

PLS 140  
Introduction to  
Comparative Politics

Week 11, Lecture 2:  
Contentious politics

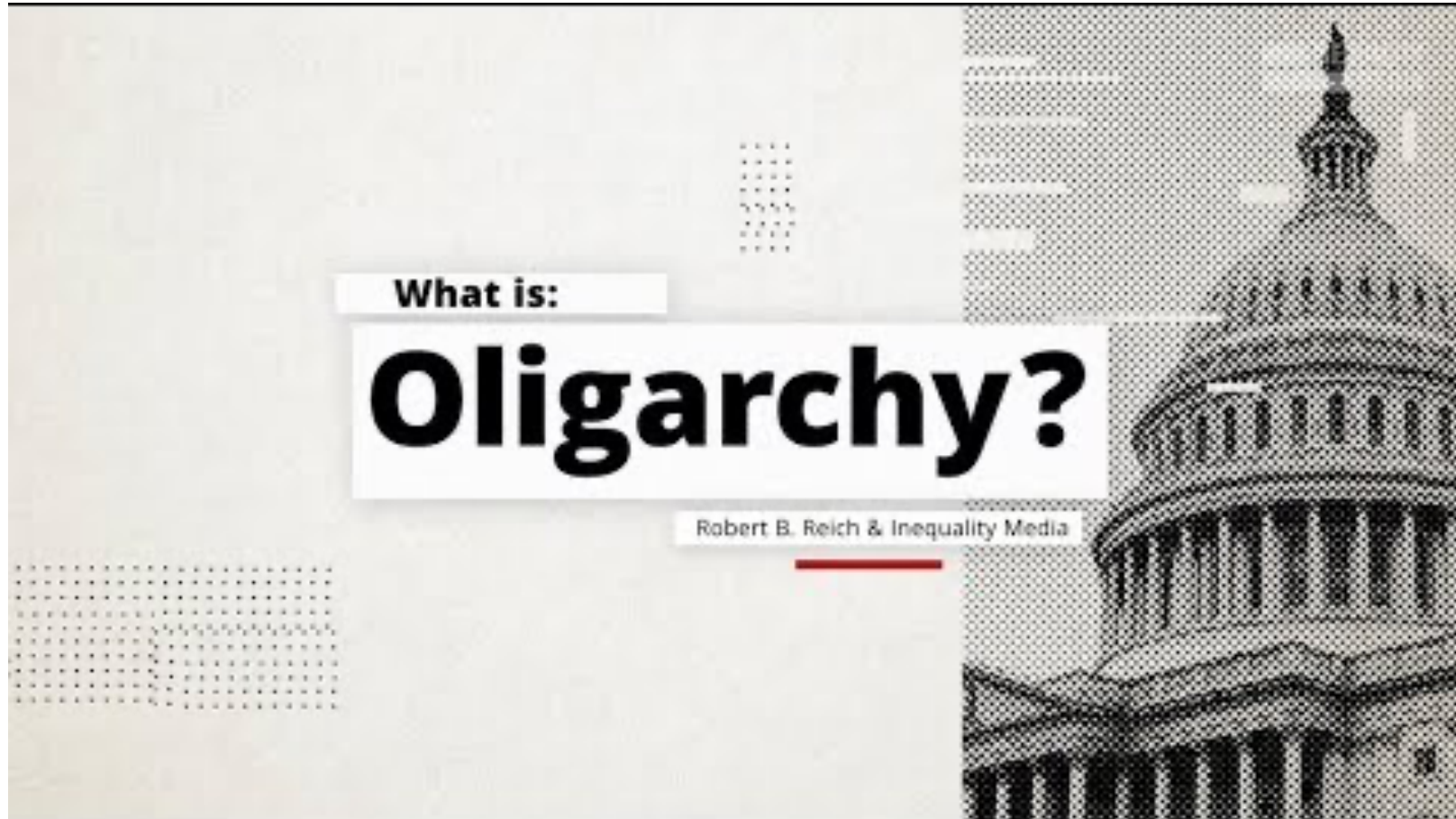
# Recap

- Representation of societal interests within the framework of the state by political parties and interest groups

# Plan for today

- Contentious politics, its types, and explanations

# Oligarchy



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inBWp13C7H8>

# Michels's iron law of oligarchy

- Inevitability of the rule by an elite (= oligarchy) as a result of:
- Necessity of delegation of power to individuals in complex organizations (e.g. states, parties, interest groups) —>
- Dominance of a 'leadership class'

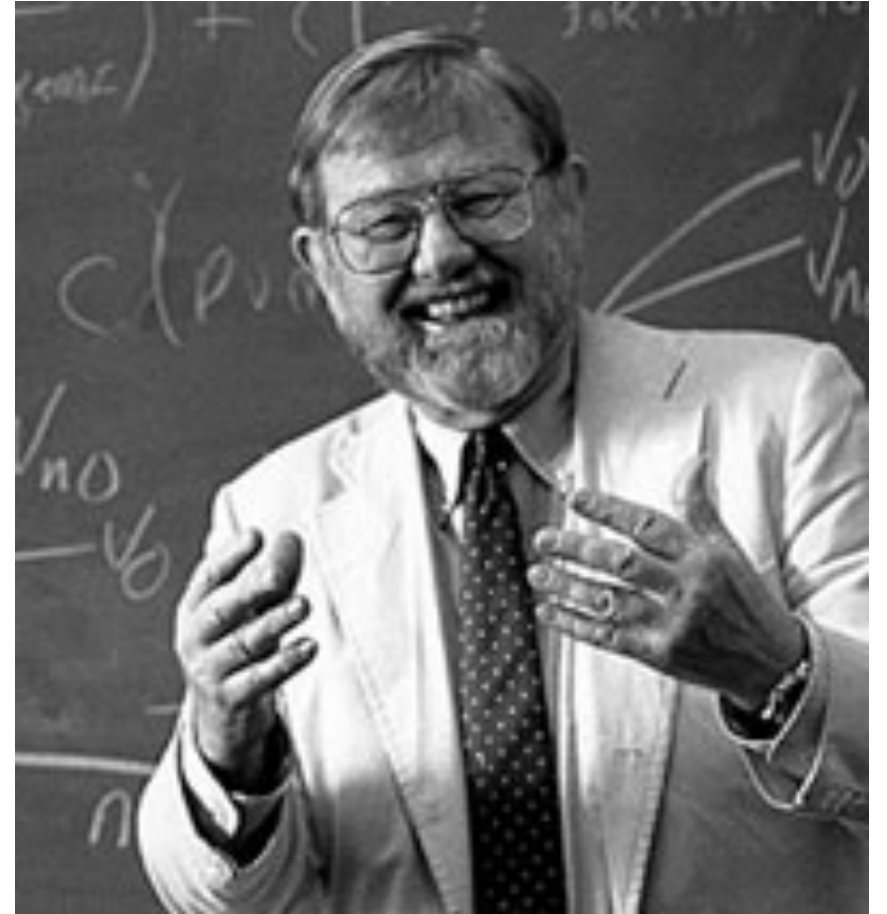
- Michels, Robert. 1915. *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*. New York: The Free Press.



# Olson's distributional coalitions

- Accumulation of special interests → political dominance of special interests (distributional coalitions) → slower economic growth
- E.g. UK vs. Germany and Japan after World War II

- Olson, Mancur, 1982. *The Rise and Decline of Nations: Economic Growth, Stagflation, and Social Rigidities*. New Haven: Yale University Press.



# Contention

- *Pursuit of collective goods outside of formal political institutions*

# Types of contention

- Everyday forms of resistance
- Social movements
- Revolutions
- Coups d'état
- Insurgencies and civil wars
- Terrorism



# Revolutions

- *Attempted or accomplished large-scale structural change*
- Political
- Social

# Civil wars and insurgencies

- Civil wars:
  - *Military conflict between domestic actors*
- Insurgencies:
  - *Rebellions against the government*

# Coups d'état

- *Non-electoral change of government undertaken by or with the support of the military*

# Terrorism

- *Intentional use of violence, typically against civilians, for political purposes*

# Russia's revolutions and civil war



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-tICpleWLI>

# The Soviet Union's Great Terror



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYFZawos3v0>

# Contentious politics in Russia

- February Revolution, 1917—political revolution
- October Revolution, 1917—coup d'état or political revolution
- Civil war, 1917-1922
- Subsequent social revolution:
  - Nationalization and restructuring of the industry
  - Collectivization of agriculture
  - Annihilation or exile of nobility, bourgeoisie, and rich peasantry
- State terror: Great Purge

# Social movements

- *Sustained organized collective action oriented towards a goal of social change*



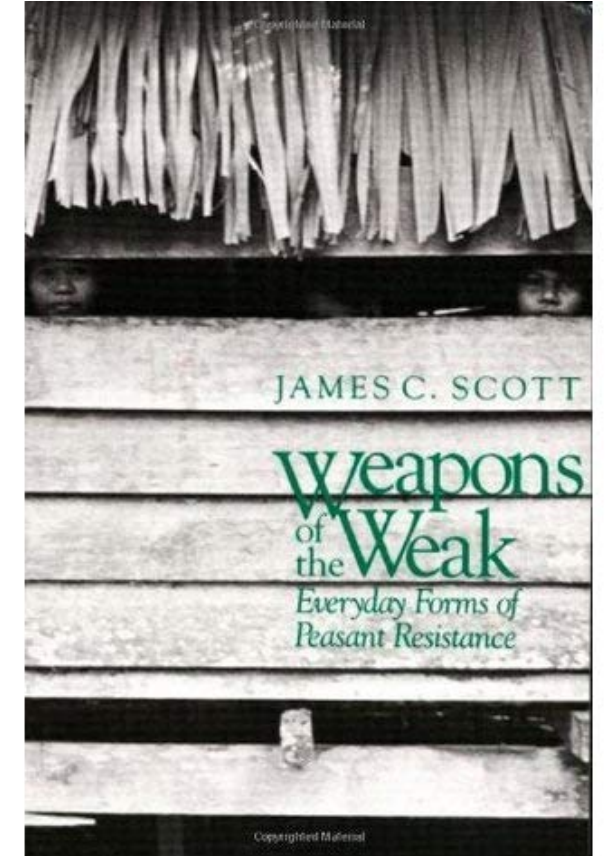
# Antinuclear movement in Kazakhstan

- Popular protests against nuclear testing at Semipalatinsk
- Formation of the Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement
- Cancellation of tests and closure of the test site



# Everyday resistance

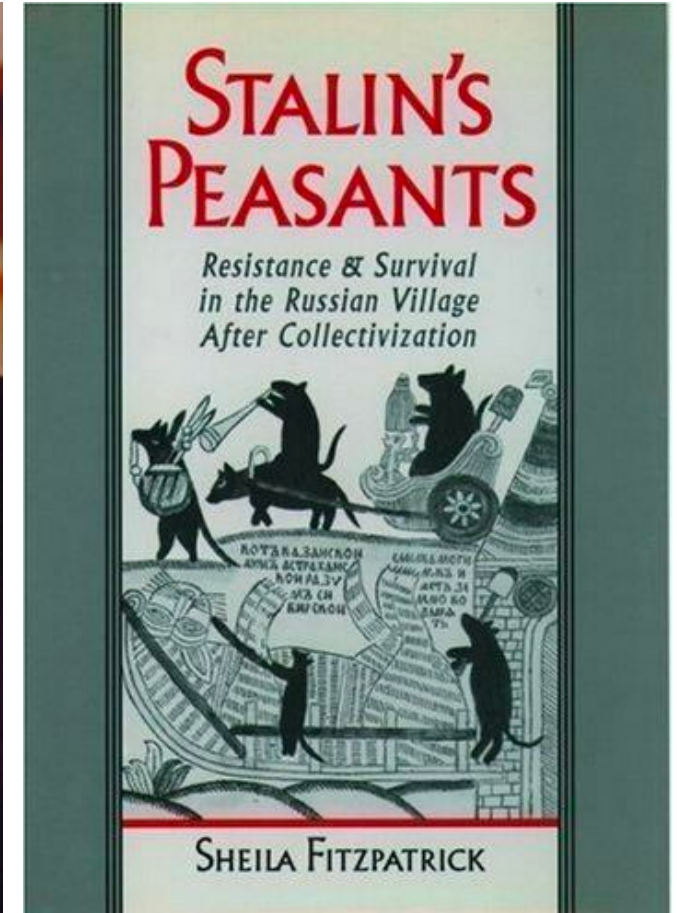
- *Unorganized efforts to resist or obstruct authority*
- Scott's infrapolitics:
  - Foot-dragging, sarcasm, passivity, laziness, theft, misunderstandings, slander, avoidance
    - Scott, James C. 2008. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.



# Everyday resistance in the Soviet Union

- Resistance through passivity in the Soviet Union

- Fitzpatrick, Sheila. 2006. *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization*. New York: Oxford University Press.



# Some explanations of contention

- Rational choice
- Relative deprivation
- Political opportunities and mobilization

# Lichbach's rational choice

- Incentives to freeride —>
- Irrationality of contention:

	<b>Participate</b>	<b>Do not participate</b>
<b>Contention succeeds</b>	Share in collective benefits	Share in collective benefits
<b>Contention fails</b>	Face personal costs	Face no personal costs



# Lichbach's rational choice

- Market: expansion of benefits and probability of winning, reduction of costs of engaging in dissent, improvement of productivity of tactics
- Community: common values
- Social contract: self-government, tit-for-tat, mutual exchange
- Hierarchy: imposition of cost-sharing, creation of selective incentives

- Lichbach, Mark. 1995. *The Rebel's Dilemma*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

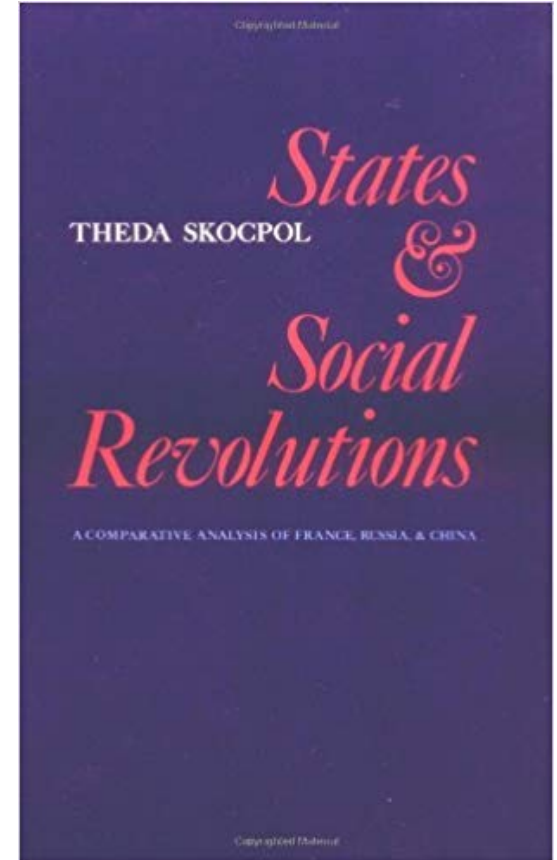
# Gurr's relative deprivation

- Entitlement vs. circumstances
- Relative deprivation —>  
frustration —>  
anger —>  
violence
  - Gurr, Ted. 1968. "Psychological Factors in Civil Violence." *World Politics* 20 (2): 245-78.



# Skocpol's opportunities and mobilization

- Necessary conditions for revolution:
  - State collapse and breakdown →
    - Elite division
  - Peasant mobilization
    - Skocpol, Theda. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.





# Takeaways

- Incentives to participate in contention, despite its costs, in specific conditions
- Variation in the type—and effects—of contention