

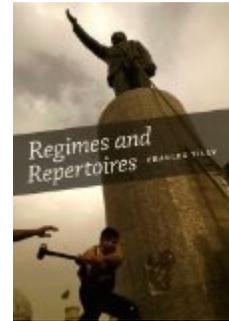
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Charles Tilly. *Regimes and Repertoires*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. ix + 240 pp. \$36.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-80350-0.

Reviewed by Matthew McCulloch (Department of Politics, International Relations and European Studies, Loughborough University)

Published on H-Ideas (June, 2007)



Time for a Change?

The central question of Charles Tilly's work is to explore "how the change and variation in regimes interacts with changes and variations in the character of contentious politics" (p. 29), or, in layman's terms, how do people protest and how is this ability to protest affected by the capacity of the regime they are protesting against? Anyone familiar with the depth of Tilly's work will be unsurprised to read in his latest book that he answers this central question with his usual finesse and style. Over nine chapters, and numerous diagrams and tables, Tilly methodically sets out the main question, and then, through the analysis of individual cases, he offers support for his hypothesis displaying a level of knowledge that is top-rate.

The book opens with Tilly discussing "What Are Regimes" (chapter 1), "How Regimes Work" (chapter 2), and "Repertoires of Contention" (chapter 3). Tilly then brings both sides of the argument together in chapter 4 ("Repertoires Meet Regimes"). Essentially, the first chapter introduces the idea of regimes by focusing on Aristotle, Robert Dahl, and Samuel Finer, but it is in chapter 2 that Tilly really begins to spell out his argument. With his inclination for diagrams, Tilly highlights the relationship between regimes and contentious politics; this section is paramount as it forms part of the basis of the preceding discussion. Tilly's classification of the relationship is simplistic, yet effective. He distinguishes between two dimensions of variation: "government capacity," or the effectiveness of the government's reach, and "democracy," or the degree to which individuals are

both respected and protected by the law, with each being either "high" or "low" (p. 21). The outcome is a matrix with government capacity and democracy as its axes (p. 27). Once this relationship has been established, various aspects of the discussion can be applied to the matrix of regime space, collective violence, and revolutions. For instance, with regards to revolutions, Tilly concludes that it is more difficult for revolutionaries to form an opposition in a country, such as Germany, that is democratic with high government capacity (p. 27). Hence, revolutions occur much more frequently in low-capacity-non-democratic regimes (p. 161), such as Somalia or the Congo, (p. 27).

The following chapters are then spent exploring different aspects of the discussion: trajectories of change, collective violence, revolutions, and social movements. An interesting aspect of Tilly's argumentation is its form. Each of the chapters offers a wide range of historical examples to highlight his argument: we are even greeted with a discussion of the problems of "Peru, center of the Inca Empire" (p. 1). For instance, in the discussion on the trajectories of change, Tilly focuses on the closing days of the apartheid regime in South Africa. The first part of the discussion introduces the key actors (the South African government and security forces, the African National Congress, and the Inkatha movement) and how each one had the ability to either force change or to absorb potential change. This historical narrative is then related back to the theoretical framework established at the beginning of the book. Through his use of tables, bullet-

points, and diagrams, Tilly is able to transpose the actual events onto the theory he has outlined.

The next chapter that stands out is Tilly's discussion on "Revolution" (chapter 7), which focuses on the genocide of Rwanda. This event is not typically considered to have been a revolution, yet Tilly argues that, by expanding the definition of revolution, not only can we argue that the Rwandan genocide was revolutionary, but also that this "expanded definition better serves this book's purpose of explanation" (p. 157). Following a justification as to why this expanded definition is needed, the discussion then shifts to ask "why do revolutions occur" (p. 161), taking into account the factors of "revolutionary situations" and "revolutionary outcomes" (p. 159). In a few short pages, the reader is taken from Africa in the 1990s to Europe between 1492-1991 (p. 164), without really realizing that such a shift has occurred; such is the

power of Tilly's narration.

Despite offering an authoritative book on the subject of contentious politics, there are two minor flaws that blemish this otherwise remarkable scholarly achievement. First, Tilly's storytelling style can be both a strong and a weak point, as he sometimes spends several pages discussing a point, when a line or paragraph (or even a chart or diagram) could achieve the same end. The second problem does not concern Tilly's work per se, but rather its reception by a less advanced audience. The work is of a highly theoretical nature and it is difficult to see this as being an introductory book on the issue of contentious politics for undergraduate students. (Tilly himself does give a vast range of more suitable books for this level of study.) However, this book will be invaluable to any doctoral students or researchers interested in this contentious area of political and conceptual study.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-ideas>

Citation: Matthew McCulloch. Review of Tilly, Charles, *Regimes and Repertoires*. H-Ideas, H-Net Reviews. June, 2007.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13241>

Copyright © 2007 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.