Channeling Discontent: The Impact of Political Institutions on Patterns of Social Protest in Contemporary Latin America

Roberta Rice
Channeling Discontent: The Impact of Political Institutions on Patterns of Social Protest in Contemporary Latin America

Roberta Rice
Channeling Discontent:
The Impact of Political Institutions on Patterns of Social Protest in Contemporary Latin America

Roberta Rice
Research Paper Series No. 40  June 2003

Channeling Discontent:
The Impact of Political Institutions on Patterns
of Social Protest in Contemporary Latin America

Roberta Rice

© 2003 by Roberta Rice
The Latin American and Iberian Institute (LAII) at the University of New Mexico (UNM) is one of the nation's leading foreign language and area studies centers. The LAII is a federally designated Comprehensive National Resource Center for Latin American Language and Area Studies, and UNM is believed to offer more Latin American degree programs and courses than any other university in the country. More than 130 UNM faculty specializing in Latin American research and teaching are members of the Faculty Concilium on Latin America and are the primary constituency of the LAII.

The LAII's Research Paper Series, Occasional Paper Series, and NAFTA/Mercosur Working Paper Series provide refereed forums for the timely dissemination of research on Latin American topics. Authors also gain the benefits of comment and criticism from the larger research community if they intend to later submit their work to other publications.
Channeling Discontent:  
The Impact of Political Institutions on Patterns of Social Protest  
in Contemporary Latin America  
Roberta Rice, 2003  
Department of Political Science  
University of New Mexico  
rice@unm.edu

Abstract: This paper examines patterns of popular protest in contemporary Latin America largely in  
response to the region’s adoption of market reforms. The central question addressed is, why have social  
protests against neoliberal reforms emerged more in some countries than in others? And second, are there  
discernible patterns in the forms of social protest being undertaken? The research questions are addressed  
using a pooled cross-sectional time series analysis of domestic conflict in Latin America coupled with a  
qualitative comparative analysis of the patterns of protest in the member and associate member countries  
of Latin America’s most important trading bloc, the Common Market of the South (Mercosur; f.1991).  
The paper argues that it is the character of domestic political institutions which structures the nature,  
scope, and intensity of resistance to economic reform on the part of civil society. It is suggested that new  
social actors, who lack institutionalized channels of social representation, have come to the forefront of  
anti-neoliberal protests. Market reforms are found to have produced a shift in the pattern of social protest  
in Latin America, from institutionalized to non-institutionalized forms of social mobilization.

The imposition of neoliberal economic reforms in Latin America has fundamentally  
altered the political landscape of the region. The disarticulation of traditional class-based  
collective action and the crisis of the political Left in Latin America have created a void in  
popular sector interest representation. A more heterogeneous and informal workforce is  
said to have diminished the strength of organized labor and reduced civil society’s capacity  
for collective action (see Baño 1993; Murillo 2001; Oxhorn & Ducatenzeiler 1999; Roberts 1996). However, a closer examination of the regional record reveals that new,  
non-institutionalized forms of social mobilization against neoliberal reforms have emerged  
in certain national contexts. This study employs a pooled cross-sectional time series  
analysis of domestic conflict in Latin America coupled with a qualitative comparative  
analysis of the patterns of protest in the member and associate member countries of Latin  
America’s most important trading bloc, the Common Market of the South (Mercosur;
The central question addressed by the paper is, why have social protests against neoliberal reforms emerged more in some countries than in others? And second, are there discernible patterns in the forms of social protest being undertaken in the region today?

The paper contends that it is the character of domestic political institutions, particularly the degree of party system institutionalization, which structures the nature, scope, and intensity of resistance to economic reform on the part of civil society. The central argument is that well institutionalized party systems, such as in Chile and Uruguay, are better able to address the demands of the popular sectors through electoral and legislative means, thereby dampening conflict. Conversely, weakly institutionalized party systems, such as in Bolivia and Brazil, are unable to channel popular sector demands to the state, thereby producing a situation of radical mobilization against unpopular reforms. Political party systems which fall between the two extremes of the institutionalized and inchoate party systems, such as in Argentina and Paraguay, tend to produce a mixed or intermediate degree of social protest. A more nuanced account of these case studies reveals that even within the more institutionalized party systems, the excluded or marginalized sectors of the polity tend to be those groups which protest against market reforms. Similarly, within the less institutionalized party systems, those groups which have been able to establish or maintain institutional channels to express their grievances have tended to be far less mobilizational than those whose interests remain unrepresented within the political system.

The theoretical approach adopted by the paper is that of the new institutionalism. This school of thought suggests that institutions are independent variables capable of
shaping political outcomes (March & Olsen 1989; Rothstein 1996). Institutions are said to create incentives for social actors to behave in certain ways through the way in which they structure the rules of the game. Party systems can play an important role in determining whether social discontent is channeled into the political system or is directed against the legitimacy of that system. According to Mainwaring and Scully, “[i]nstitutionalized party systems help groups express their interests while allowing governments to govern. They select, aggregate, and help absorb social cleavages. They channel political demands and can dampen political conflicts” (1995, 23). In the absence of institutionalized channels of social representation, frustrated social actors must resort to pressuring for change from outside the formal political system. This paper examines the notion that institutionalized party systems have a dampening effect on social protest using the case of contemporary Latin America. A new institutionalist perspective applied to the study of popular protest in Latin America offers important insights into the constraints and opportunities for new social actors to be incorporated into the polity.

The paper begins with a large-N statistical analysis of the factors which account for the varying levels of social protest found in Latin America. Institutional hypotheses as well as alternative economic explanations are tested. The second section of the paper presents the case studies of the Mercosur member and associate member countries, highlighting the impact of each of the countries’ respective party systems on the responses of the popular sectors to economic reform. The case studies serve to corroborate and extend the findings of the statistical model as well as provide a more nuanced account of the patterns of popular protest in the region. As the major player within Mercosur, and
the most notorious case of weak party system institutionalization in the region, the case of Brazil is examined first. The cases of Bolivia, Argentina, and Paraguay then follow to further illustrate the patterns of social protest in inchoate and intermediate party systems. Lastly, the cases of Chile and Uruguay are presented to demonstrate social protest dynamics within countries with relatively well-institutionalized party systems. The paper concludes with an assessment of the trends in the forms of social mobilization against neoliberal reforms that are currently underway in Latin America.

Explaining Levels of Social Protest

To test the central hypothesis of the study, that levels of social protest are higher in countries which have weakly institutionalized party systems than in those which have well-institutionalized party systems, event count data on general strikes, riots, and anti-government demonstrations in Latin America were utilized. Initially, the data for the study was drawn from the widely-used Arthur S. Banks’ cross-national time-series data archive, which contains domestic conflict data for every nation-state between the years of 1815 to 1995. However, spot-checking of the data revealed there to be serious errors of omission due in large part to the limited coverage of protest activities in Latin America in the principal data source used in the Banks’ project. An alternative event count data set on social protest was assembled by the author based on the Information Services on Latin America (ISLA) periodical collection. ISLA provides monthly reports on current events

---

1 Data for the Banks’ domestic conflict variables are derived exclusively from the daily files of the New York Times. The original data set on domestic conflict behavior, 1919-1966, is available from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research website: www.icpsr.umich.edu.

2 Errors of omission included both articles on social protest from the New York Times that did not make it into the Banks’ data set (e.g. “Argentines Stage Rally Against Army Pardons,” NYT, 10 September 1989; according to the data set there were no anti-government demonstrations in Argentina in 1989), as well as important protest events not captured by the NYT (e.g. “Riot in Brasilia Shakes Confidence in Sarney,” Washington Post, 29 November 1986; according to the data set there were no riots in Brazil in 1986).
for all of Latin America.\(^3\) The event count data set built from the ISLA reports contains social protest data from 1978, the start of the third wave of democracy in Latin America, until 1995 for 18 Latin American countries (N=216). Each country enters into the data set starting from the year of its transition to democracy (see Appendix A). Country dummy variables were used to control for fixed unit effects.

**Dependent Variables**

The study uses three social protest variables to provide a robust test of the hypothesis. The variable definitions conform to those used in the Banks' data set. The variables include: *general strikes*—defined as any work stoppage of 1000 or more industrial or service workers that involves more than one employer and that is aimed at national government policies or authority; *riots*—defined as any violent demonstration or clash of more than 100 citizens involving the use of physical force; and *anti-government demonstrations*—defined as any peaceful gathering of at least 100 people for the primary purpose of displaying or voicing their opposition to government policies or authority.\(^4\) The general strikes variable ranged from a value of 0 to 8 in terms of the number of events in a given year; the riots variable ranged from 0 to 4; and the number of anti-government demonstrations ranged from 0 to 9. Separate models were run for each of the dependent variables as well as a combined model based on a computed social protest variable.\(^5\)


\(^4\) All three social protest variables include both urban and rural protest activities. For example, aggressive, confrontational tactics in the countryside, such as illegal land occupations, were coded as 'riots' in order to capture the element of violence. Less confrontational and contentious forms of protest, such as provincial road blocks, were coded as 'anti-government demonstrations.'

\(^5\) The social protest variable was computed by first multiplying the riots variable by two to match the 0-8 scale of the general strikes variable, collapsing the anti-government demonstrations variable from a 0-9 scale to a 0-8 scale, and then summing the three dependent variables.
**Independent Variables**

The central independent variable of the study is party system institutionalization. According to the seminal work of Mainwaring and Scully (1995) on party systems in Latin America, a party system is said to be institutionalized when it meets the following four criteria: stability in the rules of the game; stable party roots in society; legitimacy of parties and of the electoral process; and strong party organizations. Party system institutionalization was operationalized in the study by *electoral volatility* and *party age* variables in addition to *fragmentation* and *polarization* variables. A well-institutionalized party system is characterized by low levels of electoral volatility (net aggregate vote shifts from one election to the next); low levels of fragmentation (the vote share of the top two parties); and older, more entrenched parties (the average age of the major parties). A weakly institutionalized party system is characterized as being highly volatile, fragmented, and possessing younger, newer parties. Based on the observation by Mainwaring and Scully (1995, 31) that ideological distance tends to widen as the effective number of parties increases, greater polarization is expected in inchoate, multi-party systems. Therefore, it is hypothesized that higher electoral volatility, greater party system fragmentation and polarization, and younger party ages will be associated with higher levels of social protest.

**Controls**

A plausible alternative explanation for the varying levels of social protest found in the region is that differences in economic development condition the pattern of protest. In

---

6 These variables were derived from a data set generously shared by Kenneth M. Roberts and Erik Wibbels (1999). The author of the present study calculated the scores for El Salvador and Guatemala, the two countries missing from their data set. For further details, see Appendix B.
other words, ‘misery breeds revolt.’ Moreover, scholars working within the relative deprivation school of thought (Gurr 1970; Muller & Seligson 1987) argue that the greater the maldistribution of land or resources, the greater the probability of mass-based political uprisings. In order to control for these arguments, economic variables were included in the model. A Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita variable was used to control for level of economic development and Gini coefficients for income inequality and land inequality were used to control for the maldistribution of resources. Inflation and GDP growth variables were also included in the model to control for economic performance as a potential explanatory variable of social protest. It is hypothesized that lower levels of GDP per capita and growth, greater levels of income and land inequality, and higher rates of inflation will be associated with higher levels of social protest.

Results

The results of the pooled cross-sectional time series analysis offer some support for the hypothesis that institutional arrangements condition the level of social protest in a country as well as for the alternative economic arguments (see Table 1). Model 1 tests the impact of party system institutionalization and economic factors on the level of general strikes. Of the economic variables, the only significant predictor of general strikes was the level of inflation, with higher inflation being associated with an increased number of strikes. This finding suggests that formal sector workers tend to protest in response to

---

7 Data for the GDP per capita variable was drawn from the World Bank (2002), World Development Indicators data base available on CD-Rom. Data for the income and land inequality measures were taken from Wilkie (ed.) Statistical Abstract of Latin America, 2002, Vol. 38. For details see Appendix B.

8 Data for inflation and GDP growth rates were derived from the data set developed by Roberts and Wibbels (1999). A logged rate of inflation was used to prevent a small number of cases of hyperinflation from skewing the results.
Table 1  
Level of Social Protest in Latin America by Institutional and Economic Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1 (Strikes)</th>
<th>Model 2 (Riots)</th>
<th>Model 3 (Demonstrations)</th>
<th>Model 4 (Social Protest)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Volatility</td>
<td>.02664 (0.017)</td>
<td>-.00739 (.009)</td>
<td>.03144 (.019)</td>
<td>.04462 (.034)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fragmentation</td>
<td>-.06134*** (.016)</td>
<td>-.00425 (.008)</td>
<td>-.03536* (.019)</td>
<td>-.107*** (.033)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polarization</td>
<td>-.00032 (.015)</td>
<td>.00586 (.018)</td>
<td>.06246*** (.017)</td>
<td>.07254* (.030)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Age</td>
<td>-.03754 (.023)</td>
<td>.01294 (.012)</td>
<td>-.03697 (.025)</td>
<td>-.04895 (.046)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP Per Capita</td>
<td>.00067 (.000)</td>
<td>.00015 (.000)</td>
<td>-.00020 (.000)</td>
<td>.00079 (.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP Growth</td>
<td>-.01133 (.026)</td>
<td>-.01681 (.013)</td>
<td>-.03719 (.029)</td>
<td>-.07795 (.052)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Inequality</td>
<td>-.1.177 (4.527)</td>
<td>8.273*** (2.278)</td>
<td>2.309 (4.985)</td>
<td>17.427 (9.010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Inequality</td>
<td>-9.308 (6.867)</td>
<td>1.409 (3.455)</td>
<td>-7.662 (7.562)</td>
<td>-14.416 (13.669)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation</td>
<td>0.489*** (.092)</td>
<td>.0446 (.046)</td>
<td>-.00148 (.101)</td>
<td>.578** (.183)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>10.802 (6.406)</td>
<td>-6.486 (3.223)</td>
<td>9.648 (7.055)</td>
<td>7.800 (12.752)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.532</td>
<td>.153</td>
<td>.320</td>
<td>.483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors printed below in parentheses.  
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

short-term fluctuations in the economy rather than in response to long-term, structural conditions. The other significant predictor of general strikes in the model was the degree of party system fragmentation. Interestingly, while the fragmentation variable is
significant, it is not in the hypothesized direction. Rather, greater numbers of strikes are associated with a less fragmented party system. This may be explained theoretically by the notion that greater fragmentation implies a greater number of parties, which may more effectively channel popular sector demands into the political system. A less fragmented party system, whereby the top two parties receive the majority share of the votes, may not adequately represent the interests of workers, thus prompting them to mobilize.

Model 2, which tests for the factors that determine the level of riots in a country, offers a different picture. None of the institutional variables successfully predicted the number of riots. The only significant result was for income inequality, with higher levels of inequality being associated with a greater number of riots. This finding suggests that in contrast to strike activity, which results from economic fluctuations, riots are the product of deep-seated, structural inequalities. Consequently, this finding lends support to the relative deprivationist argument that greater social inequalities increase the likelihood of mass-based political uprisings. However, this only appears to be the case for more violent forms of social protest, such as illegal land seizures.

Model 3 tests the determinants of the number of anti-government demonstrations in a country. In contrast to the other models, none of the economic variables were successful in predicting the number of anti-government demonstrations. Only the institutional variables yielded results. The results of Model 3 indicate that there are a greater number of demonstrations in countries which do not have effective channels of social representation. Both the party system fragmentation and polarization variables were significant. While the polarization variable was in the expected direction, with greater
polarization being associated with an increased number of demonstrations, the
fragmentation variable continued to be in the reverse expected direction. As noted above,
this may be explained by the inability of the major parties to channel popular sector
demands into the political system. These findings suggest that anti-government
demonstrations serve as an alternative means of exercising voice in a political party system
that does not adequately represent the interests of more marginalized social actors.

Finally, the results of the combined model of social protest, Model 4, further
confirm that institutional as well as economic variables determine the level of social
protest within a country. Two of the institutional variables, party system fragmentation
and polarization, were significant in the combined model, as well as one of the economic
variables, the level of inflation. Although the fragmentation and polarization variables in
and of themselves are at best an indirect measure of party system institutionalization, the
results do support the notion that domestic political institutions have an important impact
on the level of social protest in a country. Perhaps most important from a theoretical
standpoint, the findings also suggest that different types of protest may have very different
causal logics.\footnote{A correlation matrix of the dependent variables confirmed that strikes, riots, and anti-government
demonstrations operate independently of one another, with correlations of less than .3 for each of them.}

**Patterns of Popular Protest**

While the statistical analysis reveals the factors that determine the level of social
protest within a country, it does not tell us about the actors involved and the tactics they
employ. In order to fully examine the patterns of popular protest in contemporary Latin
America, we must turn to comparative case studies. I evaluate the patterns of social
protest within and across countries using a qualitative approach focusing on the properties of protest. Eckstein (1980) suggests that degrees of political conflict can be differentiated according to scope (local versus nation wide), intensity (peaceful versus militant), targets (specific policies versus the overall economic model), and the degree of organization (spontaneous versus well-organized). It is based on these four criteria that I will compare the impacts of political institutions on patterns of social protest in the Mercosur member and associate member countries (see Table 2). The case selection offers the opportunity to examine trends in social protest across countries with considerable differences in power, wealth, size, development, and institutional arrangements.

Table 2
Patterns of Social Protest Among the Mercosur Countries Across Categories of Party System Institutionalization*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party System Level</th>
<th>Uruguay</th>
<th>Chile</th>
<th>Paraguay</th>
<th>Argentina</th>
<th>Brazil</th>
<th>Bolivia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate to low</td>
<td>Moderate to high</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate to low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate to high</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate to high</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Party system categorizations proposed by Mainwaring and Scully (1995).
**Level of social protest is based on the combined means of the number of general strikes, riots, and anti-government demonstrations in the event count data. Low: 0-2; Moderate: 3-5; High: 6-8.
***Although Mainwaring and Scully (1995) place Argentina in the category of 'institutionalized party systems,' they note that "Argentina is the least clear-cut case of an institutionalized party system," suggesting that it falls between the two extremes (p.19). Similarly, although they place Paraguay in the category of 'hegemonic party systems in transition,' they note that "Paraguay fall(s) somewhere in between the institutionalized and the inchoate party systems" (p.20).
The Common Market of the South

On 26 March 1991, the presidents of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay signed the Treaty of Asunción, forming the Common Market of the South (Mercosur). The treaty evolved out of a common commitment of the member countries to the principles of democracy and trade liberalization. Since the customs union became effective on 1 January 1995, Mercosur surprised skeptics as it quickly became the most important trade grouping in Latin America (EIU 1999). The process of expanding Mercosur began in 1996 with the associate memberships of Bolivia and Chile. Mercosur now faces the difficult task of promoting integration among member countries with extremely uneven levels of development. The fact that a single country, Brazil, accounts for approximately seventy percent of Mercosur’s gross domestic product (GDP) raises serious questions about the prospects for successful integration (Pereira 1999, 7). As a consequence of its disproportionate weight and the lack of any formal dispute resolution mechanisms within Mercosur, Brazil has largely been able to control the integration process (Cason 2000).

Critics of Mercosur have suggested that the Treaty of Asunción is more notable for its silences on social issues than for what is actually stated in its text (Alimonda 1994; Manzetti 1993; Montenegro 1995). According to these observers, the process of Southern Cone economic integration has been entirely the product of executive decisions, solidified in a treaty that tends to exclude rather than promote social debate. The absence

---

10 Mercosur is at present a customs union, signifying a free trade area with the adoption of a common external tariff (CET) against non-member countries. However, the member countries’ ultimate aim is to develop the agreement into a common market, which is a customs union in which all restrictions on capital movements are abolished.
of any significant preferential treatment for the smaller Mercosur countries, as well as any compensatory measures for economic sectors negatively effected by the integration process, is indicative of the exclusionary nature of the initiative. An important lacuna within Mercosur’s founding treaty and its accompanying protocols and annexes, has been the lack of any consideration of workers, unions, and the issue of unemployment. For instance, the ten thematic subgroups that were specified at the historic meeting in Asunción, Paraguay omitted labor. An extemporaneous eleventh category concerning labor was later created as a result of intense pressure by organized labor within the member countries (Alimonda 1994, 26). Some of the strongest social mobilizations in the region today are being witnessed in Brazil, the case to which we now turn.

Brazil

Brazil is an extreme case of weak party system institutionalization. Unlike other countries in the region, where the party systems which emerged after their recent experience of authoritarian rule largely resembled the pre-authoritarian ones, none of Brazil’s major pre-1964 parties survived (Mainwaring 1995, 369). Traditionally, Brazilian politics has been dominated by ‘catch-all’ parties which seek to capture the support of broad segments of the population through populist and clientelist tactics. In general, party organizations in Brazil are weak, electoral volatility is high, and the individual personalities of the candidates tend to dominate political parties and campaigns. The lack of party sympathies among citizens, and even amongst the party leaders themselves, has led to a situation in which parties appear and disappear with stunning frequency (Hagopian 1996; Mainwaring 1999). As a result, there is an almost complete
disconnect between Brazil’s party system and the popular sectors. With the exception of the Workers’ Party (PT), there are no real channels for representing the interests of the popular sectors within the Brazilian political system.

The Workers’ Party is an anomaly within Brazilian political history. In the context of an inchoate party system, the PT arose as a highly disciplined and principled party. What is particularly noteworthy about the PT is how, from its inception, it has reached out to social movements and sought to link them into a larger political project. Although the party initially defined its base as the industrial working class, it had the organizational flexibility to incorporate not only traditional social movements focused on political and material demands, but also new ones concerned with issues of the environment, the rights of women, and identity-based concerns (Davis 1997; Keck 1992). The decentralization process in Brazil has been key to the success of the PT. The transfer of resources and power to municipal-level governments has enabled the party to strengthen its administrations and project itself as a viable, alternative political party (Nylen 2000; Samuels 2000). Impressively, the PT’s candidate and founding member, Luis Inácio da Silva (popularly known as ‘Lula’), succeeded in winning the presidential race of 2002 (www.electionworld.org).

Although the Workers’ Party seeks to represent popular sector demands to the state, not all social movements in Brazil have chosen to ally themselves with the party. Without question, the most combative popular movement in contemporary Brazil has been the Rural Landless Workers’ Movement (MST). The MST was formed in 1984 by the leaders of a series of land occupations that occurred almost simultaneously in several
regions of the country during this time period. The central goals of the movement are to secure land for landless rural workers, maintain steady pressure for agrarian reform through large-scale land occupations, and to struggle against an economic model that is harmful to the poor (Hammond 1999, 473). Brazil has never had an agrarian reform of any real consequence. The country’s extremely inequitable distribution of land has become a highly politicized issue. Over the past fifteen years, it is estimated that more than 1,600 Brazilians have been killed over land conflicts (Cadji 2000, 30). The most infamous massacre of landless farmers by the Brazilian military police occurred on 17 April 1996, in the state of Pará. The image of the police opening fire on a crowd of farmers demonstrating in support of land reform, which killed nineteen and wounded many more, was captured on video and televised nationally (NotiSur 11/21/1997). The incident served to launch the MST into the national and international spotlight.

The MST has won considerable support among the Brazilian public due to its strategy of combining militant mobilization with a legalistic image. The movement typically organizes the occupation of rural properties, involving anywhere from 200 to 2,500 families, and then seeks legal title under the law (Hammond 1999, 473). A key institutional support for the MST has been the Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), which investigates all land occupations and determines whether a property is eligible for forcible purchase under the 1964 Brazilian land law (Martins 2000). The law clearly mandates that all land must serve a social function. Consequently, lands lying empty and unused may be purchased by the state and then resold to the landless poor at low interest rates and flexible payment schedules (Harbury 1999). Given that the MST
is careful to only occupy land that appears eligible under the law, the movement usually wins its case. It is estimated that the MST has helped more than 300,000 families gain farmland in twenty-two of Brazil’s twenty-six states (Harbury 1999, 4).

In 1999, however, the Cardoso administration abolished the law pertaining to the state financing of land expropriations. In its place, a World Bank program for the nation’s first ‘market agrarian reform’ was introduced. Under the new program, federal funding was shifted from INCRA to a ‘land bank,’ which makes loans to the rural poor for the purchase of land (Petras 2000). With the removal of the legal backbone of the MST, the movement has increasingly turned to the political sphere, signaling an increasing desire to become involved in electoral politics. To date, the MST has retained a considerable degree of autonomy in its relations with political parties, including the PT, preferring instead to negotiate directly with the state (Flávio de Almeida & Ruiz Sánchez 2000). The MST is currently following a two-pronged strategy of continuing grassroots organizing in the countryside while attempting to build an alternative political project at the national level (Petras 2000). It is questionable, however, that the MST will be able to achieve the impressive results it did as a radical mobilizational force in its emerging new role as an electoral movement.

The complete disconnect between the Brazilian political system and the rural landless has resulted in a situation of radical mobilization against the country’s inequitable distribution of land. The case of Brazil ranks at the high end of the criteria for social protest specified by this study. In terms of scope, the MST can be said to have a national presence. Although its activities are largely focused at the local level, the MST has
operations in the majority of the Brazilian states and has effective social and political reach across the country. The MST is also characterized by a high degree of intensity given its radical tactics, particularly its reliance on extra-legal land occupations, and its militant stance toward the state. Furthermore, while the principal concern of the MST has been agrarian reform, its wider target is the neoliberal economic model. As an alternative to free market capitalism and neoliberal ideology, the movement promotes the fundamental values of solidarity, social justice, and autonomy through popular education programs in its rural settlements (Martins 2000). Lastly, the MST also possesses a high degree of organization. The movement engages in a lengthy process of planning within its encampments and in preparing for the legal battle over land rights once an occupation is completed. The pattern of social protest in Brazil can therefore be characterized as nation wide in scope, militant, targeting the economic model, and well-organized.

**Bolivia**

Similar to Brazil, Bolivia also possesses a weakly institutionalized multi-party system. Political parties in Bolivia have generally served more as vehicles for the capture and circulation of state patronage among political elites than as organizations expressing the interests of society (Gamarra & Malloy 1995). Historically, the nation’s most influential political party has been the National Revolutionary Movement (MNR). The MNR was founded in 1941 by the architects of post-war Bolivian politics, including Walter Guevara Arce, Hernán Siles Zuazo, and Victor Paz Estenssoro (Gamarra & Malloy 1995, 401). The MNR-led revolution of 1952 introduced profound changes to Bolivian society. The corporatist projects of the MNR government included the nationalization of
tin mines, agrarian reform, and the adoption of universal suffrage. Ironically, thirty-three years later the MNR government, under the leadership of Víctor Paz Estenssoro, implemented one of the most draconian neoliberal economic programs in the history of Latin America (Conaghan & Malloy 1994; Morales 1994).

The implementation of orthodox neoliberal economic reforms in Bolivia has had devastating consequences for the nation’s previously most powerful social actor — organized labor. The Bolivian Workers Central (COB), in particular, has long held a position of national political prominence as the organizational expression of Bolivia’s labor union movement. During the heyday of the revolutionary period, the MNR government had granted co-governing status to the COB. This relationship established a system of dual power in Bolivian society that lasted until the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s (Malloy & Gamarra 1987). Bolivia’s new economic policy, rather than being strictly economic, also had the political aim of restoring the state’s control over society. For instance, the privatization of state-owned mining enterprises in 1985, long a bastion of support for the COB, resulted in the loss of 23,000 jobs, leaving in place a workforce of only 7,000 unionized miners (Farthing & Kohl 2001, 9). Consequently, economic restructuring in Bolivia has served to break the strategic position that organized labor once held over the national economy.

The demise of organized labor in Bolivia has created a space for new social actors to emerge. Following the growing trend in Latin America, ethnic and cultural identity in Bolivia have become increasingly politicized in response to the homogenizing, individuated state-society relations promoted by the neoliberal economic model. One of
the immediate consequences of the shift toward neoliberal economic policies in Latin America has been the weakening of state corporatist institutions (Oxhorn 1998). As part of the corporatist project of the twentieth century, many Latin American states promoted assimilation into the dominant mestizo culture by reconstituting indigenous peoples as national peasants. In exchange for access to land, credit, and services, indigenous communities were obliged to organize and define themselves as peasant communities (Yashar 1998). As the corporate organizations of the peasantry have lost their social and political leverage, however, the primary mode of interest intermediation between the state and indigenous communities has been severed (Van Cott 2000). In response to this changing economic and political context, indigenous groups in Latin America have increasingly mobilized on the basis of indigenous identity.

Bolivia’s indigenous population, whose principal groups are the Aymara and the Quechua, comprises a slight majority of the country’s total population (Brysk & Wise 1997, 79; Yashar 1998, 25). However, the indigenous movement as a whole remains divided over class and ethnic-based concerns. The highland indigenous movement, led by the United Confederation of Peasant Laborers of Bolivia (CSUTCB), has generally maintained a leftist, class-based political orientation. By contrast, the lowland indigenous movement, headed by the Bolivian Indigenous Confederation of the Amazon (CIDOB), has tended to emphasize ethnic-based concerns (Albó 1996). As a result, Bolivia’s indigenous movement remains limited in scope and fragmented in structure.

One of the most combative social actors within contemporary Bolivia are the coca growers of the Chapare region. Since the United States’ ‘war on drugs’ was instituted in
1989, the coca producers have had to struggle for their livelihood against the forced eradication programs conducted by both the Bolivian and the U.S. governments (Farthing & Kohl 2001, 9). Given the incompatibility of their demands with U.S. anti-narcotics policy, the coca growers have found themselves to be in a difficult bargaining position. However, the movement has gained greater legitimacy through its participation in municipal government within the Chapare region (Van Cott 2000, 230). Perhaps most impressive, the coca growers’ party, the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), led by Evo Morales, came within a few percentage points of winning the first round of the 2002 presidential race (www.electionworld.org). The government’s insistence that the issue of coca eradication is non-negotiable, however, suggests that the coca growers will continue to be a key source of social protest in Bolivia.

The new, militant anti-privatization movement has also become a surprisingly powerful social force within Bolivia. Most notably, in the city of Cochabamba, the privatization of the water system incited a cycle of protest activities that forced the Banzer government to capitulate to the residents’ demands. In 1999, the government sold Cochabamba’s water system to Aguas del Tunari, a multinational consortium led by the London-based firm International Water Limited (Shultz 2000, 44). Under the terms of its forty-year concession, the company gained control over all of Cochabamba’s surface and subterranean water sources. The company was also granted authority to charge for water use in the surrounding countryside, where peasants have traditionally controlled the water supply (Farthing & Kohl 2001, 9). Within weeks of the privatization, water rates in Cochabamba increased 300%. The situation was so untenable that local residents
participated in months-long strikes and transportation blockades that shut down the city
on three separate occasions (Shultz 2000, 44). The privatization program in Cochabamba
came to symbolize all that is wrong with the neoliberal economic model and sparked
parallel protests across the country.

Public outrage against the blatantly unreasonable terms of the privatization deal in
Cochabamba quickly spread to other parts of the country. Civil society groups throughout
Bolivia began to protest not only the issue of water rights, but also the general direction of
the government’s economic policies (Shultz 2000). In the highlands, indigenous and
peasant groups protesting the lack of access to land and unfavorable agricultural policies
blockaded all routes in and out of the capital city of La Paz, effectively cutting it off from
the rest of the country for a period of three weeks (Farthing & Kohl 2001). In the
Chapare region, coca growers demonstrated against the proposed construction of three
U.S.-financed military bases in the area. Following suit, the national teachers’ union
declared a nation wide strike calling for wage increases (Collins 2000). Faced with a
massive civic uprising, the Banzer government terminated the contract with Aguas del
Tunari in April 2000 (Farthing & Kohl 2001, 44). The re-nationalization of
Cochabamba’s water system marked a watershed moment in the evolution of popular
protest in the country. It represented the first major victory of civil society against
unpopular neoliberal economic reforms in Bolivia.

The failure of the Bolivian party system to effectively channel the interests of the
popular sectors into the political system has produced a situation of radical mobilization
against unpopular reforms. Similar to Brazil, the case of Bolivia can be characterized as
possessing a high level of social protest. Protest activities in Bolivia are nation wide in scope. Through the use of parallel or solidarity protests, civil society groups are able to effectively shut down the entire country. Secondly, such mobilizations are frequently marked by a high degree of intensity, particularly in the case of the more militant coca growers’ unions and their violent encounters with the state. Furthermore, social protest in Bolivia is characterized by a high degree of organization. The various social actors within Bolivian society are not only organized at the local level, but there also appears to be an element of coordination among social movements at the national level. Lastly, the target of social protest in the nation is the neoliberal economic model itself. Neoliberalism has become an organizing symbol around which popular movements gather support for their resistance efforts. The high level of social protest found in Bolivia is significant in light of the body of literature which casts the nation as a neoliberal success case (see Haggard & Kaufman 1995; Morales & Sachs 1990; Pastor 1992).

Argentina

In contrast to Brazil and Bolivia, the contemporary Argentine party system is relatively institutionalized. The country’s two major political parties, the Peronist party (Partido Justicialista) and the Radical party (Unión Cívica Radical), have historically had strong roots in society. However, although party identities are strong, the parties themselves are weak in terms of organization and ill-equipped to channel political conflict. The Peronist party, in particular, has traditionally depicted itself more as a movement embodying the nation as a whole, rather than as an organization competing for votes against other legitimate contenders for power (Mainwaring & Scully 1995). Juan Perón
himself was critical of parties and politicians and preferred to forge direct ties with his followers rather than construct strong party organizations. As a result, Argentine society has more often than not bypassed parties as vehicles for interest representation and relied instead upon peak sectoral organizations, such as the National Labor Confederation (CGT), to pressure or bargain with the executive (McGuire 1997).

The adoption of the neoliberal economic model in Argentina has had dramatic consequences for the nation’s once powerful labor movement. Significant divisions within the movement have emerged concerning what organized labor’s response should be to the changes taking place in the labor market. The National Labor Confederation (CGT) has long been the country’s dominant peak sectoral organization representing the interests of labor. In light of the new economic model, the CGT has largely followed a strategy of negotiation and accommodation in exchange for political appointments and privileged access to the executive (Murillo 1997). By contrast, the Congress of Argentine Workers (CTA), consisting largely of public sector unions, emerged onto the labor scene in 1992 as an independent, alternative labor confederation opposed to neoliberal economic reforms. What sets the CTA apart from other labor confederations in Argentina is its willingness to incorporate those sectors penalized by market reforms and marginalized by traditional forms of interest group representation, such as the retired, the unemployed, and the self-employed (Alimonda 1994; Patroni 2000). The CTA’s attempt to build broad-based linkages of support across civil society has afforded the confederation a certain degree of political import in Argentine society.
The general trend in the decline of organized labor’s capacity to represent the interests of Argentina’s popular sectors has coincided with the expansion of social protests in the nation’s provinces. In particular, a new form of social protest that uses road blocks as a means of protesting economic reforms has emerged in the provinces of Córdoba, Catamarca, Salta, and Tucumán, where the highest levels of unemployment in the country are found (Farinetti 1999, 28). The obstruction of national highways by the so-called ‘piqueteros’ has proven to be an effective means of disrupting the market and drawing attention to the plight of the provincial communities which have suffered under the government’s economic reforms. The piqueteros typically reject the use of political intermediaries and call on the state directly in their demands for the creation of jobs, subsidies for the unemployed, and the deferment of tax payments for those negatively affected by economic restructuring (Farinetti 1999). By interrupting the circulation of labor and goods, and injecting their voices into policy debates, these protesters have reinserted themselves into an economic and political system that has excluded them.

The origins of the piqueteros can be traced to the massive uprising in the townships of Cutral Có and Plaza Huincul in the upper Patagonian province of Neuquén that was caused by the privatization of the national petroleum company Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (YPF) in 1995. The privatization of the YPF resulted in massive lay offs, with a total of 400 employees remaining out of an original workforce of 4,000 (Farinetti 1999, 28). Following the lay offs, close to 5,000 residents of the impacted townships barricaded all routes in and out of the area for a period of six days, at which time the local governor promised to find a solution to the unemployment problem. After
nine months of negotiation with the government, a small subsidy was granted to 1,000 needy families in the area (Pozzi 2000). While the uprising was a local, spontaneous reaction to a specific situation, the incident sparked a wave of similar protests throughout Argentina that forced the De la Rua administration to begin to address those groups who have been marginalized by market reforms.

More recently, however, social protests in Argentina have managed to temporarily overwhelm the tenuous institutions of the state as a result of the nation’s growing economic troubles. The emerging market crisis that hit Brazil in 1998 has had serious consequences for its Mercosur trading partners. In particular, the devaluation of the Brazilian Real by thirty-five percent in January 1999 resulted in a surge of imports into Argentina which, up until now, had maintained a fixed currency rate pegged to the U.S. dollar (EIU 1999, 4). Since 1991, when the Law of Convertibility was passed, Argentina had maintained a currency board arrangement. The law required that the peso be fully backed by foreign-currency assets in the reserves of the nation’s central bank (Gajewski 2001, 31; Powell 2000, 50). However, the growing global financial crisis, a strong U.S. dollar, and the currency devaluation in Brazil has forced Argentina to undergo the painful process of devaluation. The current political instability generated by the crisis has placed Argentina and Mercosur at a crossroads.

The inability of Argentina’s major political parties to effectively structure political conflict and channel the demands of new social actors into the political system has produced a moderate to high degree of social protest in the country according to the criteria specified by this paper. Until very recently, protesters have tended to target
specific policies, particularly individual privatization efforts, rather than the economic model itself. Similarly, the road blocks and demonstrations typically employed by the piqueteros have generally been oriented towards negotiation rather than confrontation with the state and have tended to be more localized in scope. Recent developments, however, underscore the potential for popular mobilization to reach national proportions. The massive uprising of Argentine civil society in response to the country’s recent economic crisis reflects a high degree of intensity in terms of protest activities, such as rioting and escalating levels of violence. However, much of the social protest currently being witnessed in Argentina is spontaneous in nature and lacking any degree of organization. Consequently, the pattern of social protest in Argentina can be described as nation wide in scope, militant in intensity, targeting the political system, but spontaneous in nature, thus falling into an intermediate category of protest.

**Paraguay**

The Paraguayan party system is one of the oldest and most unique systems in the region. The country’s two major parties, the Colorado or Republican Party (Asociación Nacional Republicana) and the Liberal Party were founded in 1887 (Abente 1995, 300). Throughout the period between the 1880s and the 1950s, Paraguay remained largely a two-party system. However, the rough equilibrium that had been maintained between the Colorados and the Liberals was fundamentally altered by the nation’s thirty-five years of authoritarian rule by General Alfredo Stroessner (1954-1989). By fusing the Colorado Party, the state, and the military into a single governing framework, the Colorado Party was propelled into the role of a hegemonic political force. During this period, access to...
bureaucratic positions, the police force, the military, and a host of other opportunities was made contingent on being a member in good standing of the governing party. These developments, in addition to the repression of the Liberal Party, served to strengthen the hold of the Colorados over Paraguayan society (Abente 1995).

Paraguay has the least industrial capacity and the smallest working class of all the Mercosur member countries. The nation’s economy depends almost exclusively on the rural sector. In 1989, it was estimated that 96% of the country’s total exports consisted of livestock, agriculture, and forest-related products, with an estimated 60% of the population residing in the countryside (Carter, Barham & Mesbah 1996, 33). Historically, a well entrenched rural oligarchy has dominated much of Paraguay’s economic and political life, benefiting from the nation’s highly inequitable distribution of land (Richards 1997). Until recently, however, a strong peasant movement had not existed in Paraguay. It has been suggested that the concentration of land ownership has not been an explosive issue for the country due to the large landowners’ tolerance of widespread squatting on unused lands. However, with the move towards greater economic liberalization, and the resultant shift in production patterns favoring large-scale agro-industry, Paraguayan peasants have lost their access to the land (Carter, Barham & Mesbah 1996). The new economic model, which marginalizes peasants as both small producers and workers, has incited a cycle of land occupations followed by violent military evictions in the Paraguayan countryside.

In the days following the coup of February 1989 which began the transition to democracy in Paraguay, thousands of peasants illegally occupied unused lands owned by
the state, the Stroessner family, and foreign investors. By the mid-1990s, it had been estimated that approximately 19,000 families had laid claim to over 360,000 hectares of land in the north eastern border region (Nagel 1999, 148). In addition to land rights, the small farmers and rural workers have demanded direct participation in the new government, favorable agricultural policies, and restitution for past abuses. The National Peasant Federation (FNC) has taken a lead role in organizing this new wave of rural activism (Petras 1998). However, the dominant public discourse within Paraguayan society has tended to vilify the rural landless as posing a threat to democracy and economic development. Rural violence has escalated over the past decade as landowners have employed armed guards to defend their tracts of land. In response to this growing crisis, the Paraguayan government has frequently deployed the armed forces to quell the occupations and to forcibly evict the rural landless (Nagel 1999, 149).

Another sector of Paraguayan society which has recently mobilized around the issue of land is the indigenous population. Paraguay’s indigenous peoples, who comprise less than four percent of the total population, have long been disregarded by the state (Kidd 1995, 43; Prieto 1995, 235). In an effort to make their demands known, an important indigenous political movement named after the date of the International Day of Indigenous Peoples recently formed in Paraguay. The Indigenous Movement of April 19 (M-19) has been active in instituting road blocks and holding protest marches. In 2000, the M-19 decided to form its own political party and enter into the electoral arena (AFAPP 04/23/2001; Gutiérrez 2000; M-19 2000). Although the indigenous vote is insignificant at the national level, in the western region known as the Chaco, indigenous
groups comprise almost thirty percent of the total number of inhabitants (Kidd 1995, 61).

As a result, a municipal-level governing strategy is beginning to develop within the indigenous movement. The void in popular sector interest representation within the Paraguayan party system provides a real opportunity for a leftist party based on indigenous, peasant, and other social movement concerns to emerge.

The domination of the Paraguayan party system by the Colorado Party has effectively excluded certain social actors, such as landless peasants and indigenous groups, from the polity. In response, marginalized social actors have resorted to protest activities in an effort to try and bring about change in the desired direction. Paraguay ranks as an intermediate case in terms of the level of social protest found in the country. Protest activity in Paraguay tends to be local in scope, with most of the mobilization by peasant and indigenous groups occurring in the sparsely populated north eastern border region and the western Chaco. These movements have generally targeted large-scale, export-oriented agricultural schemes which usurp the arable land and undermine the small farmers’ subsistence base rather than the neoliberal model. Social protests, however, are marked by a considerable degree of intensity as such groups have had to defend their land occupations against forcible eviction by the military. At present, such mobilizations are characterized by a moderate degree of organization. However, the indigenous movement appears to be moving in the direction of greater organization in its role as an emerging electoral force. The pattern of protest in Paraguay can therefore be described as local in scope, militant, targeting specific economic policies, and somewhat organized.
Chile

Chile has the oldest multi-party system in Latin America. The Chilean party system, with its distinctive tripartite division of the electorate, is frequently compared to the party systems of many European countries (Mainwaring & Scully 1995; Scully 1995). Correspondingly, Chile is also noteworthy for its current low levels of popular protest and mobilization. Political parties have long been considered the ‘backbone’ of the Chilean political system, serving to channel and shape society’s interests. According to Scully, “(w)hether church or union organizations, university or professional associations, large or small groups organized at the neighborhood, municipal, or national level, parties have been active protagonists in the long process to extend the rights of citizenship” (1995, 100). Despite seventeen years of authoritarian rule under Augusto Pinochet, the party system that reemerged in Chile in the 1980s largely resembled the previous one. An important distinction, however, is that the constitution put in place by Pinochet, which greatly enhances the power of the political Right, is still in effect in Chile (Posner 1999). This institutional impediment has limited the responsiveness of the contemporary political system to the demands of the popular sectors.

Organized labor in contemporary Chile has proven to be an ineffectual mode of interest representation for the popular sectors. The imposition of neoliberal economic reforms and the political repression of organized labor during the authoritarian period have had permanent consequences for the Chilean labor movement. The greater heterogeneity of the Chilean workforce, low levels of unionization, and the divided political loyalties of the workers are said to have undermined the strength of organized labor (Roberts 1997).
There are indications, however, that Chile’s public sector unions are currently seeking to redefine their strategic role in society. A central division within the labor movement concerns the option of whether to work within the political system, or to seek to address the demands of the workers through social mobilization (Munck 1994). However, it is doubtful that a newly revamped labor movement will be able to challenge the hegemonic hold that the neoliberal model has over Chilean society.

While much of contemporary Chilean society may have been demobilized by political and economic reforms, the nation’s indigenous peoples have increasingly shown potential to become a radical mobilizational force. The Mapuche peoples are the largest indigenous group in Chile, comprising approximately ten percent of the total population (Millaman 1996). Although numerically small, the Mapuche movement has spearheaded the resistance effort against neoliberal economic policies. According to the Chilean census of 1992, the level of poverty among the indigenous population has reached 47.5%, with an illiteracy level of 19.4% (PuntoFinal 2001, 1). The Mapuche nation argues that the government’s economic reforms have been particularly devastating to the country’s indigenous peoples. Specifically, activist groups cite the construction of hydroelectric dams and extensive logging on Mapuche lands, along with the expropriation of their ancestral territories, as their central grievances (NotiSur 03/06/1998). The protest marches, demonstrations, and attempts at land occupations by the Mapuche movement have been met with serious repression by the state in the form of police beatings and arrests (Buendía 2000).
The Mapuche movement has remained splintered by partisan rivalries and clashes among competing factions over the question of tactics. Recently, the Council of All Lands, a Mapuche nationalist organization, has emerged as a radical alternative. The Council is well known within Chilean society for its high-profile militancy in the form of illegal land occupations (NotiSur 07/21/1992). In February 1998, a Chilean judge ordered more than 400 Mapuche peoples be forcibly removed from the Fundo El Rincón property owned by Forestal Mininco. The occupation, which was organized by the Council of All Lands, was based on a Mapuche land claim. The dispute is one of fifty-five pending cases between the Mapuche movement and Chilean forestry companies (NotiSur 03/06/1998).

Despite the growing power of the Council, the majority of the indigenous peoples do not support their 'sensationalist' actions. Factions within the movement which have chosen to work within the existing party system channels have accused the Council of acting irresponsibly and playing into the hands of the Chilean Right (NotiSur 11/13/1991). It remains to be seen whether the movement will be capable of presenting a unified front in its demands against the state.

Chile’s well-institutionalized party system has served to channel much of society’s demands into the political system, thereby dampening political conflict. With the sole exception of the indigenous movement, which has been marginalized by the political system, social mobilization in Chile is minimal. The scope of the Mapuche movement, however, is local as opposed to nation wide. Most of the movement’s protest activities tend to be contained within the center-south region of Chile known as ‘Araucania’ (Millaman 1996, 30). However, the movement is characterized by a high degree of
intensity given its violent clashes with Chilean authorities over its attempts at land occupation. In terms of the degree of organization, the Mapuche peoples remain divided by partisan loyalties and ideological differences. Furthermore, most of the movement's protest activities have targeted specific export-oriented economic policies which impinge upon their ancestral territories, rather than the neoliberal model itself. Consequently, while social protest in Chile is low overall, it has the potential to become radicalized depending on the direction of development of the indigenous movement.

Uruguay

Unlike the other Mercosur countries, the unusual degree of party system institutionalization that is found in Uruguay has mitigated against social mobilization by funneling the debate over economic reform into the nation's political system. Uruguay has one of the oldest party systems in Latin America. At the core of the nation's political system has been the Colorado Party and the National Party (also known as the Blancos), whose origins date back almost 150 years (González 1995, 140). Each party has generally had the support of about half the country, with the Colorados representing the more cosmopolitan, urban sectors of society and the Blancos being more rural and conservative in nature. Before the country's recent authoritarian experience, Uruguay was perhaps the most stable democracy in the region and was frequently touted as the 'Switzerland of Latin America' for its welfare state leanings (González 1995). Consequently, of all the parties to the Mercosur agreement, Uruguay stands to be the most affected by the integration process.
There has been a marked decline of the welfare state in Uruguay as a result of the general trend toward greater economic liberalization. However, these transformations have been gradual and the overall deterioration in the quality of life has tended to follow a relatively egalitarian pattern across Uruguayan society (Filgueira & Papadópulos 1997). Furthermore, any serious attempts to introduce wide-scale economic reforms have been successfully defeated as a result of a peculiar feature of the Uruguayan political party system. Namely, the ability to call for a referendum on major policy issues has enabled the popular sectors to effectively veto stabilization and adjustment measures. For instance, since the return to democracy in 1985, six major attempts have been made to reform the nation’s much lauded social security system, all six of which were defeated by popular plebiscites (Filgueira & Papadópulos 1997, 363). In general, the stronger and more diverse institutional channels for registering discontent on the part of Uruguay’s popular sectors has tended to dampen social protests and temper the severity of neoliberal reforms in the country.

Equally important, the popular sectors have found an institutional ally in the form of the political Left. The Uruguayan Left, which resurfaced in 1985 with the Broad Front (FA), has become the chief defender of the nation’s welfare state legacy. The FA is an alliance of eighteen parties that runs the entire leftist gamut. The coalition party has benefited electorally by the failure of the Blancos and Colorados to resolve the country’s growing economic and social problems (Winn & Ferro-Clérico 1997). The FA’s main candidate, Tabaré Vázquez, won the 1990 mayoral race in Montevideo. The main political project of the FA has been to make government more responsive by
decentralizing power and resources to the local level. The party’s strategy is to use a successful experience in municipal government as a launching pad to the presidency (Winn 1995). As the country’s leading opposition party, the FA promises to be a key source of institutional support for Uruguay’s popular sectors during the integration process.

The case of Uruguay illustrates the central argument of this paper of how a well-institutionalized party system can funnel social unrest into a nation’s political system, thereby dampening political conflict. As a result of the specific features of Uruguay’s political party system and the electoral strength of the Left, social protest in the nation is minimal. The solid institutional channels which are available to express the grievances of civil society concerning the process of economic reform and integration have tended to absorb social unrest. In particular, the plebiscite mechanism within the political party system has given the nation’s citizens considerable influence over the scope and pace of reform. Uruguay exemplifies the dynamics of social protest, or lack thereof, that occurs within a well-institutionalized party system.

**Conclusion**

The central task of this paper has been to explain why social protests against neoliberal reforms have occurred more in some countries than in others. I have argued that the degree of party system institutionalization within a country conditions the nature, scope, and intensity of resistance to market reform on the part of civil society. Countries with more institutionalized party systems tend to experience a lesser degree of social protest as popular sector demands are effectively channeled into the political system. The social protests which do occur within these systems tend to be spontaneous, localized, and
focused on specific policies. Conversely, countries with weakly institutionalized party
systems tend to experience a higher degree of social protest. Protests within these systems
have a tendency to become radicalized and to overwhelm the weak institutions of the
state. However, such protests also tend to be better organized, take on national
dimensions, and target the economic model itself. Consequently, this paper suggests that
the character of domestic political institutions plays an important role in shaping the
response of civil society to neoliberal economic reforms.

Secondly, this paper has attempted to determine whether there are discernible
patterns in the forms of social protest being undertaken in contemporary Latin America.
I have argued that the move to neoliberal economic policies has produced a shift in the
pattern of social protest, from institutionalized to non-institutionalized forms of social
mobilization. In general, workers have been the main bearers of the costs of economic
restructuring. As a result, labor unions have lost much of their socio-economic weight
and political influence. While public sector unions have remained active in the region, they
have tended to mobilize in an effort to simply maintain minimal rights for workers (Munck
1994). Consequently, organized labor appears incapable of offering any credible policy
alternatives. The decline of traditional, class-based collective action has left a void that is
being filled by new social actors, employing unprecedented forms of collective action.

The new pattern of social protest involves different social actors, such as the
unemployed, the landless, and indigenous groups, who until recently had not expressed
themselves publicly nor collectively. This form of social protest is also different in terms
of its demands, which tend to be local, defensive, civic, and identity-based as opposed to
class-based in nature. Lastly, the new pattern of social protest tends to be based on innovative forms of collective action, such as the use of road blocks and holding parallel protest activities. However, this form of social protest possesses a number of limitations. In particular, whereas organized labor in the past was able to negotiate from a position of strength and present its demands as a unified block, the demands of the new social actors are susceptible to being played off of one another by their respective governments. The diversity of interests at stake in these new protest movements suggests that the movement leaders will need to recognize that they share overarching concerns in their struggles if they are to be effective over the long run.

The institutionalist perspective on which this study is based is not without its limitations. Institutions are a necessary, not a sufficient factor in explaining diverse outcomes. However, institutions do create the parameters within which actors establish their behavior and as such tend to have predictable consequences. The benefit of an institutionalist approach is that it provides an effective basis for making cross-case comparisons and possesses a measure of theoretical generalizability. Therefore, it is hoped that the central insights of this paper on the patterns of social protest in contemporary Latin America will have wider applicability to the study of the political impacts of the neoliberal economic model in developing nations as well as open new avenues for research.
Appendix A: Country Sample

Each country enters into the data set starting from the year of its transition to democracy. The cases of Colombia, Costa Rica, and Venezuela, which transitioned to democracy in the mid-twentieth century, were entered into the data set beginning in 1978, the beginning of the third wave of democracy and the shift toward neoliberal economic policies. Data on political regime change dates were taken from *The Statistical Abstract of Latin America*, 2002, Vol. 38, Table 1002.

The countries and years they entered into the data set were as follows: Argentina 1983; Bolivia 1982; Brazil 1985; Chile 1990; Colombia 1978; Costa Rica 1978; Dominican Republic 1978; Ecuador 1979; El Salvador 1992; Guatemala 1986; Honduras 1982; Mexico 1988; Nicaragua 1990; Panama 1989; Paraguay 1989; Peru 1980; Uruguay 1985; Venezuela 1978.
Appendix B: Measurement of Variables

Electoral Volatility

Electoral volatility is calculated according to the Pedersen index (1983). The index provides a measure of the net aggregate vote/seat shifts from one election to the next. It is calculated as the sum of individual party gains and losses divided by two. The index yields a scale from 0 to 100, with 0 signifying that no parties lost or gained vote/seat percentages and a score of 100 meaning that all votes/seats went to a new set of parties. For the purpose of this study, the electoral volatility scores of presidential and legislative elections were averaged to produce one general score.

Fragmentation

Following Roberts and Wibbels (1999), party system fragmentation is calculated by the percentage of the vote/seats obtained by the top two parties in the previous election subtracted from 100. Higher scores are associated with greater fragmentation. The fragmentation scores used in this study are the average of the presidential and legislative election scores.

Polarization

Ideological polarization is calculated on the basis of the continuous indicator developed by Coppedge (1997) to measure Left-Right polarization. The mean left-right position of the party system is calculated by subtracting weighted left-of-center scores from weighted right-of-center scores. An index of polarization is calculated by measuring the dispersion from this mean in individual elections based on the share of the vote and the ideological
position of the individual parties. The polarization scores used in this study are based on legislative elections.

Party Age

Following Roberts and Wibbels (1999), the party age variable is calculated by the average age of the political parties that received more than 10% of the vote/seats in the previous election. The party ages used in this study are based on the average of the ages of the parties in presidential and legislative elections.

Income Inequality

The income inequality variable is based on the Gini coefficient for urban household income in Latin America for selected years, 1978-1998. Gini coefficients range from a value of 0 to 1, with higher values signifying greater inequality. The data is derived from The Statistical Abstract of Latin America, 2002, Vol. 38, Table 1411. This data source provides coefficients for all Latin American countries, except Peru, at approximately two-year intervals. The Gini coefficient of family income inequality in Peru was drawn from the World FactBook 2002; http://www.cia.gov.cia/publications/factbook/fields/2172.html.

Land Inequality

References


Movimiento Indigena 19 de Abril (M-19). “Para la Vida...Tierra y Poder Indígena; Acto de Lanzamiento,” Chaco, Paraguay, promotional brochure.


NAFTA/MERCOSUR WORKING PAPER SERIES


OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES


2. Davidson, Russ "A Description of Rare and Important Medina Imprints in the University of New Mexico Library." May 1988.


SPECIAL PUBLICATIONS


All research and occasional papers and special publications are available from the Latin American and Iberian Institute; 1 University of New Mexico; MSC02 1690,801 Yale NE, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131; 505-277-2961. Call for prices. To comply with the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, these publications are also available in alternative formats.