

# Value-added Theory

Authored by  
**mohammad looti**

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Value-added theory (also known as social strain theory) was first proposed by Neil Smelser and is based on the assumption that certain conditions are needed for the development of a social movement. Smelser saw social movements as side-effects of rapid social change.

Smelser argued that six things were necessary and sufficient for collective behavior to emerge, and that social movement evolves through those relevant stages:

Structural conduciveness - the structure of the society (e.g. spatial proximity) must be such that certain protest actions become more likely. People must be aware of the problem and have the opportunity to act.

Structural strain - there must be a strain on society, caused by factors related to the structure of the current social system, such as inequality or injustice, and existing power holders are unable (or unwilling) to address the problem (see also relative deprivation).

Generalized belief - the problem should be clearly defined in a way that is agreed by and understood by the participants. See also: framing.

Precipitating factors - events that become the proverbial spark igniting the flame, in other words a political opportunity.

Mobilization for action - people need to have a network and organization allowing them to take a collective action, see also resource mobilization

Operation (failure) of social control - how the authorities react (or don't). High level of social control by the those in control of power (politicians, police) often makes it more difficult for social movement to act.

The concept of value added was used earlier in the economics, where it refers to the increasing value of product in progressing stages of production.

Critics of this theory note that it is too focused on the structural-functional approach and views all strains on society as disruptive.