists and Its Effect on U.S. Movements for Protest (2010-Present) Since 2010, climate activism has emerged as a transnational movement, and activists in the U.S. have increasingly collaborated with allies across the globe to confront the global climate emergency. This global solidarity has shaped the tactics, messages, and scope of U.S. climate protests and connected local environmental fights with larger global movements for climate justice.

One of the most successful examples of global collaboration is the Fridays for Future movement launched in 2018 by young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg. Her lone school strike for climate snowballed into an international effort, which inspired youth-led school strikes and protests around the world and in large U.S. metropolitan centers, including New York, Washington D.C., and San Francisco. U.S. students took up Thunberg's message and tactics and started to organize school strikes and climate marches to stand in solidarity with others who were fighting for climate action (Fisher & Nasrin, 2021). The Global Climate Strike in September 2019, which had over 4 million participants across 163 countries, had a robust presence of people from U.S. cities and highlighted the potency of simultaneous global action. The digital platforms of Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have encouraged this connection by allowing climate activists to share information, mobilize actions, and elevate the voices of those who have

been historically marginalized. For certain U.S.-based organizations, such as the Sunrise Movement and Extinction Rebellion U.S., communication and alliance building with organizations abroad has been a priority. They have used new technologies to share knowledge with global partners, to learn these organizations' tactics, and to take coordinated action during global day(s) of action. All of these efforts (as demonstrated in the climate movements' connections across borders) not only amplified the issues of climate change but also signaled the connections of environmental justice, racial justice, and economic justice - a theme upon which the recognition of climate change is still potentially bridging within the U.S. (Martínez-Alier et al., 2016).

In addition to solidarity building with activists around the globe, international climate conferences (the Conference of the Parties - COPs organized by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and other similar gatherings), provided one of the best opportunities for activists to converge. Various U.S.-based delegations to the global meetings made up primarily of youth, Indigenous leaders, and environmental justice advocates have participated in these global protests and developed alliances with organizing groups from the Global South; a significant benefit of participation has been to extend the narrative and use of concepts around climate action from predominantly emissions reduction to incorporating narratives around colonialism, Indigenous sovereignty, and climate reparations. The international aspect of climate protest has therefore been a vital factor in the formation of the U.S. movement's approach and objectives. Activists are now employing strategies that integrate local grassroots organizing with international lobbying on relevant issues, recognizing that climate change knows no borders.

Conclusion

Activism in the United States today has been both strategic and educational, demonstrating the tension between grassroots organizing and durable social power. For the reasons discussed in this chapter, the recent movements experienced success in actionable ways: the BLM movement

was able to engage municipalities as they reformed policies on policing and public safety; #MeToo was able to influence revisions to sexual harassment procedures in public and private spaces; and youth-led movements boosted political youth engagement (Ransby, 2018; Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019; Fisher & Nasrin, 2021). All of these results point to the apparent capacity of collective action to disrupt and erode established, entrenched systems to create a democratic milieu.

Even while these successes have occurred and continue to be achieved, many ongoing and new challenges exist. Social actors struggle to avoid activist burnout, which can occur after "depleting" the well of public policy or as a result of exhaustion from the emotional labor involved in their often-unpaid work as grassroots activists (Chen & Gorski, 2015). Organizations/classified actors also continue to grapple with the tension between their financial dependency on outsiders, as received from donors outside of the targeted community, and grassroots decision making in organizational decision making (Jenkins, 1983; Ostrander, 2007). Moreover, organizations and movements face growing issues with digital surveillance, political backlash in the form of laws that punish progressivism labelled "anti-woke", as well as internal divisions that complicate their ability to build solidarity, momentum and create organizing space. In light of these challenges, contemporary activists are utilizing new strategies such as encrypted communication tools, decentralized leadership, and international partnerships that provide them the potential for transnational solidarity and shared resources (Tufekci, 2017; Milan, 2020). This strategy is practical. It acknowledges that activism in the contemporary digital and global context is both fluid and technologically savvy, and these groups have to accommodate rapidly shifting political contexts.

The future of activism in the United States will depend on the capability of these movements to institutionalize progress without curtailing their radicalism. Activism has made itself much more visible in the political landscape, and action is immediate, but it may still be co-opted, repressed, and worn out. Should we be concerned? History shows us that innovation and

resilience are part and parcel of a justice, equality, and sustainability struggle, and it would appear that this identity resilience is still evolving. The innovations in collaboration, communication, and alliances suggest that activism will remain at the center of deepening democracy and democratization in the United States in the 21st century.

General Conclusion

This dissertation explored the development of protest movements in the United States from 2010 to the present as a way to both understand contemporary forms of activism within a historical context and to explore how digital technologies have changed organizing, leadership, and results for political protests. Comparing to contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and March for Our Lives, as well as butting up against the Civil Rights Movement, the study finds both constants and dramatic shifts in strategies, leadership practices, and organizations of mobilization.

In line with the first hypothesis, the results show that there is a noticeable transition from traditional top-down leadership toward bottom-up leadership structures empowered by digital platforms. Twitter and TikTok have revolutionized the dissemination of information, the organization of dissent in real-time, and the accessibility of marginalized voices, thereby democratizing the ranks of advocates and eliminating geographical barriers to activism. However, the digital mediation of this movement presents certain challenges, including disinformation, online harassment, and performative allyship, which may undermine the sustainability and efficacy of these movements.

As for the second hypothesis, we have noticed that movements like Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and March for Our Lives have had a major impact on US political discourse, legislative policy reform, and electoral participation. Indeed, Black Lives Matter affects police reform with local and state ordinances, while #MeToo has spurred major changes in workplace sexual harassment policies. March for Our Lives youth activism for climate has spawned greater youth voter engagement, which has influenced the direction of elections and policies.

The third hypothesis—which focuses on the strategic centrality of social media and digital platforms—is supported by the qualitative research on how decentralized networks are using these new forms of media to mobilize quickly, coordinate complex activities, and maintain a voice at the national and global scale. The effect has been to turn public demonstrations from

events into movements, even if the degree of their endurance and influence are still determined by the ability of organizers to anticipate and respond to new communications tools.

Finally, the fourth hypothesis about the policy impact of these movements finds support. Although all of these movements have raised awareness and changed cultural attitudes, the progress in legislative reform varies significantly among them. Black Lives Matter emerges as something of an outlier for making greater concrete policy reforms, compared to #MeToo and March for Our Lives, which catalyzed predominantly social and cultural change with weaker but significant policy effects.

Ultimately, this dissertation makes the case that today's U.S. protest uprisings simultaneously adapt historical legacies and digital innovations, remaking the possibilities and pitfalls of activism. The extent to which they can be successful in the future depends on the interplay between grassroots authenticity and organizational stability, the incorporation of new technologies, and shifting political terrain. Further research should guide the degree of consolidating these mobilizations, of addressing burnout, and of sustaining momentum with a view to long-term change in the systems.

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ملخص

تتناول هذه الرسالة تطور وتأثير حركات الاحتجاج في الولايات المتحدة منذ عام 2010 فصاعدًا. كما تستعرض كيفية تكيف النشاط الاجتماعي مع التحولات التقنية والثقافية والسياسية، مع التركيز على حركات بارزة مثل حياة السود مهمة (#BlackLivesMatter) حركة #أنا_أيضًا (#MeToo)، مسيرة من أجل حياتنا (March for Our Lives)، والنشاط المناخي. يبحث البحث في التغيرات التي طرأت على الأطر التنظيمية والاستراتيجيات، وتأثيرها العام على المشاركة المدنية والعمليات الديمقراطية. تستخدم هذه الدراسة المنهج النوعي الذي يجمع بين البحث التاريخي، وتحليل المحتوى الموضوعي للوسائط الرقمية، ودراسات الحالة. وتشمل مصادر البيانات تصريحات الناشطين، الوثائق السياسية، التقارير الإعلامية، والأدبيات العلمية. تشير النتائج إلى أن القنوات الرقمية أحدثت ثورة في أساليب التعبئة من خلال تمكين نشر المعلومات بسرعة وتعزيز ظهور الأصوات المهمشة. تتبنى الحركات بشكل متزايد القيادة اللامركزية والتمويل الجماعي في التنظيم والتمويل. وعلى الرغم من أن هذه الحركات أسهمت في الإصلاحات التشريعية، وتعديلات بيئة العمل، وزيادة مشاركة الشباب في الانتخابات، إلا أن التحديات مثل إرهاب الناشطين، الاعتماد على التمويل المؤسسي، والمراقبة الحكومية ما تزال قائمة. تؤكد الرسالة أن النشاط الاجتماعي المعاصر يستند إلى تقاليد العدالة الاجتماعية السابقة ويُحوّرها، مسلطًا الضوء على الدور الحيوي للمشاركة المدنية المستمرة في المجتمعات الديمقراطية.

كلمات مفتاحية: النشاط الاجتماعي، المشاركة المدنية، المنصات الرقمية، حركات الاحتجاج، العدالة الاجتماعية