Chapter 1: A new approach for studying political contention – contentious episode analysis[1]

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On May 24, 2011, in the middle of the parliamentary debate on the so-called ‘mid-term adjustment plan’, yet another round of austerity imposed by Greece’s international creditors, a call for an event-demonstration at Syntagma square in Athens and at the White Tower in Thessaloniki went up on Facebook. By the next day at least 20’000 people assembled in the two squares, mostly chanting ‘thieves, thieves’ at parliamentarians and cursing the Parliament. The movement of the Greek Indignados or Aganaktismenoi was born. It would prove to be massive, expansive and innovative. Immediately after the initial demonstrations, the main squares in the two cities were occupied and simultaneous protests started across almost all major urban centres of the country. Interest would focus on Syntagma square, however, where the occupation was symbolically confronting Parliament, juxtaposing the public assembly and the symbolic seat of political power. In the following days, the occupation grew exponentially, eventually reaching almost 400’000 participants on June 5. In our dataset, there is an event associated with the Aganaktismenoi on almost every single day until the end of the episode on June 30.

At first, the PASOK government reacted to the movement in a mix of fear and embarrassment. But the original ambivalence was soon giving way to growing anxiety. On the eighth day of the occupation, Prime Minister Papandreou addressed the ongoing mobilization with an attempt to shift the blame to abstract ‘global powers’ – to no avail. On the same day, the movement blocked all the exits of parliament, effectively locking up the MPs inside. Eventually, the MPs had to escape in the dark, with the help of the Fire Brigade, through the adjacent National Garden. PASOK MPs were becoming the main target, bearing the brunt of the opposition to a policy about which they themselves had considerable reservations. They reacted by challenging the government, asking for explanations and for assurances that this austerity package would be the last one. On June 7, in the parliamentary committee, the five ministers in charge of the bailout took fully thirteen hours to convince raging and fearful MPs of the need for new measures. The squares, which were initially seen as a potential relief for PASOK, were by now fissuring the link between the government and its MPs.

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[1] Parts of this chapter are taken from: Kriesi, Hanspeter, Abel Bojar, Swen Hutter 2019. Contentious Episode Analysis, *Mobilization* 24, 3:

At the same time, EU pressure on the government escalated, as did its pressure on the opposition leader to share responsibility for the new measures. The opposition, however, did not budge. On June 14, when one PASOK MP resigned and another one publicly declared that he would not vote for the mid-term adjustment, the government majority shrank to only four MPs. At this point, the possibility of a lost vote and a subsequent chaotic default loomed large. At the same time, the unions entered into the fray. On June 15, the large strike-demonstrations of the unions fused with the Syntagma square occupation, gathering hundreds of thousands once more. The earlier blockade was repeated. For the first time after 20 days of protest, the riot police moved in forcefully to disband the blockade and the new movement underwent its baptism of fire. Reports of police repression and brutality dispensed on a crowd that was until then peaceful shocked the attending public.

On the evening of the same day, the Prime Minister called the opposition leader to ask for a government of national unity. The latter accepted, on the condition that the government's sole focus would be the 'renegotiation' of the bailout and that elections would then be called. Papandreou first agreed, but then withdrew his consent to such a program within a day and, instead, opted for a cabinet reshuffle: he replaced his finance minister who had been the main target of the ire of the protesters and MPs. The new minister tried to open a dialogue with the movement and the unions. After the reshuffle, the government asked for a vote of confidence, which it received on June 21.

After having been finalized in the various committees, the mid-term adjustment package was introduced in the plenary session.

The major unions responded with a 48-hour general strike on June 28-29, the days of the plenary debate and the final vote on the program. The demonstration on June 29, attended by both the unions and the Aganaktismenoi, proved to be one of the largest to date. While each organization had its own block, radical left parties, anarchists, a loose nationalist crowd and Indignados united their forces in the first showing of an 'informal' anti-bailout coalition. During the following night, while the mid-term adjustment was legislated, a large group of hooded protesters clashed with riot police. As it turned out, the cabinet reshuffle and the signal of the new finance minister that he would consider social concerns sufficed to relieve the tension within parliament and allowed the remaining PASOK MPs to vote compactly in order to pass the mid-term adjustment program on June 30. External pressure had trumped the domestic threat from the new challengers. After the passage of the bill, the challenge subsided. The combination of repression and unresponsiveness of the elites deflated the movement.

This sequence of events, which has been told by Altiparmakis (2019: 143-154) in more detail, dramatically illustrates the patterns of interactions between challengers, the government and third parties (MPs of the governing party, opposition parties, foreign creditors) that have been triggered by austerity proposals of European governments during the Great Recession, one of the great economic crises in our time. In this book we shall study such patterns of interaction in twelve European countries. The Great Recession, which was unleashed by the breakdown of Lehmann Brothers in fall 2008 soon spilled over to Europe, where the initial shock of the financial crisis was to be followed by the Eurozone crisis, initiated in early 2010 with the sovereign debt crisis in Greece. While the worst of the crisis seemed to be over by fall 2012 after the Head of the European Central Bank had declared that he would do 'whatever it takes' to save the euro, the fallout of the crisis continued to haunt Europe at least until the conclusion of the third Greek bailout in summer

2015. It is hard to overstate the sheer magnitude of the impact the economic crisis has had on the lives of people in some, although not in all parts of Europe. As Adam Tooze (2018: 5) has observed in the introduction to his account of 'the first crisis of a global age', the combination of these crises and the economic and political responses to them are essential to understand the changing face of the world we are living in today.

Initially governments countered the economic impact of the crisis by relying on some version of 'liberal' (Pontusson and Raess 2012) or 'emergency Keynesianism' (Hall 2013). But once the Greek crisis deepened, starting in early 2010, governments turned to austerity policies, which were the key sources of economic hardship in the most hard-hit countries. While the welfare states buffered the negative consequences of the crisis initially (Bermeo and Bartels 2014), especially in the countries of northwestern Europe, which had strong automatic stabilizers, the turn to austerity impeded the redistributive functions of the state and crucially contributed to the hardship of the populations. This has focused the minds of the challengers on government policy and on the supranational constraints imposed on the national governments by agencies of the European Union, fellow governments of the Eurozone and the IMF.

In the present volume, we zoom in on the interactions between the governments and their challengers in reaction to the governments' austerity proposals. We focus on the austerity proposals and ask whether and how they have been challenged by social movements, unions, opposition parties and other actors, and how the government, in turn, have reacted to such challenges. We are trying to understand how it was possible that austerity came to pass in spite of popular resistance by investigating in detail the contentious episodes that were triggered by the austerity packages proposed by European governments. As we shall see in the subsequent analyses, the Greek episode that we used to illustrate the interplay between challenger actions and government reactions is a rather extreme case with regard to the contentiousness of the challenge and the intensity of the interaction between the two main protagonists. However, it proves to be rather typical with respect to its outcome. Even in a case of a very intense challenge such as this one, where the government was heavily shaken by the mobilization of the challengers, the authorities ended up by imposing themselves. We shall try to make sense of the patterns of interaction by analyzing in detail the composition of the main protagonists, how they reacted to each other and the extent to which their reciprocal reactions depended on context conditions.

In focusing on the patterns of interaction that developed during the contentious episodes unleashed by the austerity proposals of European governments during the Great Recession, we believe that we can get a better understanding of what happened during this crucial period of European politics. We already know that the crisis has been particularly deep in southern Europe, where it led to a wave of public economic protest against the government austerity programs, while protest remained much more limited in northwestern and central-eastern Europe (Kriesi et al. 2020). We also know that the southern European party systems have been profoundly transformed by the electoral consequences of the Great Recession, while the party systems in the other two European regions have been more resistant to change (Hutter et al. 2019). However, our knowledge is based on a comparative-static analysis and we have little understanding about the processes that have shaped the waves of protest and the electoral outcomes. It is the ambition of the present study to dig deeper into the dynamics of these processes in order to show the mechanisms that have been driving the different outcomes at the macro-level in the three European regions.

We have selected twelve countries to study the patterns of interaction underlying the macro-level outcomes – four countries each from the three regions of Europe: France, Germany, Ireland and the UK in northwestern Europe; Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain in southern Europe; and Hungary, Latvia, Poland and Romania in central-eastern Europe. In this selection we find several countries which have been particularly hard hit by the Great Recession, but there also countries such as Germany or Poland which have gotten much better through the crisis. For each country we study four austerity packages which have been introduced by the respective governments during the Great

Recession. For comparative purposes, we also include an institutional reform proposal for each country in our study. From the perspective adopted here, the austerity proposals (and possibly also the institutional reform proposals) of the governments constitute ‘proposals at risk’ which are likely to be challenged by some actors mobilizing in the name of aggrieved groups in society. However, not all such proposals have been challenged and not all of them have been challenged to the same extent. We shall not only describe how, by whom and to what extent the different proposals have been challenged, but also try to account for the differences in the contentiousness of the challenges and their outcomes.

For this study, we develop what we call the ‘Contentious Episodes Analysis’ (CEA), a novel approach to the study of ‘contentious episodes’, which aims at a more systematic analysis of the dynamics of interaction in such episodes. In this chapter, we shall introduce the broad outlines of our new approach, which is situated at the ‘middle ground’ between the encompassing chronology of the episode, reproduced in narratives, and the micro-level of the events, reproduced in simple event counts. We first provide some arguments why we have chosen to study the middle ground. Then we proceed to introduce the conceptual building blocks of our approach. Finally, we provide a brief summary and an overview over the contents of the present volume.

Why and how to study ‘the middle ground’?

In his book on contentious performances, Charles Tilly (2008: 206) proposed to distinguish between *three levels of analysis* for studying contentious performances – the encompassing level of the episode (what he called the ‘narrative’), the micro-level of the event (what he called ‘epidemiology’) and the close description of successive interactions within contentious episodes (what he called ‘the middle ground’). He advocated the study at the middle ground, and suggested that from this level, we can move to either one of the other levels, but also in a third direction –

toward analytic sequences transcending any particular episode, but identifying recurrent actions and relations. In this third vein, Tilly himself had aggregated verb categories (e.g. ‘attack’, ‘control’, ‘bargain’) when comparing sets of episodes and then showed which sets of relations among claimants and objects of claims prevailed with different verb categories.

The ‘narrative’ approach is the conventional story telling of historians, where explanation takes the form of ‘an unfolding open-ended story fraught with conjunctures and contingency, where what happens, an action, in fact happens because of its order and position in the story’ (Griffin 1993: 1099). By contrast, the ‘epidemiological’ approach relies on conventional protest event analysis. For this approach, the individual event constitutes the unit of analysis. According to this approach, we can describe an episode in terms of its aggregate *event* characteristics (e.g. the number of protest events in an episode, the number of events produced by different types of challengers) as well as in terms of the dynamic development of events over time (e.g. the weekly counts of protest events). The ‘middle ground,’ by contrast, focuses on the *interactions between challengers and authorities*.

Most notably, this middle ground has been the focus of the programmatic *Dynamics of Contention* (DoC) (McAdam et al. 2001). The goals of this seminal study were manifold. Amongst others, it aimed to (a) overcome the prevailing static approaches in social movement studies, (b) extend the field of study to include other types of actors, (c) introduce a new language to describe/reconstruct processes of contentious politics and (d) explore the black-box between independent and dependent variables, i.e. to identify the mechanisms connecting the two. Reflecting on the book’s impact ten years later, its authors (McAdam and Tarrow 2011) self-critically observed that they might have been trying to do too many things, that they had invoked too many mechanisms too casually[2], that they had been too indifferent to measurement, and that theirs had still been a state-centric bias. We might add, most importantly, that they failed to provide a framework for the systematic study of interactions across a set of contentious episodes.

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[2] Lichbach (2005: 228) has already pointed to the key problem of the introduction of mechanisms – multiplicity. As an antidote he proposed to embed causal mechanisms in theories and evaluate the mechanism by using stylized facts and historical narratives. He argued that generating mechanisms is easy, but locating them is not. In his view, the real challenge is to embed mechanisms in larger and more organized structures of knowledge so as to deepen our understanding of interesting and important causal processes (Lichbach 2005: 233f).

Building on DoC, our goal is to further explore the ‘middle ground’. We do so because we share Tilly’s (2008: 21) view that this level of analysis offers the ‘opportunity to look inside contentious performances and discern their dynamics’ without losing the opportunity to systematically analyze these dynamics. In other words, we suggest that contentious episode analysis (CEA) holds out the promise to go beyond the narrative approach by infusing it with the rigor and explicitness of protest event analysis (PEA), without losing its dynamic quality. At the same time, CEA aims to move beyond a narrow focus on protest activities by challengers (as in PEA-based research). In this it follows political claims-analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999).

In addressing the middle ground, the challenge is to provide an analytical approach to the study of the dynamics of contention that allows for the systematic comparative analysis of causal patterns across single narratives. Instead of comparing entire narratives (as in sequence analysis), the strategy we propose in CEA is to break down the narratives into their component elements. This is in line with DoC, which insisted on the analysis of smaller-scale causal mechanisms that could then be concatenated into broader processes. McAdam et al. (2001: 24) defined *mechanisms* as ‘a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations.’ For our purposes, we translate ‘events’ into ‘actions’ and ‘elements’ into ‘actors’ (individual or collective actors). That is, we propose to narrow down the range of mechanisms[3] and focus on actions that have an impact on the relations among specified sets of actors.

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[3] Though other types of mechanisms proposed by DoC, such as contextual or dispositional ones, are no less important elements of the overall conceptual repertoire of contention, we restrict our study to mechanisms that directly imply interaction between political actors.

Generally, the goal of CEA is to specify the concepts of DoC in such a way that they can be applied to systematic comparative analyses across episodes[4]. Before introducing the building blocks of the proposed CEA in more detail let us highlight three more general points: First, in conceptual terms, CEA privileges the interaction between governments and their challengers. While this focus allows us to move away from the 'starkly Ptolemaic view of social movements' that puts movements at the center of the political universe (McAdam and Boudet 2012), it keeps the state-centric perspective of DoC and its inherent limitations. It does so by largely drawing on the political process model which has since long argued that social movements are sustained interactions between challengers and powerholders (Tilly 1978). In this perspective, challengers' actions can only be understood in relation to the actions by authorities. Relatedly, we shall only allow for a rather reductionist conceptualization of other participants in the episodes, and we shall limit the possible action repertoires of the various actors, too. In other words, there is a price to be paid for the systematic approach we propose here. In a way, the ontology we propose is rather 'flat.' That is, in line with the tradition of social movement research inaugurated by Tilly (1978), CEA adopts a structural-relational perspective focusing on interactions between challengers and authorities neglecting other components of the mobilization process, in particular, the subjective dimension of contentious politics including processes of framing, the construction of collective identities, emotions, motivations, beliefs and values. While focusing on interactions, CEA is distinguished from relational accounts of social movements focused on dynamics of interactions within social movements, that is, on interactions among challengers (see Diani 2015), thus excluding the analysis of groups, or "catnets" (Tilly 1978). In contrast, CEA aims to build the sequence of interactions within an episode by considering the actions by several types of actors – challengers as well as authorities and third parties, and it proposes a fairly parsimonious conceptualization of the action component which it focuses on.

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[4] In this respect, our approach differs from the one chosen by Griffin (1993), who relied on 'event structure analysis,' a procedure developed by Heise (1989) that allows reconstructing the causal structure of the narrative about an *individual* episode – in his case a lynching episode that took place in Mississippi in 1930.

Second, some details of the suggested approach are tailored to the example which we shall study here – 60 contentious episodes that have taken place in Europe in the course of the great financial and economic crises that shook the continent from 2008-2015. However, we would like to insist that the approach is more flexible than it might seem at first sight. It is, for example, not restricted to interactions between the government and its challengers in the public arena. The type of arena and the type of actors studied may vary. For example, one might study the interactions between challengers and other types of authorities – like supranational or local political authorities, churches, business corporations, or media – or focus on the interactions between movements and counter-movements. What we would suggest though is that one cannot do all these possible applications at the same time. In order to keep any analysis manageable, we have to make choices depending on the specific research questions.

As with classical PEA, we think that this flexibility might also be a major strength of the approach (see Beissinger 2002: 460f.). That is, CEA provides a common conceptual language and general guidelines for data collection and analysis, but ultimately researchers can and should adapt it to the specific research questions at stake. In our study, we ask questions about the variety of contention related to economic and institutional reforms in the Great Recession with regard to the intensity of conflict, the actors involved, the configurations of actor coalitions, their action repertoires, as well as the outcome of the episodes. In addition, we ask about patterns of interaction in the course of the episodes – interactions between the two main contestants, government and challengers, and between each one of them and potential third parties. We are also interested in identifying critical moments in an episode that decisively redirect the sequences of actions from one state of interaction dynamics to another.

Finally, let us point out that it is possible and, indeed, necessary to complement the bare bones of an analysis based on the CEA framework we propose here with narratives (or process tracing) in order to get a more complete account of the dynamics of contention in the episodes in question. We would maintain that the skeleton of the structural-relational analysis we propose here will make it easier to put flesh on the bare bones in order to get to a full understanding of the episodes one is studying and to systematically compare the various cases. However, it does only complement but not replace a more qualitative and in-depth analysis.

The conceptual building blocks of the contentious episode analysis

Our conceptualization of 'contentious episodes' follows the tradition of DoC (McAdam et al. 2001), but we have adapted it to our specific purposes. Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly (2001: 5) defined *contentious politics* as

> 'episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants'

They defined episodes as 'continuous streams of contention including collective claims making that bears on other parties' interests' (p. 24). More than a decade later, Tilly and Tarrow (2015: 7) reiterated and clarified the notion of contentious politics:

> '[c]ontentious politics involves interactions in which actors make claims bearing on other actors' interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties. Contentious politics thus brings together three familiar features of social life: contention, collective action, and politics.'

For Tilly and Tarrow contentious claims making becomes political when the interaction involves agents of governments. Closely following these conceptions, but simplifying them, we define a *contentious episode* as a 'continuous stream of interactions regarding policy-specific proposals between the government and its challengers, involving also some other actors'. In other words, for us, the key defining element of a contentious episode is the *dyadic interaction* between two stylized types of actors – the government and its challengers – each making claims on behalf of its own interests and/or on behalf of some other actors[5]. Consequently, CEA examines the sequence of political claim-making by different actors within broader episodes. In doing this, it goes beyond political claim-making analysis (as for example proposed by Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham 1999). Political claim-making analysis indeed overcomes some problems related to PEA (protest event analysis), to the degree that it includes the investigation of political demands regardless of their form in which they are made and regardless of the nature of the actor (Koopmans et al. 2005: 254). However, the innovation of CEA lies in conceiving political claims within a sequence of ordered interactions - something which is missing from claim-making analysis used in prior studies - thus enabling to fully engage in making inferences on causality, and disentangle the mechanisms at work in interactions.

In the specific cases we study, the *government* is initiating the contentious episode by introducing a policy proposal into the public debate. Naturally, in the overall universe of cases, not all episodes need to be initiated by the government but our chosen focus on a subset of such episodes, namely *policy episodes*, entails that governments are the first movers. The *challenger* is an actor who opposes this proposal by means of 'contentious performances' and other public claims-making. A general account of such 'contentious performances' should in theory allow for protest actions on behalf of the government, but in our selected cases of *policy episodes* this is rather unlikely, and we have in fact identified no such actions to warrant this concern.

In addition to the government and the challengers, we introduce a third set of stylized actors who contribute to the sequence of interactions constituting the episodes – a heterogeneous category of *'third parties.'* Under this category, we aggregate all the other participants in the episode who intervene on behalf of either the government or the challengers or who try to mediate between the two without being a member of any one of the two camps that oppose each other in the contentious episode. The main reason for this simplification is that we are mainly interested in their relationships with the two main protagonists but not in the detailed relations between the various types of 'third parties'.[6] Also, an important caveat for our definition for third parties above is that their role in a particular episode stays more or less unchanged. If an actor starts out as mediator but later gets directly involved in contentious challenges, we regard them as a challenger actor for the purposes of that particular episode.

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[5] Similarly, Ermakoff (2015: 96f.) distinguishes between two general 'stakeholders' – challengers and target actors (the target of the challenge), and Biggs (2002) distinguishes between labor and capital, or workers and employers.

Our conceptualization of the main actors in the contentious episode is closely related to the arena concept of Myra Ferree et al. (2002). We include all actors who are actively engaged in the conflict in the public sphere, but exclude mere bystanders who do not get involved and who constitute the audience of the actors engaged in the public arena. Our framework does not include the public as a specific actor either[7], but it does not exclude the addition of the public as a fourth actor depending on the research question one might have. We do not include it for the time being to keep the framework as parsimonious as possible.

Episodes then are composed of single *actions* by one of the three stylized actors interacting with the other actors. In protest event analysis, each action of the challenger constitutes an *event*. We shall use the term 'action' for individual components of episodes. These actions are typically triggered by previous actions of some other participants in the episode. We call a *sequence* a series of actions in which each component action is triggered by a previous action. In adopting this terminology, we follow Tilly (2008: 10), who characterizes episodes very broadly as 'bounded sequences of continuous interaction'. The focal properties of sequences are order and convergence (Abbott 1983:

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[6] In the real world, the boundary between the two camps and 'third parties' is sometimes difficult to draw, because members of either camp may distance themselves from their home turf during the episode-specific controversy, trying to operate rather as a 'third party'.

[7] In specific instances, the general public is included in the analysis when there is a particular action that is attributable to it with the referendum on Brexit being a prominent example.

133). Order is crucial ‘for if the order of the sequence has no effect on its future development, there is no need to worry about sequences at all’. Convergence refers to the end point of a sequence and is one possibility for a sequence to end among others (oscillation or divergence being possible alternatives).

Sequences can be of different length. They may range from short exchanges of verbal statements to a sustained series of interactions between the three types of stylized actors as in the case of the mid-term adjustment program with which we initiated this chapter. It is possible that an episode consists of a single sequence of interactions of variable length. More likely, however, an episode is composed of a set of sequences. These sequences may be triggered at different points during the episode, by successive actions of the protagonists.

As Tilly (2008: 10) suggests, ‘cutting the big streams into episodes’ will usually allow us to get a better grip on the cause-effect dynamics. The question is, of course, how to cut. As already pointed out, we let an episode start at the moment when the government publicly announces the policy proposal that constitutes the focal point of the episode. This implies that the government is the first mover in our type of crisis episodes and the challengers are in a situation, where they can only react to the government’s proposal. This situation is radically different from one where the challengers propose a reform, and proactively attempt to put it on the agenda and implement it against the opposition of the government (Walgrave and Vliegenthart 2012). There is nothing in CEA that prevents its application to this different kind of situation, however. Episodes can have different types of starting points, depending on the dynamics to be analyzed.

Episodes may also end in various ways. Our types of episodes end in one of two ways. They typically end with the formal adoption of the (possibly modified) proposal by the government. The episode of the mid-term adjustment program illustrates this type of ending. Alternatively, if the challenger continues to mobilize after the formal adoption of the proposal, the episode may end when the continuous stream of interactions between the government and its challenger related to the proposal breaks off.[8]

As already stated, the focus on the actions by the different actors does not come at the expense of focusing on *mechanisms*. However, it does clearly narrow down the type of mechanism under scrutiny. As highlighted, in CEA, we focus on mechanisms involving specific types of action undertaken by specific actors. For example, brokerage – a key mechanism introduced in DoC – is an action of a third party that mediates between two contestants, which might change their relationship (into a more cooperative direction). Repression, to take another example, is an action by an actor that may trigger a violent reaction by its target, which would be a sign of the further deterioration of the relationship between the perpetrator and the target actor. In the way we conceive of mechanisms, they correspond to specific sets of interactions that concatenate into processes, i.e. longer sequences of interactions.

To be sure, there are mechanisms that are not reducible to actions, e.g. category formation, identity shifts or social appropriation. However, the focus of CEA on actions allows introducing a more rigorous treatment of mechanisms and processes, while remaining close to the general spirit of DoC. Note that this contrasts with Alimi et al. (2012), who reduce the concept of mechanisms to the effects they produce and who subsequently apply it to narratives in a rather loose sense. Instead, we prefer to stay closer to the original understanding of DoC, but to specify mechanisms in such a way that they become operable for quantitative analyses.

In addition, we shall also rely on environmental mechanisms. They come into play once we introduce context characteristics that condition the interaction dynamics between the key actors (see Chapter 4). However, we largely neglect cognitive mechanisms. Our approach gives short shrift to the fact that politicians may be influenced by social movements in formulating their policy proposals, that they might anticipate movement protest, or that they might test policy before formal announcements in order to come up with a proposal that will find broad acceptance. Our action-centered approach comes at the cost of neglecting beliefs and expectations. CEA is focused only on actions, the interrelationship between actions, and the patterning of these interrelationships. While it is true that a lot of what takes place within contentious episodes has to do with people's expectations and beliefs (not to mention emotions), our approach strips these considerations out of the equation in a way that the case study method does not. We concede this important point, but we would like to suggest that it is possible to use CEA to reconstruct the rough outlines of a given episode which are then taken as the starting point for a more detailed account of the development of this particular episode. We shall provide an example of this possible extension of our approach in Chapter 13, where we present the Greek episodes in more detail.

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[8] As a rule of thumb, we use a period of two months for assessing whether the interactions related to the proposal have indeed come to a halt before we can declare the episode to have ended.

Actors

According to our conceptualization, the *government* includes all public authorities linked to the government, i.e. the head of government and other members of the cabinet as well as all national public officials. These actors are proposing the policy change. Usually, the political parties of the governing coalition are also part of the stylized government. In some cases, however, a party of the governing coalition may be divided on the proposal and this division may have relevant repercussions on the overall conflict. In these cases, the dissenting voices from the governing party may be coded as third parties or even as part of the challenger coalition.

The *challenger* includes all actors who oppose the government's proposal at least partly outside the routine, institutionalized arenas of interest articulation by means of sustained and coordinated collective action, possibly *on behalf of* other opposing groups. Note that this definition follows the general approach in social movement research and excludes actors who voice their opposition only in routine ways in institutionalized channels, such as the national parliaments or tripartite bodies of interest representation (these actors are considered third parties). The challenger in a given episode can be (a) an individual organization – non-mainstream parties (such as a populist parties), mainstream opposition parties, public interest groups (NGOs), unions, social movement organizations (SMOs) – or representatives of such organizations, (b) a social movement, i.e. a coalition of organizations or dense informal inter-organizational networks *with* a strong identity, or their representatives, or (c) a conflict coalition or alliance, i.e. a network of organizations *without* a strong identity (see Diani and Bison 2004). Empirically, CEA can discern social movement dynamics from coalitional dynamics with no identity, given that the former involves sequences of sustained interactions within an episode (sustained interactions are the basis for the development of strong collective identities), while the latter relies on more contingent and less durable sequences of interactions.

All components of 'the challenger' share the opposition to the government's proposal, but given that the proposal may be a package that includes diverse policy measures, they need not necessarily pursue the same targets, nor may they be part of the same coordinated effort to oppose the proposal. In other words, they form an 'objective coalition' against the government (in the sense that they all oppose the same package of proposals), but not necessarily a 'subjective' one (since they do not necessarily coordinate their efforts in one and the same collective action).

The challenger opposes the government by striving for the 'expansion of conflict' to an ever larger public (Schattschneider 1975), i.e. it seeks to politicize the proposal by drawing the public's attention to the proposal (i.e. to render it more salient), by mobilizing public resistance against it (i.e. to polarize public opinion on the proposal), and by expanding the number of actors opposed to it (see Hutter et al. 2016). Public claims-making is designed to unleash a public debate, to draw the attention of the public to the grievances of the actors in question, to create controversy where there was none, and to obtain the support of the public for the actors' concerns. Controversial public debates and support by the general public are expected to open up access and increase the legitimacy of speakers and allies of the challenger with journalists and with decision-makers who tend to closely follow the public debates (Gamson and Meyer 1996: 288).

As already observed, *third parties* include all the other participants in the episode who intervene on behalf of either the government or the challengers or who try to mediate between the two without being a member of any one of the two camps. Just like challengers, third parties can cover a highly diverse group of actors in terms of their institutional characteristics: they can be supranational actors, foreign governments, independent regulatory state agencies, opposition parties or even government coalition members.

As we alluded to above, we can treat the two adversaries and the third parties as unitary actors, but we can also distinguish the actors within the adversarial coalitions according to their *institutional characteristics*. The institutional taxonomy of actors will depend on the specific episodes. In our study, we coded a very large number of institutional actor types that we inductively reduced to more limited sets of actors. Chapter 6 will introduce more details in this respect.

The action repertoires

The contentious politics scholars have focused their attention on the action repertoires. As Tilly and Tarrow (2015: 39; *emphasis in the original*) advise: ‘We can learn a lot from what activists say or later write about their activities. […] We will learn more by examining what activists *do* during major episodes of contention.’ Following this advice, we focus on the action component of the series of interactions constituting the episode. In following this approach, we suggest that the main problem of DoC is not so much the multiplicity of mechanisms it introduced, but the fact that it too easily dropped the fine-grained analysis of single actions. As a result, the set of mechanisms it introduced was rather unsystematic. We argue that one needs to first focus on the level of the single action before one can systematically start to combine them into more complex sequences.

We conceptualize the action repertoire separately for each one of the three stylized actors. Importantly, we suggest that the action repertoire of each one of them has two dimensions – a procedural and a substantive one, i.e. an actor can relate to another actor in procedural and in substantive terms. The *procedural* dimension refers to the relationship between two actors. This can range from conflictive to cooperative. The *substantive* dimension refers to the substance of the actors' claims which they address to each other. It can range from support to rejection of the government's proposal. In our proposed toolbox, each actor type has a specific action repertoire in terms of both dimensions. *Table 1* presents an overview.

Table 1: Detailed action repertoires of the three actor types

	government	**challenger**	**third party**
substantive			
support of proposal	sticking	cooperation	support of government
rejection of proposal	concession	disruptive/non-disruptive action	support of challenger
procedural			
conflictive	repression	disruptive/non-disruptive action	support of government/challenger
cooperative	concession	cooperation	mediation

In the stylized world of CEA, each actor has three basic options. Once the proposal has been launched and challengers have reacted, the government's three options are repression, concessions (in procedural and substantive terms), and sticking to its policy. Tilly (1978) had originally also distinguished between three options (all conceived in procedural terms) – repression, facilitation, and toleration. Toleration was defined as a residual category in between repression and facilitation that included inaction or disregard of protest. More recently, the term 'toleration' has been criticized for its vagueness and value-laden implications (acceptance of the challenge). In her analysis of Egyptian protest against the Mubarak regime, Dina Bishara (2015) proposed to replace it by the term ‘ignoring’, which ranges from passive to actively dismissive responses, and suggests that severe forms of ignoring can fuel protest by provoking moral outrage and indignation. Samson Yuen and Edmund Cheng (2017), analysing the umbrella protest in Hong Kong, introduced yet another concept for government reactions to protest that lie between repression and concession – attrition. In this case, toleration is only ostensible, while the government actually ‘uses a proactive action repertoire to discredit, wear out and increase the costs of protest’ (p. 613). The proactive action repertoire in the case of the Chinese authorities in Hong Kong included maintaining elite cohesion, mobilizing counter-movements and using the courts for legal action against the protestors. From our perspective, both depreciating statements about the protestors by the Egyptian authorities and the more indirect proactive repertoire used by the Chinese authorities to counter the protests by challenging movements are all procedural reactions that would qualify as repression in the broader sense of the term. As a third category between repression and concession, we propose instead the term ‘sticking to the policy proposal’, which means that the government reaffirms its support of the policy in substantive terms. This is, of course, equivalent to ‘ignoring’ the protests and may have the effect of attrition as well, but it does not include proactive attempts to undermine the effectiveness of protest by dismissive statements or further going acts of surveillance and under cover repression.

The *challengers* react to the kind of proposals we study in our research. The *challengers* have first to decide whether they want to react at all. Given that the government proactively pursues policy reform, the challengers are in a situation where they can only react by rejecting the government’s proposal in one way or another. That is, in our episodes we are dealing with threat-induced challenges. As argued by Almeida (2007: 125) against the background of the Latin American experience, ‘economic austerity policies (e.g. fuel price hikes, privatization of a public service or utility) that are expected to make popular sectors worse off if implemented are likely to set in motion defensive mobilization that focuses attention on the government and state managers’. To put it differently, the challengers in our episodes constitute ‘movements of crises’ (see Kerbo 1982), which attempt to fend off threatening policy measures. Threat is the cost that protestors will incur regardless of whether they act or not (Goldstone and Tilly 2001).

We assume that the challengers act rationally and that they adopt strategies that they expect to have the greatest chances of success at the lowest costs. Conventional politics is usually less costly than protest politics (Cunningham 2013: 293), but the costs of the threat posed by the government's proposal may be sufficiently high to induce the challengers to act outside of conventional politics. Once the challengers have decided to act, they also have basically three options for action during the episode: they can launch a disruptive challenge or a non-disruptive challenge (both in procedural and substantive terms) or they can cooperate (in the further course of the episode) with the government. Following the lead of claims-making analysis, we extend the kind of communicative acts of challengers that we include in the analysis beyond protest events (see Koopmans and Statham 1999, 2010: 54f.): non-disruptive actions such as verbal claims are included in the challengers' action repertoire as well. We distinguish non-disruptive from disruptive actions based on the extent to which they are conventional and institutionalized.

Finally, the three strategic choices of *third parties* include (a) siding (in substantive or procedural terms) with the government or (b) with the challengers or (c) attempting to mediate (in procedural terms) between the two. As already pointed out, we are not interested in the relationship between the third parties among themselves and we do not code neutral positions of third parties unless they proactively engage in mediation between the opposing actors. In general, we expect that third parties are more likely to react in substantive terms, i.e. to participate in the debate on the proposal without entering into a debate about the mobilization process. Third parties that engage in favor of a given camp both in substantive and procedural terms can be considered to be stronger allies than those who engage in substantive terms only.

Building on the action repertoire of the actors involved in an episode, we shall propose a summary measure of the *contentiousness* of each episode. The three stylized types of actors contribute each to the contentiousness of an episode to the extent that they interact with each other and to the extent that their actions are disruptive (challengers), repressive (government) or one-sided (third parties).

Sequences

The different types of actions constitute the building blocks for the construction of the sequences within an episode. Recall that we define a sequence as a series of actions in which each component is triggered by a previous action, that is, the actions in a sequence are explicitly linked to each other. Sequences have properties of their own, which can be studied in descriptive and explanatory terms. Sequence analysis occupies a well-established place among social science methodologies. The most prominent approach to study sequences rests on some assumptions that CEA does not fulfill, however. Moreover, this approach takes the whole sequence as the unit of analysis and attempts to find clusters of similar sequences, a goal that CEA does not try to pursue (see Chapter 7 for more details). Instead, CEA is interested in the overall sequence structure of an episode and in the dynamics of the sequences across episodes.

We shall analyze the overall sequence structure of entire episodes in temporal terms (referring to the duration and pace of the sequences), and in relational terms (referring to their length, breadth and overall complexity). This will allow us to get a first idea of the basic structural properties of the episodes and their determinants. In addition, the reconstruction of the sequence structure also allows us to identify specific important points in the development of the episodes, such as turning points. Turning points can be defined in two different ways. An action may be a turning point in the sense that it leads to a certain closure of the interaction process by closing alternatives and focusing the interaction on a single thread. Both Abbott (2001) and Ermakoff (2015) define turning points as closing points. But an action may also be a turning point in the sense that it opens up the interaction process by giving rise to a multiplicity of reactions of some consequence, i.e. reactions each of which in turn trigger a series of further actions.

Based on the chronological order of the sequences we shall analyze their interaction dynamics with the aim to uncover general mechanisms that characterize the episodes triggered by austerity policies in the Great Recession. The gist of the interaction dynamics within an episode lies in the interdependence of the three types of actors. As Beissinger (2011: 27) has observed, 'one of the defining features of mobilization – and its greatest challenge for causal explanation – is the high degree of inter-dependence of the actions and reactions involved, both within and across episodes of mobilization. While not a feature characteristic of mobilization alone, it figures so centrally in contentious politics that it is difficult to explain any protest episode without fundamentally addressing this issue'. Our approach assumes that the actors involved act *retrospectively*, i.e. they react to the actions of the other actors (see Moore 2000: 121).

The most elementary sequence is a *pair* of consecutive actions. We shall focus on pairs of actions which are chronologically following upon each other within a sequence, one being the trigger of the other. For example, we shall study the reactions of the government to disruptive actions of the challengers. Even with only three types of stylized actors and a limited action repertoire of three stylized actions per actor, there are multiple patterns of possible interactions in any such pair of actions. In the example, the government can react in three ways to the disruptive challenger action, and one of the possible three pairs would be disruptive challenger action followed by government repression. Importantly, we shall generalize the approach based on pairs in two ways. First, we shall relax the restriction that the action triggering a given reaction need to immediately precede the reaction in question, i.e. we shall allow for actions that are chronologically preceding the reaction in question by variable steps in the chain of the action sequence to have an impact on the reaction in question as well. In the example of government reactions to disruptive actions by challengers, we shall study the governments' reaction to immediate challenger actions, but also to such actions that are further removed in the sequence. Second, instead of studying specific pairs, e.g. a disruptive challenger action followed by government repression, we can include in the analysis of the given type of reaction (e.g. government repression) any possible trigger (e.g. actions by third parties supporting the challengers, disruptive and non-disruptive actions by challengers) of the reaction in question. In other words, we can introduce the different action types of the three stylized actors into the multivariate analysis for the explanation of a given reaction at one and the same time. These extensions will allow us to come up with a more detailed account of the interaction patterns in the various episodes.

Conclusion and overview over the volume

In this introductory chapter, we introduced a set of concepts and general guidelines of what we call contentious episode analysis (CEA). In the footsteps of Dynamics of Contention (DoC), we are attempting to develop a conceptual framework which improves upon the concepts originally introduced by McAdam et al. (2001) and which allows us to study contentious episodes more systematically, in a non-narrative mode. Our analytical strategy is similar to that of DoC, i.e. we also propose to decompose the episodes into their component elements – actors, actions, sequences of actions, pairs of actions – that can then be recombined in a systematic way to account for specific processes in the dynamics of contention. We suggest that CEA holds out the promise to go beyond the narrative approach by infusing it with the rigor and explicitness of PEA, without losing its dynamic quality. At the same time, CEA aims to move beyond a narrow focus on protest activities by challengers (as typically done in PEA-based research) by incorporating into the analysis a broader set of action repertoires by a broader set of actors (as is typically done in claims-analysis). In addressing the middle ground favored by Charles Tilly, we apply an analytical approach to the study of the dynamics of contention that allows for the systematic comparative analysis of causal patterns across individual narratives. We hope that the toolkit we introduce here will allow for a more systematic analysis of a wide variety of questions linked to the DoC.

In the subsequent chapters of this volume we shall elaborate these concepts in more detail and show how they can be operationalized and implemented in the analysis of specific questions. The volume is divided into three parts. In the remainder of the first part, we shall first present the methods we used to collect our data as well as the context conditions of the 60 episodes we study in this volume. In Chapter 2, we set out how we selected the 60 episodes and how we documented them. As for their selection, it is important to note that we tried not to select on the dependent variable, i.e. our selection procedure is not based on whether or not there was a serious challenge to the government's proposal. The documentation of the episodes involved the selection of articles in national quality newspapers and the manual coding of these articles. Chapter 3 briefly presents the policy proposals that gave rise to our 60 episodes, while Chapter 4 puts them into their economic and political context. Chapter 3 introduces five episode types and shows that these types systematically differ with regard to the severity of the measures they intend to impose. The measures' severity, in turn, is shown to be heavily dependent on the problem pressure to which the country was exposed at the time the proposals were introduced. Chapter 4 clarifies that the actual decline in economic performance was much more strongly and sharply felt in the South than in the other two parts of Europe. Moreover, it shows that the governments in the hard-hit countries got under double political pressure – from without (from international agencies) and from within (from protest in the streets). In terms of the timing of the proposals, the Chapter finds that it has been closely related to both the development of the economic crises, and country-specific political considerations.

Part II elaborates the various key concepts, introduces their operationalization and presents results at the level of the episodes. It provides an overview over the varieties of contention that we observed during the Great Recession. Building on the action repertoires, Chapter 5 introduces the multi-dimensional concept of 'contentiousness', describes the contentiousness of the individual episodes in the different countries and provides a set of factors that contribute to the episodes' contentiousness. As it turns out, the Greek episodes (among them the midterm adjustment program that with which we introduced this introductory chapter) have been the most contentious of all. By contrast, the German episodes were the least contentious ones, which is, of course, not so surprising given that Germany got through the Great Recession better than any of the other countries in our study. Chapter 6 presents the actors who have been involved in the various episodes, and characterizes them in institutional terms. Among other things, we find that labor unions have been the most important challengers during the contentious episodes in the Great Recession. The chapter also analyzes the actor coalitions and configurations in the various episodes. Chapter 7 introduces the analysis of the sequences. It characterizes the episodes according to the temporal and relational structure of the sequences. The chapter describes the overall sequence structure of the various episodes and makes an attempt to explain it. Thus, the episode types introduced in Chapter 3 turn out to be the best predictor of the temporal sequence structure, with structural and institutional reforms being characterized by a slower pace than IMF bailouts, bank bailouts and fiscal measures. The greater pressure associated with the latter episodes leads to a more intensive pace of the interaction between the government and its challengers. Chapter 8 concludes part II with an analysis of the outcomes of the episodes. The results of this chapter show that there was very little government responsiveness to challenger actions. Only exceptionally, in the case of episodes proposing extremely severe measures, governments made some limited concessions to the challengers.

Part III presents various aspects of the dynamic interactions during the episodes. Chapter 9 sets the stage. It introduces the specific method we apply to study the dynamic interactions between the three actor types, and it tests some general hypotheses concerning their interactions. For all action forms of both adversaries, it finds strong evidence for path-dependence, with the pattern being somewhat stronger on the government side. By and large, government behavior appears to be independent of previous challenger actions. With respect to the impact of third parties, governments have a higher propensity to repress challengers when they are not supported by third parties. Most importantly, however, governments seem to honor mediation attempts with concessions. The analyses in this chapter do not take into account the context of the various episodes, however. It is the following two chapters that introduce context into the analysis: Chapter 10 focuses on the government's reactions to challengers, while Chapter 11 deals with the challengers' reaction to government repression. Both chapters indicate that context is very important. The results of these chapters are rather complex, and they tend to qualify the sweeping results of Chapter 9. Thus, the mediation effect which was uncovered in Chapter 9 appears to be limited to the least threatening episodes – the party-driven episodes, and even in these instances it has at best been marginal. By contrast, the intervention of international actors on behalf of either the government or the challengers tend to be more consequential, especially in party and movement-driven conflicts.

The last two empirical chapters adopt a somewhat different approach. Chapter 12 analyses the two types of turning points in more details and uses this concept to distinguish between different phases of the episodes – the opening phase, the main phase and the closing phase. It shows that the government is mostly responsible for the turning points, and that it dominates in the opening phase, while the challengers play a much bigger role in the main phase and, above all, in the closing phase. There are signs of escalation in the closing phase of the episodes. Chapter 13, finally, shifts gear once again and shows how CEA can be used in a more qualitative way to analyze a series of episodes that have taken place in one country. The case studied in this chapter is Greece, the country that stands out for the extreme contentiousness of the episodes unleashed by austerity packages during the Great Recession. It treats the contentious episodes of this country not as separate units of analysis as the rest of the chapters, but as parts of a larger campaign that unfolded during the years Greek politics was dominated by the bailout. This chapter uses the contentious episodes as a guide to build a narrative account of Greek contention during the age of the bailout.

The final chapter 14 concludes. It draws together the various threads of the empirical chapters and presents our own assessment of the novel approach for the study of political contention that we introduce with this volume.