

## SOCIAL AND SOLIDARY INCENTIVES

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Mancur Olson stated: “Rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests” (1965: 2). Since no one is excluded from the benefit brought about the achievement of public goods, individuals free ride and leave the costs of their production to others. Only *individual inducements*, that is “a separate and selective incentive will stimulate a rational individual [...] to act in a group-oriented way” (p.51). In Olson’s utilitarian theory, personal and instrumental incentives become the main motivator of actors’ participation in collective action.

One of Olson’s main contributions of is to have highlighted the difficulty of motivating participation in collective action. By raising awareness that an aggrieved population will not necessarily struggle to defend its common goods, scholars were forced to recognize that, rather than being an obvious phenomenon, collective action is an exception worthy of explanation. However, despite the beauty of a parsimonious explanation of the rational choice theory to explain why people participate, *Olson’s model fares poorly*. A wide range of studies emphasizes the virtual absence of instrumental incentives in motivating individuals to participate in collective action (e.g. Knoke 1988; Seyd and Whiteley 1992; Walsh and Warland 1983). Many scholars state that selective incentives are too narrowly focused to give an adequate account of why people join collective action (Clark and Wilson 1961 ; Moe 1980).

### Stretching a Concept

Since the explanation of collective action through instrumental is insufficient, scholars developed *alternative bases of motivation*. Clark and Wilson (1961) were among the first to expand Olson’s concept. Besides instrumental incentives, they added two other inducements: social and purposive incentives. Individuals are induced to join political parties because this brings them into contact with like-minded individuals, and because they thereby enable political parties to realize their policies and achieve their ideological goals.

Clark and Wilson’s work led to numerous studies that expanded the range of selective incentives. Concept stretching implied opening up the *Pandora’s box of human motives*. Thus, actors could be motivated either by purposive incentives (political goals), collective incentives (the value of the expected public good), social incentives (the expected reaction of others), solidarity incentives (searching for the company of like-minded individuals), identity incentives (searching for a community of people), or normative incentives (fairness and equity values). This non-exhaustive list of incentives defined a set of inducements that Opp (1985) nicely labeled “soft incentives”. Thus, besides instrumental

inducements, a set of soft incentives entered into play in explaining individuals' participation.

Two schools of thought should be distinguished among scholars who have expanded the concept of selective incentives: those remaining *within* the utilitarian paradigm, and those scholars developing soft incentives *outside* this theoretical framework. Both schools stress distinct social mechanisms. For scholars staying within the conceptual perimeter of the utilitarian paradigm, individuals mobilize because of personal rewards or coercion. For example, Opp (1988) emphasizes that social control of others incite individuals to contribute to contentious politics. For Chong (1992), individuals are induced to collaborate in collective action to enhance their reputation. The social mechanism at stake closely resembles Olson's explanation: *personal incentives* incite actors to join collective action. In contrast, for scholars who expand the concept outside the utilitarian paradigm, individuals mobilize because of: their identification to a group; the value of the public good; the potential success of collective action; or because of their personal norms. The social mechanisms are twofold. For some authors *collective incentives* induce participation (Clark and Wilson 1961; Klandermans 1997, Knoke 1988). Individuals are prone to participate because of the intrinsic value of the collective good, and not because they receive private and indivisible goods. Other scholars stress another social mechanism: *norm-oriented action* (e.g. Marwell and Arms 1979). Individuals' norms, such as fairness, solidarity, or equity induce them to participate in collective action.).

### **Social and Solidarity Incentives: Slippery Definitions**

Social and solidarity incentives belong to the family of soft incentives, designated as being either within or outside the utilitarian paradigm. How do we distinguish one from another? It is a difficult question since in the literature we are faced with *slippery definitions of those concepts*. Solidarity incentives include the idea of group attachment suggesting identification to a collective actor (Clark and Wilson 1961; Oliver 1984; Walsh and Warland 1983). Individuals are induced to participate because they identify with the collective actor, they share social ties with the group or, they are searching for the company of like-minded individuals. By contrast, social incentives involve various definitions. For some scholars, social incentives include emotional attachment, thus overlapping to a certain extent with the concept of solidarity (Knoke). For others, they refer to norms, such as fairness and equity (Marwell and Arms). For Klandermans, they mean an individual's expected reaction to others. For Opp, they mean individuals' integration into networks inspired by moral principles. In other studies social incentives comprise social and recreational activities offered to participants in return for contributing to a collective action (Knoke).

Solidarity and social incentives often overlap. However, the difficulty for both concepts, particularly for social incentives, lies with the various definitions endorsing them. Slippery definitions render comparison impossible, and also make them useless as heuristic tools for research. In addition, studies mobilizing Olson's concept of selective incentives face another important shortcoming: *selective incentives are no longer selective*. In revisionist models, incentives have become a catch-all concept, which has lost its explanatory power since any incentive explains why individuals participate in collective action. Thus Olson's model

is now devoid of its predictive strength (Green and Shapiro 1994). Expanding the concept has resulted in slippery predictions and post-hoc embellishments, a criticism that specifically concerns scholars who remain within the rational choice theory. They thus evade problematic evidence that utilitarian motives are not sufficient to explain collective action. For example, Moe adopts a contortionist posture to explain why the pursuit of collective goals is in itself a selective incentive: “if group policies reflect (individual’s) ideological, religious, or moral principles, [...] he may consider the free-rider option morally reprehensive”. (1980: 118). The same problem applies to Opp and Chong. Behind ‘moral duty’ and ‘reputation’ actually lies conformity to norms that explain why people promote common goods.

For scholars expanding the concept of incentives outside the rational choice theory, they use an inappropriate sociological terminology. In fact, they are discussing motives rather than incentives, that favor individuals’ mobilization. Attachment to a group, feelings of solidarity, or willingness to promote political goals are not incentives in the sense that the rational choice theory has elaborated as a concept. For those scholars it would be more fruitful to restrict their study within the concept of motives or “*raisons d’agir*” and try to specify why those motives do play a role. They need to emphasize what social mechanisms are at stake.

### **To Move from “The Logic of Collective Action” to Multiple Logics**

The stretching of the concept of incentives offers a clear finding: instrumental motives are, by far, not the only motives for participating in collective action. Multiple motives are what incite actors to join social and political movements. Whereas we started with *a* logic of collective action, the concept stretchers have introduced *other* logics, so that we now have to move on to the *multiple* logic of collective action (Sorber and Wilson 1998). Instrumental incentives could mobilize certain individuals to join a collective action. For example, actors could be tempted to support a group defending retired people by claiming higher reductions for them for entertainment activities. But many other motives bring actors to support collective action. For example, identification with a group and a feeling of solidarity induce actors to join collective action (Huddy 2001; Stryker et al. 2000). Ideological and moral concerns push several actors to mobilize (Goodwin et al. 2001; Passy and Monsch 2009). Moral expression by aggrieved people in order to attain dignity in their lives motivates certain actors to join protest movements. Those motives cannot be understood within a unique utilitarian perspective since they are grounded in different sociological logics that need to be clarified if we want to better understand why people participate in collective action. The utilitarian paradigm that gave birth to Olson’s *The Logic of Collective Action* relied on a monist conception of human motives that failed to understand actor’s mobilization. This monist conception led several scholars to stretch a concept in order to stay within this monist and universal understanding of human motives. Since solidarity, ideology, emotion and other motives favor activists’ action, we now need to move toward *a plural conception of human motives*. We certainly lose on explanatory parsimony, but certainly gain a better understanding of social reality.

**SeeAlso:** Consciousness, Conscience and Social Movements; Motivations and Types of Motivation; Rational Choice Theory; Selective Incentives; Solidarity and Movements

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