

Social movements in Belgium

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Abstract

Despite the important roles played by social movements in all aspects of Belgian political life, much less scholarly attention, within political science, has been paid to Belgium as a specific field of social movements. Against this background, our chapter proposes a critical overview of social movements in Belgium, by focusing on their role as democratic counter-power. After a non-exhaustive literature review, we highlight recent developments in the role of social movements as a democratic counter-power in Belgium, by identifying two avenues for future research, in particular: 1) the recent repressive turn in the legal, political and institutional context in which social movements operate in Belgium which calls for interdisciplinary research at the crossroads between social movements studies and legal studies, and 2) (new) sociological barriers to social movement participation linked to the recent diversification of practices and repertoires of action. Overall, our chapter raises important questions on the counter-power role of social movements in the broader context of crisis of representative democracy, and the rising autocratization of '(il)liberal' democracy in Belgium and beyond.

Keywords: social movements, counter-power, cleavages, repression, democracy, repertoires of action, protest, police, autocratization

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