

Humans have constructed visions of a better world throughout history: in fact, social movement scholars argue that the history of humanity itself is a history of struggle. Some people want to change the world for what they think will be a better future, whilst others oppose them (sometimes because there is a genuine disagreement about what 'better' means, sometimes to defend their power and privilege). Protests can be thought of as rituals or 'technologies' which we can then analyse as signs of how human beings communicate their discontent with the current situation.

Some 'protest technologies' have existed throughout time: taking up arms to fight for what you believe in, or to defend a way of life. Some forms of resistance date back to the nineteenth century: the strike, the march, the petition, sabotage. More recently, social movements have used international networks and social media to create what some argue are new forms of protest.

This course surveys how geographers and others have theorised protest, resistance and other strategies for change through a range of theoretical approaches and case studies. As part of the course, students will analyse contemporary and historical social movements to question how protests (both from grassroots and elite groups) have affected the possibilities for social change. The course combines lectures (which give an introduction to specific topics such as different social movement theories), with participatory sessions (in which students work in small groups to explore in more detail the ways in which these theories can be applied to case studies).

Assessment is through two pieces of coursework. Firstly, an essay in which you analyse a social movement of your choice using the theoretical tools discussed during the course. The second assessment is a policy brief on a social movement, written in the style of a communication/briefing note to a government minister or NGO. This assignment will show us that you understand your movement, and are also able to write about its key features in a concise, 'snappy' and easily understandable way.

