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The Opportunity Structures and Cultural Schemas of Online Collective Action: The Case of China

Abstract

Recent scholarship on global internet-related protests emphasizes the role of digital networks and personal expression in online collective action. Highlighting a neglected dimension in current scholarship, we show the importance of conditions external to digital networks in the making of online collective action. Using cases from China, we develop a perspective that takes account of the external conditions without losing sight of agency. We identify four different political styles of online collective action in China and link them to five types of opportunities. We argue that online collective action manifests different political styles depending on the different types of opportunities and cultural schemas available to actors. Actors calibrate their modes of action to the structures of opportunity and constraints, such that when opportunity structures change, their modes of action may change accordingly.