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Reference


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WELFARE STATES, POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES, AND THE MOBILIZATION OF THE UNEMPLOYED: A CROSS-NATIONAL ANALYSIS

Marco Giugni

This article follows a revised political opportunity approach to argue that mobilization of underprivileged groups is constrained by the political opportunity structures provided by the institutional context of the country in which they act. Contrary to traditional opportunity theories, it is suggested that their mobilization also depends on a set of opportunities specific to the political or issue field most directly addressed by their claims. I propose to look for these specific opportunities in the institutional approaches to unemployment. I further maintain that such opportunities stem largely from the ways in which a given political or issue field is collectively defined. I apply a theoretical framework stressing both general and specific opportunities as well as the discursive context of claim making to original data on claim making in the unemployment political field in six European countries for the 1995-2002 period. The findings provide some support for the proposed theoretical framework, but also point to its shortcomings, especially in the lack of attention to economic factors.

Although the political mobilization of the unemployed is a research focus for which the number of studies is increasing,1 we still are relatively poorly equipped to understand this phenomenon. This is perhaps due to the fact that the politically motivated and organized unemployed do not form a strong and visible movement comparable to the labor, peace, and ecology movements, or, to cite a more recent example, the global justice movement. Yet, they are not completely absent from the political and public scene. Notable historical examples are the United States in the aftermath of the crisis of 1929 (Piven and Cloward 1979, 1993; Valocchi 1990, 1993), Britain in the 1920s/1930s and the 1980s (Bagguley 1991, 1992; Richards 2002), and, at the supranational level, the European marches against unemployment, job insecurity, and social exclusion in 1997 (Chabanet 2002).

Protest activities by the unemployed not only vary over time, but also across political contexts, and in particular across countries. One would be tempted to link such differences to the situation of the labor market. However, as I will show below, the correlation between rates of unemployment and the mobilization of the unemployed is weak at best. Therefore, the explanation must lie elsewhere. Rejecting simplistic economic analysis, I propose a theoretical framework for explaining cross-national variations in the mobilization of the unemployed that follows a political opportunity approach. In this perspective, the mobilization of social movements is encouraged or discouraged by certain aspects of their political context, such as the degree of openness of the institutionalized political system, the prevailing strategies of authorities towards protest, and the configuration of power within institutional arenas (see Kriesi 2004,

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1 This analysis is based on data collected by the members of a project entitled “The Contentious Politics of Unemployment in Europe: Political Claim Making, Policy Deliberation and Exclusion from the Labor Market.” The project includes the following countries: Britain (Paul Statham, University of Leeds), Switzerland (Marco Giugni, University of Geneva), France (Didier Chabanet, University of Lyon), Italy (Donatella della Porta, University of Florence), Germany (Christian Lahusen, University of Bamberg), and Sweden (Anna Linders, University of Cincinnati and University of Karlstad). The project is financed by the European Commission (HPSE-CT2001-00053 UNEMPOL) and the Swiss Federal Office for Education and Science through the Fifth Framework program of research of the European Union. We thank all the members of the UNEMPOL research consortium for their contributions to the project. I also thank two anonymous reviewers for the journal for their valuable comments and suggestions.

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McAdam 1996, and Meyer 2004 for reviews). However, following a line of reasoning recently proposed by Bercleaz and Giugni (2005) and Koopmans et al. (2005), I suggest that political opportunities for the mobilization of the unemployed stem not only from the general features of the political system, but also from certain institutional and discursive aspects more specifically relating to the political or issue field most directly addressed by their claims. I propose to look for these specific opportunities in the institutional approaches to unemployment (see Bercleaz et al. 2004; Giugni et al., forthcoming). Following a neoinstitutional framework, I further maintain that such opportunities stem largely from the ways in which a given political or issue field is collectively defined. Thus, this article aims to explain the mobilization of the unemployed following a revised political opportunity approach stressing three main factors: (1) the general political opportunity structures; (2) the specific political opportunity structures; and (3) the discursive context of claim making.

I apply this theoretical framework to original data collected in a European Union (EU) funded research project (UNEMPOL, The Contentious Politics of Unemployment in Europe). The data consist of newspaper print media coverage of reported acts of political claim making in six countries (Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Switzerland) for the 1995-2002 period. Since the data go beyond protest events and also include more conventional actions as well as verbal statements, the term “mobilization” is taken here in a broader sense to refer to claim making; that is, it includes not only protest activities, but all forms of intervention in the public domain.

GRIEVANCE-BASED EXPLANATIONS FOR UNEMPLOYED MOBILIZATION

Explaining the mobilization of the unemployed—or the lack thereof—involves a variety of factors. We can mention, most notably, their degree of interest in politics and political mobilization, the existence of an “objective” condition that gives rise to grievances about unemployment, the work of defining and framing unemployment as a social problem, the success in building a collective identity as unemployed, the level of internal resources and organization, and the presence of political opportunities for mobilization. Among these possible explanatory factors, two are particularly relevant when it comes to accounting for cross-national variations in the mobilization of the unemployed: grievances and opportunities.

Grievance theories (also known as breakdown theories) stress the impact of discontent as a source of collective action. They refer to collective behavior, relative deprivation, mass society, and similar theories that were popular until the 1970s in the social movement literature and stress the impact of grievances, social distress, individual frustration, and the like, to explain collective action (see Buechler 2004 for a review). Such theories assume that the more intense the objective condition or problem, the stronger the grievances, and hence the more radical or violent the collective response. Following this line of reasoning, variations in the level of mobilization of the unemployed would stem from differences in the objective conditions that give rise to grievances about the situation of the labor market and, more specifically, about unemployment. In other words, the political mobilization of the unemployed in certain countries would be lagging behind that observed in other countries because unemployment there is lower and, furthermore, the number of jobless people does not create a “critical mass” large enough for a social movement to form. Although such explanations have lost much of their popularity among students of social movements and have largely been discarded in favor of resource mobilization or opportunity theories (but see Useem 1998 for a reassessment), factors such as anomie, unemployment, status anxiety, and other indicators of “objective conditions” or the existence of a “problem” are often thought, in political debates and in public opinion, as favoring the emergence of protest activities by certain social groups. Considering this, and given the strong and direct link between the economic situation and unemployment, it is worth asking whether, in this field, the objective condition does not play a role.
Table 1. Unemployment as Indicator of Objective Condition (Grievance) for the Unemployed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Unemployment Rate (1995-2002)(^a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Currently unemployed persons as a percentage of the total population aged 15 years and older. Source: Data obtained from the European System of Social Indicators (http://www.gesis.org/en/social_monitoring/social_indicators/Data/EUSI/).

Table 1 provides us with a simple way to assess the explanatory power of grievance theories with respect to the mobilization of the unemployed. It shows a rough indicator of an objective condition for the two groups in the six countries studied here: the unemployment rate. This indicator allows us to determine whether higher levels of mobilization of the unemployed depend on the greater presence of this group in society. We can see, for example, to what extent the stronger mobilization of the unemployed in France (actual or presumed) results from the fact that unemployment is higher there.

To be sure, it seems that there is some relation between the unemployment rate and the mobilization of the unemployed. Anticipating what we will see in more detail below (see Table 4), the country with the highest unemployment rate (France) is indeed the one in which we find the highest share of claim making by the unemployed, and the country with the lowest unemployment rate (Switzerland) has a very weak mobilization of the unemployed. At the same time, however, unemployed mobilization is weaker in Britain than in Switzerland, despite the higher unemployment rate in the former country. Furthermore, Germany, on the one hand, and Italy and Sweden, on the other, have comparable unemployment rates, but they do not display similar levels of mobilization of the unemployed. Thus, while the objective condition, or at least the presence of a potential for mobilization, may well play a role, the correlation of the level of unemployment and the mobilization of the unemployed is at best a very weak one. As I will argue, institutional and discursive factors must intervene in order for such a potential to transform into actual mobilization.

THE POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY APPROACH

I suggest another explanatory path based on exogenous rather than endogenous factors. Specifically, I propose a theoretical framework to explain the unemployed’s claim making that follows a revised political opportunity approach. This theoretical framework, which is shown in figure 1, stresses three main factors: (1) the general political opportunity structures; (2) the specific political opportunity structures; and (3) the discursive context of claim making.

The concept of political opportunity structures was first introduced by Eisinger (1973) to study the relationship between the degree of institutional access in American cities and the protests that hit the United States in the late 1960s. It was then elaborated by various authors (e.g., Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi et al. 1995; and Tarrow 1998) and used to analyze the impact of the political context on social movements and other forms of contentious politics, to such an extent as to become hegemonic in the existing literature. The signals to social or political actors provided by political opportunities, or the options for collective action deriving from them, stem from a number of features of the institutionalized political system. Based on a review of existing works, McAdam (1996: 27) identifies four main features: (1) the relative openness or closure
Figure 1. A Theoretical Framework for the Analysis of Claim Making by the Unemployed

![Diagram of political opportunity structures]

of the institutionalized political system; 2) the stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity; 3) the presence or absence of elite allies; and 4) the state’s capacity and propensity for repression.

Thus, in the classic conceptualization, political opportunity structures are of a very general nature and imply a pattern of influence that concerns all kinds of challenging groups in a given political context. In other words, these “classical” political opportunity structures represent a general setting that is assumed to affect all movements in a similar fashion and to a similar extent, as if they could be defined irrespective of the characteristics of specific issue fields and collective actors.

Following a criticism made elsewhere (Berclaz and Giugni 2005), I suggest that this conceptualization of political opportunity structures, in spite of the advances that it has brought to the field, is limited in several respects. I suggest that political institutions do not affect all social groups to the same extent. If we take the unemployed, for example, they are probably affected more by the specific legislation pertaining to the welfare state than by the general characteristics of the political institutions. Thus, the rights deriving from the social security system will probably have a greater impact on their mobilization, while they probably play no role whatsoever for other groups and movements. More generally, I suggest that for movements formed by people with full (social and/or political) citizenship rights, the general political opportunity structure has a greater impact than for movements formed by what have been variously called “poor people” (Piven and Cloward 1979), the underclass (Katz 1993), or, broadly speaking, the marginalized and socially excluded. Political institutions are likely to be less important to them, and therefore we expect a weaker impact of the general political opportunity structure and a greater impact of more specific opportunity structures.

CLAIM MAKING IN THE UNEMPLOYMENT POLITICAL FIELD

Koopmans et al. (2005) have recently proposed a political opportunity approach for the study of claim making in the field of immigration and ethnic relations politics (see also Giugni and Passy 2004, 2006; Koopmans and Statham 1999a, 2000). According to these authors, “configurations” or “models” of citizenship form a political opportunity structure for the mobilization of collective actors in this field. In other words, citizenship rights define a set of institutional opportunities defining the conditions that impinge upon the costs of different forms of mobilization and their chances of success (Koopmans 1995; Tilly 1978). However, as the literature on collective action frames has stressed (see Benford and Snow 2000; Snow 2004 for
reviews), political mobilization also depends on the cognitive processes that underlie the evaluation of a given situation, possible solutions to that situation, and motivations for action (Snow et al. 1986), as well as the creation of feelings of identity, injustice, and agency (Gamson 1995). These framing processes have been conceptualized in terms of producing a set of discursive opportunities that, in turn, determine which collective identities and substantive demands are likely to gain mass-media visibility, to resonate with the claims of other collective actors, and to achieve legitimacy in the public discourse (Koopmans et al. 2005).

I propose to follow a similar line of reasoning for the political field of unemployment in order to explore the general hypothesis that the mobilization of the unemployed is constrained by the way in which the welfare state is historically and collectively defined in a given country. Thus, I argue that prevailing conceptions of the welfare state impinge in important ways upon the public debates and collective mobilizations pertaining to unemployment, to the extent that they define a specific opportunity structure that enlarges or constrains the options for action by collective actors intervening in this field. In other words, I maintain that the form and content of the intervention of collective actors in the field of unemployment depend on a set of specific opportunities provided by institutional approaches to the unemployed, which are in turn linked to the prevailing conceptions of the welfare state in a given country. As a result, I also expect the mobilization of the unemployed—I would say, especially the mobilization of the unemployed—to be affected by the political opportunities deriving from such institutional approaches to, and dominant views of, social welfare.

That strong differences exist in the way states deal with unemployment—and social welfare more generally—is attested to by the important literature on comparative welfare states (see Pierson 2000 for a review). Esping-Andersen’s (1990) distinction between the liberal or residual “welfare state regime,” the Bismarckian or insurance-based regime, and the universalist or social democratic regime, is perhaps the most well-known typology to deal with cross-national variations in institutional approaches to unemployment and social security. Similar distinctions have been proposed by other authors. For example, based on three factors relating to the welfare state that they consider to have an impact on the experience of unemployment (the degree of coverage, the level of financial compensation, and the importance of active measures for employment), Gallie and Paugam (2000) distinguish between four “unemployment-providence regimes”: the sub-protecting regime, which provides the unemployed with a protection below the subsistence level; the liberal/minimal regime, which offers a higher level of protection, but does not cover all the unemployed, and in which the level of compensation is weak; the employment-centered regime, which offers a much higher level of protection, but in which the coverage remains incomplete because of the eligibility principles for compensation; and the universalist regime, which is characterized by the breadth of the coverage, a much higher compensation level, and more developed active measures.

Gallie and Paugam’s typology bears directly on the unemployment political field, as it is based on indicators of policies aimed at fighting unemployment. However, it is aimed at inquiring into the effects of the degree and modalities of state protection on the individual experience of unemployment. What we need here is a typology linking the forms of the institutional approaches to unemployment to the political claim making by collective actors in this field. We have made an attempt to do so in the project from which the present report is drawn, by elaborating a typology of conceptions of the welfare state resulting from the combination of two analytical dimensions (Berclaz et al. 2004): (1) the formal criteria of eligibility to social rights, in particular, the rights concerning the loss or lack of remunerated work; and (2) the obligations relating to eligibility, in particular, the obligations for the recipients of the rights concerning unemployment. The first dimension refers to the criteria that define the conditions of access to social benefits for job seekers as well as the quantity and “quality” of such rights. The second dimension refers to the obligations attached to the condition of being unemployed. On both dimensions, policies can be more restrictive (exclusive) or permissible (inclusive).
The resulting four conceptions of the welfare state—perhaps better stated as the four institutional approaches to unemployment—can be considered as four specific opportunity structures for the mobilization of the unemployed and, more generally, for claim making in the field of unemployment. We have called the first type minimalism, as it combines restrictive eligibility criteria and heavy obligations attached to the right to social benefits. This situation resembles Esping-Andersen’s (1990) residual model, in which social benefits are for the most deprived and there is only a minimal level of distributive resources. Corporatism is the second type. Here we find restrictive eligibility criteria, but fewer constraints as to the obligations required to have access to social benefits. The third type is called universalism. Here permissive eligibility criteria are coupled with light obligations for eligibility, in an attempt to enlarge both access and coverage to the largest number of people, imposing at the same time a weak level of obligations. Surveillance is the fourth and final type. This situation is characterized by permissive eligibility criteria, but at the same time heavy obligations for the unemployed in order for them to have a right to social benefits.

Following the path opened by the work by Koopmans et al. (2005), I argue that the specific opportunities stemming from the prevailing conceptions of the welfare state are both institutional and discursive. On the one hand, changes in the law that regulate unemployment insurance may have an impact on the situation of the unemployed and provide them with new options or motivations to organize and mobilize politically. On the other hand, cultural notions of social security and dominant views of the welfare state determine which demands concerning unemployment and the unemployed are considered as reasonable or acceptable, which constructions of the reality of unemployment are considered as appropriate, and which claims and collective actors involved in this field are considered as legitimate within the political system. However, in the theoretical framework I propose, this aspect is treated separately as the discursive context in which claim making takes place.

DATA RETRIEVAL

The data originate in an EU-funded research project (UNEMPOL, The Contentious Politics of Unemployment in Europe) and consist of newspaper print media coverage of reported acts of political claim making in six countries (Britain, Germany, France, Italy, Sweden, and Switzerland) for the 1995-2002 period. We coded all claims reported in the Monday, Wednesday, and Friday issues (Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday in the case of France) of a major quality newspaper in each country: The Guardian for Great Britain, the Süddeutsche Zeitung for Germany, Le Monde for France, La Repubblica for Italy, Dagens Nyheter for Sweden, and the Neue Zürcher Zeitung for Switzerland. The international, national, and economic sections of the newspaper were consulted (in addition to the front page). In addition, in order to improve the coverage, claims reported in the issue consulted that took place up to two weeks before, or that were to take place up to two weeks after, the date of appearance of that issue were also coded.

Following the method of political claims analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999b), the unit of analysis is the single political claim, broadly defined as a strategic intervention, either verbal or nonverbal, in the public space made by a given actor on behalf of a group or collectivity, and which bears on the interests or rights of other groups or collectivities. In other words, a claim is the expression of a political opinion by verbal or physical action in the public space. If it is verbal, a claim usually consists of a statement, an opinion, a demand, a criticism, a policy suggestion, etc., addressed to the public in general or to a specific actor. A political claim can take three main forms: first, a political decision (law, governmental guideline, implementation measure, etc.); second, a verbal statement (public speech, press conference, parliamentary intervention, etc.); and third, a protest action (demonstration, occupation, violent action, etc.). All claims taking one of these forms were coded, provided that they fell in the field of unemploy-
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In addition, claims are by definition politically and strategically oriented, that is, they relate to collective social problems and imply a policy evaluation. This means that purely factual information is excluded. Similarly, editorial commentaries and simple attributions of attitudes or opinions to actors by the media or by other actors are also excluded.

We coded all claims that belonged thematically to the political field of unemployment. Specifically, we coded all political decisions, verbal statements, and protest actions that deal with the following themes: unemployment, underemployment, joblessness, exclusion from the labor market, measures and provisions for unemployed people (including training courses, financing of unemployment insurance, and workfare), and precarious employment. Claims referring to related fields (e.g., employment policy, economic development policy, and other issues concerning the situation of the labor market or the creation of jobs) were coded only if they explicitly referred to the political field of unemployment. In addition, we coded all claims by organized groups of the unemployed, regardless of their thematic focus. For each claim retrieved we coded a number of relevant variables: the location of the claim in time and space, the actor making the claim, the form of the claim, the addressee of the claim, the substantive issue or thematic focus of the claim, the object actor who is or who would be affected by the claim, and the justification for the claim. The most important aspects for the present purpose are the actor, the policy position, and the thematic focus.

The data thus retrieved provide a sufficiently valid and reliable basis for the cross-national comparisons conducted here. Of course, they are not exempt from the description and selection biases of newspapers discussed in the methodological literature (see Earl et al. 2004 and Ortiz et al. 2005 for overviews). However, we can be quite confident about our findings. To begin with, in the context of contemporary democracies, only claims that make it through the media selection process are in the end relevant for the population and the political decision makers alike. Furthermore, my aim is not to provide a full picture of the mobilization of the unemployed, but to explain variations in the visible mobilization as it makes it into the media and, in particular, into the newspapers used in the analysis.

OPERATIONALIZATION

I operationalize the general opportunity structure indirectly, by means of Kriesi et al.’s (1995: 37) typology of the general structural settings for political mobilization, which combines the formal institutional structures (strength of the state) and the dominant strategy of authorities towards challengers. Here is how these authors have characterized the six countries I consider in this article according to their typology:

- Britain: informal inclusion, characterized by a strong state (i.e., a closed opportunity structure on this dimension) and inclusive dominant strategy (i.e., an open opportunity structure on this dimension);
- France: selective exclusion (strong state and exclusive dominant strategy);
- Germany: intermediate case (intermediate degree of formal openness and exclusive dominant strategy);
- Italy: formal inclusion (weak state and exclusive dominant strategy);
- Sweden (and the Scandinavian countries in general): informal inclusion (strong state and inclusive dominant strategy);
- Switzerland: integration (weak state and inclusive dominant strategy).

The specific political opportunity structure for the unemployment political field is operationalized using Berclaz et al.’s (2004) typology. Unfortunately, I cannot locate the countries within the typology on an empirical basis. This would require a vast amount of data and information collection, which goes well beyond the present purpose, and which has not been done so far. However, based on existing classifications of welfare states (e.g., Esping-Andersen 1990; Gallie and Paugam 2000) and contextual knowledge generated in the project, I can give at
least a broad picture of cross-national differences in the prevailing conceptions of the welfare state. Thus, Britain tends towards a minimalist conception of the welfare state (restrictive eligibility criteria and strong constraints in terms of obligations required to have access to social benefits); France, Italy, and Germany towards a corporatist conception (restrictive eligibility criteria and relatively little constraints in terms of obligations required to have access to social benefits); Sweden towards a universalist conception (loose eligibility criteria and few constraints in terms of obligations required to have access to social benefits); and Switzerland also towards a corporatist conception, but probably closer to a minimalist conception (therefore, a sort of intermediate case).

Fortunately, I can be more systematic for the operationalization of the discursive context in the unemployment political field, using the claim-making data described earlier. These data contain a raw but useful measure of the policy position of claims with regard to the unemployed (i.e. the constituency groups that are the ultimate object of claims), which provides a general indicator of the discursive position of actors in this political field. It was computed as follows: all claims that imply an improvement of the rights and position of the constituency group or an enlargement of its benefits and opportunities have received code 1; claims that imply a decrease of the duties of the constituency group have also received code 1; all claims that imply a deterioration of the rights and position of the constituency group or a restriction of their benefits and opportunities have received code -1; claims that imply an increase of the duties of the constituency have also received code -1; all neutral, ambivalent, or technocratic claims have received code 0.8

Table 2 shows the average discursive positions in unemployment politics in the six countries. In order to provide a more detailed picture, I show scores for each of the two main issue fields as well as for the entire political field.9 Cross-issue differences, in fact, are minimal. If we look at the entire political field, Italy clearly presents the most favorable discursive context, followed by France. Britain and Switzerland are in an intermediate position. Finally, Germany and Sweden are characterized by the most hostile context.

Table 2. Average Discursive Positions in Unemployment Politics by Issue Field (1995-2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue Field</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Dimension</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Dimension</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Politics (all fields)</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HYPOTHESES

Once we have determined where the six countries locate with regard to the three explanatory factors (general opportunities, specific opportunities, and discursive contexts), we can make a number of predictions about cross-national variations in the mobilization of the unemployed. To be sure, the theoretical framework proposed here lends itself to formulating hypotheses concerning different aspects of their mobilization: the levels of mobilization, the forms of action, and the content of claims. For example, concerning the content of claims, Berclaz et al. (2004) suggest that a minimalist conception of the welfare state favors claims dealing with the access to social benefits, whereas claims made within a universalist conception should focus on the situation of the unemployed. More in line with traditional political opportunity theory, one may expect more closed opportunity structures, both general and specific, as well as a more hostile discursive context, to lead to more radical forms of action by the organized unemployed. Here, however, I focus on the most basic aspect, namely the level of mobilization or extent of claim
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making. In other words, what I wish to explain is the presence of the unemployed in the public domain, and above all, how such a presence varies across countries.

Table 3 summarizes the predictions about the extent of claim making by the unemployed in the six countries, first separately for each of the three explanatory factors (general opportunity structures, specific opportunity structures, and discursive contexts), and then as an overall assessment combining the three factors. Concerning general opportunities, according to the typology of Kriesi et al. (1995), the most favorable opportunities among our six countries are to be found in Switzerland, while France offers the worst situation. Britain and Sweden also have rather closed opportunity structures, although to a lesser extent than France. Germany and Italy can be considered as intermediate cases in this respect. Concerning specific opportunities, based on the typologies of the welfare state mentioned earlier, I expect a lower level of mobilization in Britain (residual model of the welfare state), an intermediate level in France, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland (insurance-based model), and a higher level in Sweden (universalist model). However, among the four countries that follow an insurance-based model, I predict a lower level of mobilization in Italy, due to the fact that it is a sub-protecting regime, and in Switzerland, following a broad comparison of the French and Swiss welfare systems suggesting that Switzerland is more restrictive in this respect.

Concerning the discursive context, the average discursive positions shown earlier (see table 2) lead me to hypothesize a higher level of mobilization in Italy and France, a lower level in Germany and Sweden, and an intermediate level in Britain and Switzerland. If we now combine the three explanatory factors (cumulating the hypotheses for each factor), we obtain the following overall predictions about the mobilization of the unemployed in the six countries under study: a low level of mobilization in Britain, a middle level in France, an middle-low level in Germany, a middle-high level in Italy, and middle-low level in Sweden, and a middle level in Switzerland.

Table 3. Predictions About the Extent of Claim Making by the Unemployed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Britain</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Switzerland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Political</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity Structures</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific Political</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity Structures</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discursive Context</strong></td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td>low</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>middle-low</td>
<td>middle-high</td>
<td>middle-low</td>
<td>middle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FINDINGS

Since I focus on one single—although fundamental—aspect of the mobilization of the unemployed, the presentation of findings is quite straightforward and can be relatively brief. Table 4 shows the share of claim making by unemployed actors in unemployment politics. In order to provide a somewhat more detailed picture, I first distinguish between three main issue fields in unemployment politics: (1) socioeconomic issues relating to the situation of the labor market; (2) welfare systems and social benefits; and (3) individual (re-)insertion into the labor market. Next, a residual category of other issues is presented, which includes protest activities by the unemployed that do not pertain to the unemployment political field. Finally, the last row looks at the entire unemployment political field.

If we focus on the field of unemployment politics as a whole, we see that the level of mobilization of the unemployed—or their presence in the public domain—is rather low in all six
In spite of the general low level of mobilization across the board, however, some differences can be observed from one country to the other. According to the theory offered in this report, such variations should follow differences in the general and specific opportunity structures, as well as in discursive contexts. As a result of the cumulative effect of these three explanatory factors, I expected the share of unemployed claims to be especially low in Britain, a bit higher in Germany and Sweden, still higher in Switzerland and France, and finally highest in Italy (see table 3). My predictions, however, are only partially confirmed. As expected, the unemployed mobilization is lowest—indeed, virtually absent—in Britain, the country that has the most unfavorable opportunity structures (both general and specific), and also a relatively unfavorable discursive context. Also meeting the predictions, Italy displays a relatively high level of mobilization in comparative perspective. However, France displays a higher level of mobilization than expected, both in relation to Switzerland, the other country for which I predicted an intermediate level of mobilization, but also with respect to all the other countries. Indeed, the French unemployed are the most active among the six countries included in the study. Furthermore, the mobilization of the unemployed in Italy and Sweden is more or less the same, while I expected Italy to have the most active unemployed. Finally, the level of mobilization is higher in Germany than in Switzerland, while I expected the opposite to be true.

How can we make sense of these findings and, above all, account for the gap with my hypotheses? First of all, we should be aware of the fact that, due to the generally low level of mobilization of the unemployed in all of the countries, here we are dealing with very small samples. Therefore, cross-national variations are very sensitive to “sampling errors.” Secondly, on a more theoretical level, our explanatory model may be underspecified, and some crucial factors could have been left out. For example, the situation of the labor market varies strongly across the six countries studied, in particular with regard to the unemployment rate. While I tried to show earlier that the level of unemployment is not a strong predictor of mobilization by the unemployed—at least not directly—political-economic factors may nevertheless intervene in some more complex way: for example, through different state regulations concerning the labor market which may either expand or restrict the opportunities for collective action in this field. Third, the findings may not be confirming the hypotheses because one or more of the three explanatory factors that form the theoretical framework is not relevant. This interpretation is in line with the idea that, at least in certain political fields, specific opportunities matter more than general opportunities. Thus, I would like to suggest that, unlike other social movements, the mobilization of a minority group such as the unemployed is influenced only to a limited extent by the general political opportunity structures, while it is much more sensitive to the specific political opportunity structures. After all, this is a movement composed by marginalized people who often suffer from a lack of social and political integration. Therefore, the general features of the state might be less important to them and have a minor impact on their mobilization. A similar argument has been advanced by Koopmans et al. (2005) in their analysis of claim making by migrants.

Indeed, another look at the hypotheses without taking into account the general political opportunity structures yields the following predictions (see table 3): an middle-low level of mobilization in Britain, intermediate-high in France, middle-low in Germany, middle-high in Italy, middle in Sweden, and middle-low in Switzerland. In other words, on the basis of the more specific aspects of the political opportunity structure for the mobilization of the
unemployed, I would expect the level of mobilization to be higher in France, Italy, and, to a lesser extent, Sweden than in the other three countries. This is exactly the ranking reflected in the findings (see table 4). To be sure, some of the differences remain unexplained, such as the higher level of mobilization in France than in Italy, but the main cross-national variations largely reflect the predictions based on the specific political opportunity structure and the discursive context. Thus, the political mobilization of a minority group such as the unemployed seems to be affected by specific opportunity structures and discursive contexts rather than by general opportunity structures such as those traditionally stressed in the social movement literature.

**Table 4. Share of Claim Making by Unemployed by Issue Field (1995-2002)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue Field</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic Issues (Labor Market)</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare Systems and Social Benefits</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual (re-)Insertion (Labor Market)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Issues</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Politics (All Fields)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CONCLUSION**

The unemployed form an underprivileged group that is generally not very active politically. This is partly due to the fact that they face a number of obstacles for their mobilization and have difficulties entering the public domain. However, the unemployed represent the core constituency of a political field that is central to current debates and policy making in Western Europe. It is therefore important to examine the factors improving their mobilization or, conversely, preventing them from becoming politically more active. In addition, although the level of mobilization of the organized unemployed is low in general, it varies across countries in a non-random way. My aim was precisely to account for such variations following a revised political opportunity approach. To do so, I compared six European countries that vary in their institutional approaches to unemployment, which I proposed to see as a specific political opportunity structure for the mobilization of the unemployed. Such specific opportunities, together with the general opportunity structure stemming from the political-institutional features of the state and the discursive context faced by the unemployed, combine to explain why the unemployed are more active in certain countries than in others.

However, apart from confirming the weaker political participation of the unemployed, our findings support only in part the argument that the mobilization of the unemployed depends on the cumulative impact of general opportunities, specific opportunities, and discursive contexts. The less favorable context (Britain) is indeed the country where the unemployed have mobilized least, but the most favorable context (Italy) is not the country in which they have mobilized the most. The highest levels of mobilization can be seen in France, which is also a rather favorable context, but not the most favorable one. However, if we remove the general opportunity structures, the hypotheses are largely confirmed. In other words, my findings suggest that, for the movement of the unemployed, the general institutional setting is much less important than for other movements; furthermore, it is above all the specific opportunity structure resulting from the prevailing conception of the welfare state, as well as the discursive context of claim making, that influences the political mobilization of the unemployed in important ways.
Finally, while here I focused on the role of political opportunity structures and discursive contexts (which may also be conceptualized in terms of political opportunities), other factors should be taken into account to explain the lower level of mobilization of the unemployed in general. Explanatory factors such as political interest, objective conditions, problem construction, collective identity, internal resources, and political opportunities are probably interrelated and have a cumulative impact on the political mobilization of the unemployed. Thus, unfavorable political opportunities (above all specific ones) would: (1) diminish the interest that the unemployed have in politics; (2) frame or “problematicize” the issue of unemployment in a way that discourages them to engage in collective action; (3) prevent them from creating a strong collective identity; and (4) yield little resources and mobilizing structures to be used by the unemployed in collective action. The end result of this process would be a weaker mobilization of the unemployed, in spite of cross-national variations that can be explained by differences in the political (institutional and discursive) context of unemployment.

NOTES

1 For example, see Bagguley 1991, 1992; Chabanet 2002; Chabanet and Faniel, forthcoming; Demazière and Pignoni 1998; Fillieule 1993; Galland and Louis 1981; Maurer 2001; Piven and Cloward, 1979, 1993; Richards 2002; and Valocchi 1990, 1993; for cross-national analyses, see in particular Faniel 2004, Lahusen and Baumgarten 2006, and Royall 1997). See also a number of papers presented at recent conferences and workshop over the past few years on the subject matter, such as: a section on “Social Movements, Contentious Politics, and Social Exclusion” at the second ECPR Conference (Marburg, Germany, September 18-21, 2003); a conference on “Public Employment Action and Unemployed Movements” (Centre de Politologie de Lyon, November 19-20, 2004; a workshop on “The Mobilization of the Unemployed in Europe” (Maison Francaise d’Oxford, 10-11, 2004); the closing conference of the UNEMPOL project (Geneva, April 1-2, 2005); and a conference on “From the Blanketeers to the Present: Understanding Protests of the Unemployed” (German Historical Institute, Bloomsbury, February 16-17, 2007).

2 See Goodwin and Jasper (2004) for a criticism of this hegemonic approach and replies by some of its proponents.

3 In a more recent development of this framework, we have elaborated an alternative typology that takes into account both the social and the political-economic dimensions (Giugni et al., forthcoming). It looks at both unemployment regulations and labor market regulations as defining a specific opportunity structure for claim making in the field of unemployment politics. For the present purpose, however, I prefer the original typology.

4 This question is all the more important when we look at deprived groups, such as the unemployed, as it is difficult for them to redefine the cultural frames within which unemployment has been socially and politically construed. Such a redefinition is important in order to gain access to the public domain and to have political demands acknowledged as legitimate.

5 If an issue did not appear on the selected day, the next available issue was taken. If the latter was already part of the sample, the next issue not part of the sample was taken.

6 Of course, political decisions only apply to state actors with binding policy power. Therefore, by definition, the unemployed never use this form of claim and only verbal statements and protest actions are available to them.

7 Britain was not part of their study, but the authors included it in their typology for illustrative purposes.

8 Both verbal and nonverbal claims were taken into account to determine their position. Claims that could not be classified according to this aspect have received code 9. Although the constituency group in the field of unemployment is represented by the unemployed, we also coded labor as a potential object insofar as claims dealing with labor bear on the issue of unemployment. These scores, however, are not used in this paper.

9 The economic dimension includes all claims addressing socioeconomic issues relating to the situation of the labor market. The social dimension refers to claims addressing welfare systems and social benefits, individual re-insertion into the labor market, and issues relating to the constituency of the unemployed. For practical reasons, we also included within the social dimensions claims addressing other issues (such as claims by the unemployed on issues other than unemployment).

10 It should be stressed that the mobilization of the unemployed in Italy, perhaps even more than in other countries, occurs largely at the local level (Baglioni et al. 2005). Since these events often are not reported by the national newspapers we used to retrieve the data, this might underestimate the claim making by the unemployed in Italy.
REFERENCES


