

Defensive Mobilization

Popular Movements against Economic Adjustment Policies in Latin America

by

Paul D. Almeida

In the current wave of defensive collective action across Latin America in response to neoliberal globalization, working-class groups appear most frequently in the documented protest events. The new wave of popular movement activity emerged in the region in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century and is driven by the erosion of the economic and social benefits previously available to the popular classes during the period of state-led development.

Keywords: *Protest, Globalization, Neoliberalism, Social movements, Austerity, Privatization*

In December 2001 Argentina witnessed the fall of three successive presidents to the cacophony of middle- and working-class citizens' banging their kitchen pots and pans in the streets of Buenos Aires and throughout the provinces in protest over government austerity measures. Argentina is clearly not alone; protests against austerity have spread throughout Latin America over the past two and a half decades. Indeed, in recent years, public-sector privatization and structural adjustment programs have generated some of the region's largest and most intense social conflicts.

The movement of unemployed workers in Argentina dates its founding to the privatization of the state-owned oil and energy corporation YPF. Newly displaced YPF workers in Cutral Co and Plaza Huincal in Neuquén Province conducted the first roadblocks in 1996 (Morina and Velásquez, 1999), and roadblocks quickly diffused as a social movement strategy for unemployed workers throughout Argentina, surpassing the annual number of strikes (Auyero, 2006). In March 2000, 100,000 people marched in San José, Costa Rica, to prevent the impending privatization of the state-run telecommunications and electrical power system—the largest such demonstration in recent Costa Rican history. In June 2002, massive rioting broke out in Arequipa, Peru's second-largest city, after the government announced plans to privatize

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the provincial electricity infrastructure. The riots left over 150 people injured and 2 dead and caused over US\$100 million in property damage. Between June and August 2001, university students and labor unions coalesced with the Guatemalan Chamber of Commerce in a massive protest against a sales tax hike suggested to the government by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and approved by the Guatemalan legislature. This same coalition re-materialized along with peasant and indigenous organizations in June 2004 to prevent a government attempt at a second sales tax hike.

Between 2004 and 2007, mass demonstrations and nationwide protests erupted in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and every country on the Central American isthmus against regional and bilateral free-trade agreements. Even with the rise of populist, leftist, and nationalist governments in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and Venezuela, the discontent has not completely subsided. For example, on January 31, 2007, tens of thousands marched on the central government square in Mexico City demanding price controls on basic staples such as tortillas and a renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Muñoz, Pérez, and Martínez, 2007). The task of this study is to determine the extent to which these cases are anomalous or whether there is systematic evidence of what some observers are calling a new “continent-wide tide of protest” (Green, 2003: 187) against neoliberal policies. In other words, how contested is Latin America’s structural transformation to a neoliberal economic order?

The principal factors driving the transition process are global economic integration and structural adjustment (Robinson, 2004). In order to compete effectively in an increasingly globalized economy and repay external debts, Latin American and Caribbean governments must reduce public expenditures (e.g., public employment, salaries, and government subsidies) and generate income by selling off state-owned productive assets—potentially the most contentious part of a larger package of neoliberal reforms. However, these policies create a political dilemma for state managers when civil-society organizations engage in collective action against them as an economic threat and an erosion of their citizenship rights.

MECHANISMS DRIVING POPULAR CONTESTATION

Observers of Latin American social movements noticed a relative decline in popular movement activity with the advent of democratic transitions in the 1980s and 1990s (Oxhorn, 1996; Hipsher, 1996; Pickvance, 1999). Political parties gradually replaced the movements on the streets as political struggles shifted to formal institutional arenas and electoral politics. Most important, the incentive structure driving much of the collective action of removing authoritarian regimes (e.g., in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, and Uruguay) had diminished by the late 1980s and early 1990s. As Latin America entered the late 1990s and the early twenty-first century, however, an emergent incentive structure appeared to be triggering a new wave of mass popular contention. At the core of this new motivational structure were perceived threats to economic benefits and social citizenship rights (Eckstein and Wickham Crowley, 2003).

Key mechanisms in the political environment that incite popular collective action are negative conditions and incentives. These negative inducements are often underemphasized by approaches to social movements developed in the global North (Davis, 1999). Tilly (1978) refers to such unfavorable conditions as threats. Threats are defined as unwanted changes that likely will make popular sectors worse off if they fail to mobilize against them (Goldstone and Tilly, 2001; Van Dyke and Soule, 2002). Thus threat-induced mobilization is a form of defensive collective action. Two particularly salient threats related to structural adjustment reforms in Latin America are state-attributed economic problems and the erosion of rights (Almeida, 2003).

The administrative expansion of the nation-state and its jurisdictional control over economic and social policy implementation in the twentieth century have made it the core institution targeted by the popular sectors. It is the national government that is responsible for structural adjustment and economic reforms. Thus fuel price hikes and the privatization of a public service or utility are more apparent to the affected sectors (Rhodes, 2006) than an economic recession due to an international financial crisis or a business cycle. In short, economic austerity policies (even those dictated primarily by international financial institutions) that are expected to make the popular sectors worse off if implemented are likely to set in motion defensive mobilization that focuses attention on the government and state managers. It is largely this ability of the popular sectors to place the blame on the state that drives the protest campaign.

The erosion of social rights also shapes collective action against neoliberal policies. The period from the 1940s to the 1970s was the high point of the Latin American developmentalist state. The state intervened in the economy and society to an unprecedented degree. Government enterprises and economic infrastructure were established, greatly expanded, or taken over. The state managed strategic industries and services such as petroleum, mines, telecommunications, energy production, transport and railroads, water and canal systems, agricultural processing plants, and banking/finance (Centro Latinoamericano de Administración para el Desarrollo, 1979). At the same time, it committed to an expansion of social spending, which was especially pronounced in urban areas and included social security, pension, and public health programs, increased opportunities for formal employment, and increased access to mass education and subsidized housing (Walton and Seddon, 1994). By the 1970s, much of the urban population had grown accustomed to these basic amenities.¹ When the state began to cut and reduce these programs in the 1980s, the popular sectors sensed a loss of part of their social citizenship rights—access to basic social services and publicly subsidized benefits (Walton and Seddon, 1994; Eckstein, 2002).

Popular movements in Latin America struggling against the austerity policies mandated by governments and supranational financial institutions now seem to be on the rise (Shefner, Pasdirtz, and Blad, 2006). This article provides data on protests against economic liberalization programs in Latin America between late 1995 and 2001. Variations across time and countries in terms of popular movement activity against structural reforms are presented. I begin by identifying neoliberal policies and their historical sequencing.

TABLE 1
Latin American Foreign Debt, 1980–2002 (in Millions of US\$)

Country	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2001	2002
Argentina	27,157	50,946	62,232	98,802	148,588	150,276	139,828
Bolivia	2,702	4,805	4,275	5,272	5,835	5,821	5,846
Brazil	71,520	103,604	119,877	159,073	236,058	232,055	233,643
Chile	12,081	20,384	19,226	25,562	39,035	39,571	41,581
Colombia	6,941	14,248	17,222	25,048	35,808	37,582	38,688
Costa Rica	2,744	4,400	3,756	3,802	4,287	4,595	4,620
Dominican Republic	2,002	3,502	4,372	4,448	4,759	5,354	5,397
Ecuador	5,997	8,703	12,108	13,994	13,320	13,455	13,632
El Salvador	911	1,851	2,149	2,610	4,409	4,867	5,290
Guatemala	1,180	2,678	3,080	3,655	4,633	4,441	4,592
Honduras	1,470	2,730	3,718	4,571	5,548	5,639	5,603
Jamaica	1,913	4,103	4,674	4,271	4,382	5,216	5,400
Mexico	57,378	96,867	104,442	166,874	173,026	191,693	191,382
Nicaragua	2,190	5,758	10,707	10,360	7,023	6,087	6,101
Panama	2,975	4,758	6,678	6,275	7,608	7,554	7,377
Paraguay	921	1,817	2,105	2,241	2,772	2,901	3,059
Peru	9,386	12,884	20,064	30,852	32,717	33,278	34,325
Trinidad and Tobago	829	1,448	2,512	2,746	2,899	2,932	3,076
Uruguay	1,660	3,919	4,415	5,318	7,501	7,595	7,605
Venezuela	29,345	35,334	33,170	35,848	34,426	34,679	34,851

Source: International Monetary Fund figures (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2002).

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NEOLIBERAL POLICY

Economic liberalization programs are situated in the context of the enduring foreign debt crisis in the region and pressures toward global integration. Table 1 provides figures for the total foreign debt of Latin American and selected Caribbean countries between 1980 and 2002. All of the nations' foreign debt obligations grew over the two decades, on average about threefold. The persistence of the foreign-debt crisis makes national-level policy makers vulnerable to pressures from supranational institutions to reform their economies and governmental practices along neoliberal lines and acquiesce to international economic directives. To renegotiate the terms of earlier loans and interest rates and to receive new lines of credit, national policy makers depend on international financial institutions. Thus, even in the early 2000s, policy implementation is circumscribed by the lending institutions.

The neoliberal policies associated with popular protests are of several kinds. First, there are the stabilization policies implemented by central governments, which include wage freezes and cutbacks in public health, public education, state-sector employment, and subsidies to basic consumption items and transportation (Green, 2003). Stabilization policies may also include currency devaluations, dollarization, price increases on basic consumer goods, and tax (especially sales tax) hikes (Mahon, 2004). Second, there is the privatization of public industries (e.g., electricity infrastructure, public health systems, telecommunications, petroleum, mines, ports, water, etc.). Privatization has intensified since the 1990s as a second-stage strategy for deepening reforms. A study of 16 Latin American and Caribbean countries showed that by 1997 all had privatized a substantial portion of their public enterprises (e.g., steel manufacturing, sugar

processing, and mining) and part of their power/electricity infrastructure but fewer than half had privatized the administration of telecommunications, ports, water, highways, pensions, health, and education (Torres, 1997). Particular types of public-sector privatization schemes may be more difficult to implement in the face of unfavorable public opinion and/or mass protest, among them the privatization of state-run programs that benefit broad cross sections of the society such as water, health care, and education.

These two types of national-level neoliberal policies (stabilization and privatization) are often promoted by international financial institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank. The pressure to implement market-oriented reforms usually comes in the form of formal binding agreements between the international institution and the indebted national government as a means of repaying past loans or securing a new line of credit (Walton and Seddon, 1994). Finally, in more recent years, economic liberalization has been supported by bilateral and multilateral free-trade treaties such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), Mercosur, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), and the infrastructural integration program of Plan Puebla-Panamá (PPP). Since the late 1990s, all of the above measures have increasingly driven structural reforms and governmental decision making in the same direction throughout the region, strengthening the shift toward neoliberal policy implementation (Green, 2003). In other words, in terms of neoliberalism, Latin American governments and state managers look much more alike in the early 2000s than they did in the 1980s.²

However, as Polanyi (1944) keenly observed for the transformation to a market-based society in nineteenth-century England, there is often a “double movement” in such transformations (Udayagiri and Walton, 2003). In this case, the movement away from the developmentalist state to a neoliberal regime creates a countermovement of social forces that mobilize to protect groups whose safety nets are threatened and contest the pace and logic of the transition process. The deepening of the foreign-debt crisis and economic reforms in the late 1990s seems to have triggered a threat-induced wave of defensive collective action. The intensification of structural reforms has been taking place during a period of democratic consolidation in the region (Almeida and Johnston, 2006). Political liberalization, by reducing state sanctions and obstacles to the formation of horizontal linkages within and between groups, has greatly reduced the mobilization costs for civil-society organizations (i.e., labor associations, student associations, and nongovernmental organizations [NGOs]) in mounting collective campaigns against unwanted economic measures and policies.

Protests against economic austerity measures in Latin America can be traced back to the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, the dawn of the neoliberal era, when massive protests and riots exploded in a number of countries on the continent (e.g., Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, and Peru) and in the Caribbean (e.g., Jamaica) (Walton, 1989). Previous studies have indicated that these protests and “IMF riots” were strongly associated with the Latin American debt crisis and the structural adjustment policies mandated by international financial institutions that cut state subsidies and public budgets in order to generate revenues for loan repayments (Walton and Ragin, 1990;

Walton and Seddon, 1994; López Maya, 1999). Countries with multiple IMF agreements, large urban populations, dense civil-society organizational networks, and high rates of unionization were the most likely to experience popular unrest (Walton and Ragin, 1990; Walton and Shefner, 1994). Between 1976 and 1989 scholarly observers documented 80 protest campaigns against economic austerity in Latin America (Walton and Shefner, 1994: 113). What is even more impressive, however, is that this trend appears to be turning into a second sustained wave of contention.

EXAMINING THE RECORD OF PROTEST

The data in this project suggest the emergence of a new wave of protest against neoliberal policies throughout Latin America. The data were compiled from Latin American, North American, and European newspapers that reported anti-neoliberal policy protests in the region between late 1995 and early 2001.³ To be included in the study the protest event had to be related to a neoliberal policy, economic austerity measure, free-trade accord, or structural adjustment program (e.g., price hikes, new taxes, reductions in public budgets, privatization of public enterprises/utilities, etc.). Between November 1995 and March 2001, 281 popular movement campaigns (multiple events on the same issue) and 961 distinct protest events were documented in Latin America and the Caribbean. Here as in past research based on newspaper reports, events with large numbers of participants, disruption, or violence were more likely to be reported (Koopmans, 1999; Almeida and Lichbach, 2003). Therefore these data are not a measure of the absolute amount of contention against neoliberalism but an indicator of the relative levels of protest over time and across countries in the period under investigation.

SOCIAL ACTORS AGAINST NEOLIBERALISM

Table 2 presents the different social sectors and their relative participation in the 281 protest campaigns against economic liberalization documented between November 1995 and April 2001. Forty percent of the campaigns included more than one social sector, suggesting that democratization may facilitate linkages between different collectivities. Working-class groups (e.g., labor unions) were the principal actors, participating in 56 percent of the protests. The majority of workers came from the urban sector and mining. These figures provide support for the idea that the working class is the sector most threatened by austerity policies (Portes and Hoffman, 2003) or at least has the most capacity to mobilize defensively against them.

Other important social sectors included public-sector employees (e.g., health care workers, Social Security Institute workers, and pension system employees), students, peasants, and teachers. Public-sector employees are the fraction of the working class that is most directly endangered by structural adjustment policies. Cutbacks in national budgets and massive dismissals have been a harsh reality for the public employment sector throughout the region (see Sandoval, 2001, for Brazil).⁴ In El Salvador public-sector unions emerged as the vanguard against telecommunications and health care privatization (Almeida, 2006). In Costa Rica,

TABLE 2
Participation of Different Social Sectors in 281 Anti-Neoliberal Protest Campaigns in Latin America, November 1995–April 2001

<i>Social Sector</i>	<i>Protest Campaigns in Which Sector is Present</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Working-class groups	157	55.9
Public employees	66	23.5
Students	49	17.4
Peasants	44	15.7
Teachers	38	13.5
Community-based groups, NGOs	24	8.5
Indigenous and ethnic-based groups	21	7.5
Left-wing political parties and anarchist groups	18	6.4
Unemployed, informal sector	13	4.6
Middle-class groups	12	4.3
Church-based groups	8	2.9
Environmental groups	8	2.9
Women's organizations	5	1.8
Armed insurgent groups	3	1.1

the public Costa Rican Institute of Electricity workers organized the successful struggle against the privatization of public telecommunications and electricity in March 2000. Public school teachers' associations in Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, and Peru have been active against neoliberal policy making, especially in defensive mobilizations against wage and educational budget cuts and pension system reforms.⁵

Students were present in a variety of protests, especially against tuition increases (e.g., the strike at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in 1999–2000), cuts in the university education budget (e.g., in Nicaragua between 1995 and 2004), and hikes in student busing costs (which caused mass student protests in Chile and Ecuador in 2001). Also, students often showed solidarity with other sectors in street actions against austerity measures. Finally, organized peasant groups and farmers initiated many of the campaigns, especially in Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and, increasingly, Guatemala. Peasants often protested cuts in subsidies for agricultural inputs, growing personal debt (Edelman, 1999; Aguilar, 2005), and the privatization of social security systems (e.g., Ecuador).

Other social sectors appeared less frequently in the protests, but they played an integral role in multisectoral coalitions. Neighborhood groups, human rights organizations, NGOs, women's groups, indigenous communities, local church groups, street vendors, pensioners, and debtor associations at times joined or led campaigns. Indeed, a permanent labor-based multisectoral organization in Argentina on the frontlines of anti-austerity protests, the Central de los Trabajadores Argentinos, established in 1993–1994, included several such groups from different sectors under a single organizational umbrella, as did the more loosely coordinated Bloque Popular in Honduras, the Movimiento Indígena, Campesino, Sindical y Popular in Guatemala, and the Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Populares in Paraguay. These groups had high participation rates in confrontations with the state over economic and social policies. In the

Dominican Republic, community-based groups had a substantial presence in austerity protests (Bobeá, 1999: 193–195), and in Argentina unemployed workers' organizations were prominent in the most dramatic, disruptive, and sustained protest campaigns (Auyero, 2002; Iñigo Carrera and Cotarelo, 2003).

In Ecuador and Bolivia, indigenous-based organizations often played the role of vanguard in the largest protests, among them the overthrow of President Abdalá Bucaram in February 1997 and President Jamil Mahuad Witt in January 2000 and the ousting of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in October 2003 and President Carlos Mesa in June 2005. The new social movements (i.e., identity-based movements) were not prominent social actors in this form of struggle, but they may become part of multisectoral coalitions against austerity programs in the future. In recent years, NGOs dealing with issues of consumer protection and the quality of social services have increasingly engaged in social movement campaigns over the privatization of public utilities and basic price increases (Rhodes, 2006).

TARGETS OF PROTESTS

The main targets of protests were national rather than local governments or international agencies (Fig. 1). As is common in mass-based popular movements, multiple institutions were targeted by the same campaign. Over time, popular movements increasingly recognized international agencies and regional trade bodies (e.g., Mercosur, FTAA, IADB, IMF, and the World Bank) as responsible for the economic adjustment programs they viewed as unfavorable, but the state remained the main recipient of protest demands and claims. The bureaucratic consolidation of the Latin American state and its enactment of national policies made it the central institution targeted by popular sectors with economic grievances. It was the national government that was usually responsible for executing structural adjustment and economic austerity measures. The central government was also a more vulnerable target of popular mobilization, given its physical presence in a nation's capital city, where a significant proportion of the population resides.

An important minority of protest claims targeted local governments (e.g., city councils and provincial governments). Local political units were especially important as targets in the larger Latin American states (i.e., Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina), where regional governments undertook their own austerity measures and were under national governmental pressure not to run up local budget deficits. Indeed, the beginnings of widespread anti-neoliberal protest in Argentina were against local and provincial governments in interior provinces such as Jujuy and Santiago del Estero (Auyero, 2002).⁶ Sandoval (2001: 184) reports for Brazil in the 1990s that public-sector employees mobilized defensive "strikes protesting the failure of either state or municipal governments [to] meet their monthly rolls or to protest the critical deterioration of working conditions, especially in the fields of education and health." The increasing decentralization of governmental administration and social service provision also promoted the targeting of local and regional government bodies by collective actors (Roberts and Portes, 2006). Indeed, the attempted privatization of municipal water administration in Bolivia sparked mass organizing at the neighborhood level in the cities of El Alto and Cochabamba in the early 2000s.

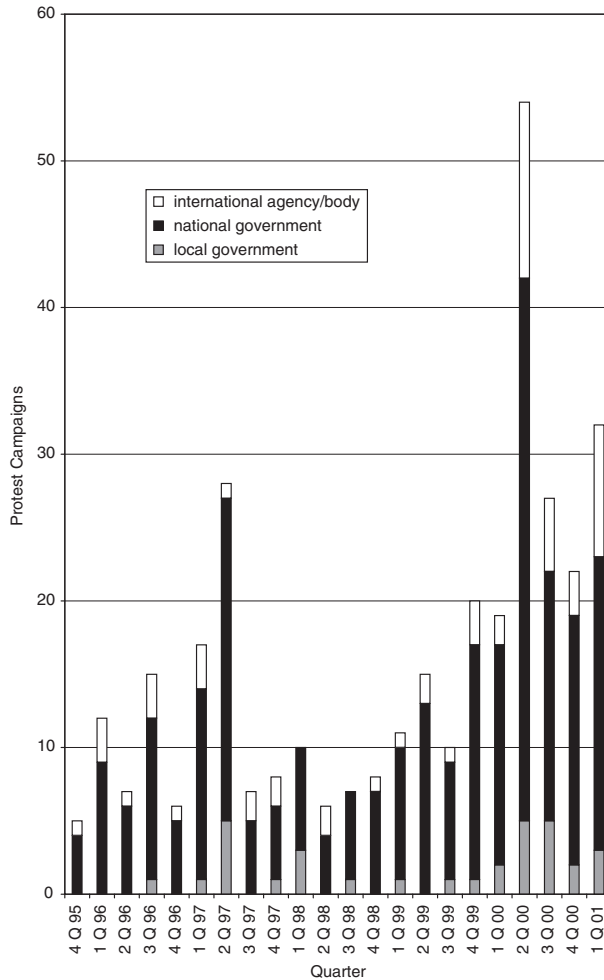


Figure 1. Targets of Claims in Anti-Neoliberal Protest Campaigns in Latin America, November 1995–March 2001.

NUMBERS

The numbers of participants in these protests are shown in Figure 2. In 1996 and 1997, Brazil and Colombia experienced massive anti-austerity strikes involving hundreds of thousands of public-sector workers.⁷ In February 1997, a major national strike in Ecuador against President Bucaram's unpopular package of price increases on cooking oil, electricity and telephone use, and public transportation drew a reported 2 million participants into the streets. In April 1997 thousands of community members in Cochabamba, Bolivia, joined a municipal strike. Because of these large events in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador in 1996 and 1997, the numbers of protest participants do not display a linear trend over time for the region as a whole, but participation rates appear to have been more sustained since the third quarter of 1999.

An increase in movement activity, both campaigns and individual events, over time is apparent (Fig. 3).⁸ Fifty-eight percent of the campaigns involved

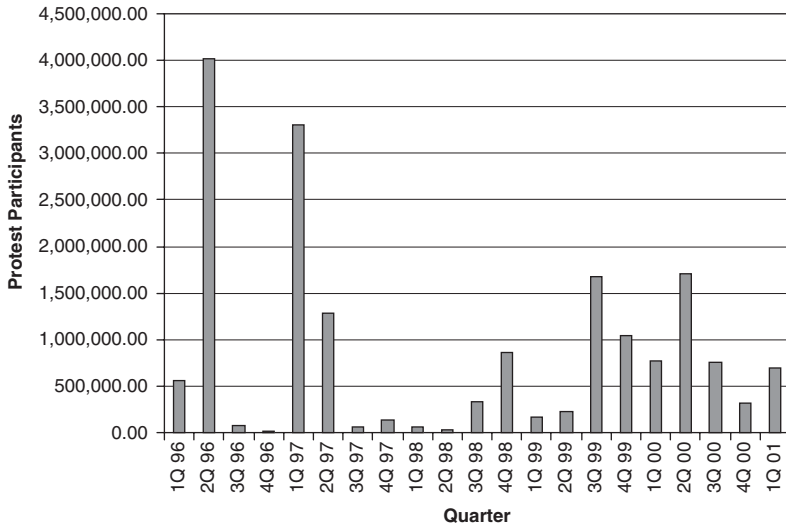


Figure 2. Participants in Anti-Neoliberal Protests in Latin America, 1996–2001.

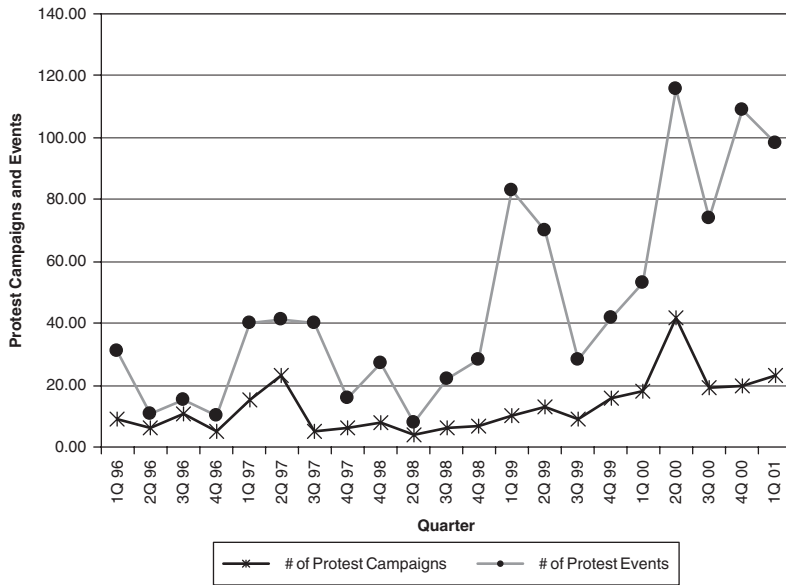


Figure 3. Number of Anti-Neoliberal Protest Campaigns and Events in Latin America, 1996–2001.

austerity measures such as the reduction in government subsidies and budgets, public-sector layoffs, wage freezes, and new taxes. Slightly less than half (45 percent) were against public-sector privatization or problems associated with past privatizations (e.g., worker indemnifications). Thirteen percent were against neoliberal policies in general (i.e., the word “neoliberal” was employed in the complaint). Another 11 percent made claims against international financial institutions. Only 4 protest campaigns explicitly opposed bilateral or multilateral free-trade treaties, although there is mounting evidence of

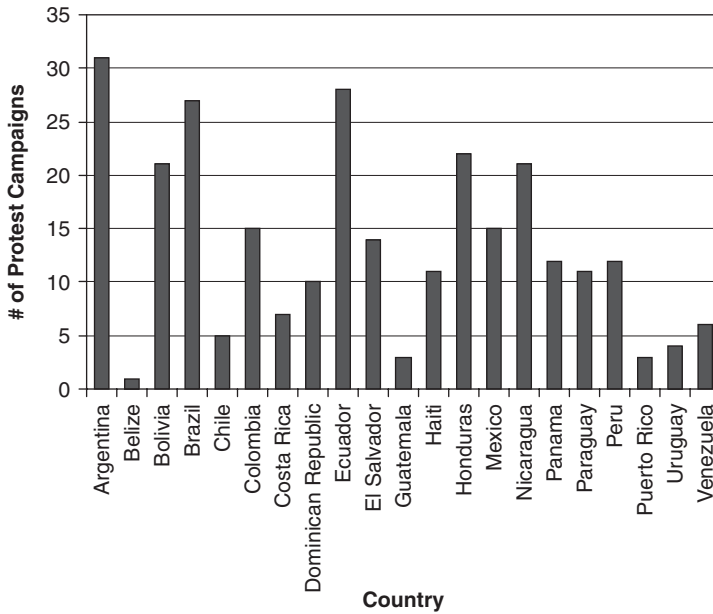


Figure 4. Number of Anti-Neoliberal Protest Campaigns by Country, November 1995–March 2001.

mobilization over free-trade agreements since 2001, and it will probably reach a higher proportion of anti-neoliberal-type protests in the near future.⁹

From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, the countries that experienced the highest levels of protest against structural adjustment were Peru, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Bolivia, and Venezuela (Walton and Shefner, 1994; Veltmeyer and Petras, 2000). Between 1996 and 2001, other countries also reported high levels of anti-austerity contention, including Ecuador, Colombia, Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador (see Figs. 4 and 5). Especially noteworthy is the relatively high level of contention in the Central American states. Major battles were waged in El Salvador in 1999–2000 against the partial privatization of the country's social security institute. Honduras also experienced several campaigns around the privatization of the public telecommunications system and several protests by public-sector unions over government-set salaries. Ecuador witnessed the second-largest number of protest campaigns and Argentina the largest. Brazil also registered a high level of anti-neoliberal contention. Every Latin American nation reported at least 3 major anti-austerity campaigns in the five-year period under study. The mean number of protest campaigns per country for Latin America and the Caribbean was 12, while the mean for individual protest events per country was 43. Thus, anti-neoliberal contention is now occurring at moderate to high frequencies in most countries of the region.

INTENSITY AND STATE REPRESSION

The intensity of anti-neoliberal protests in terms of injuries and deaths of participants, bystanders, and security forces (i.e., police and National Guard units) varied widely by country (Fig. 6). Argentina, Bolivia, and Nicaragua

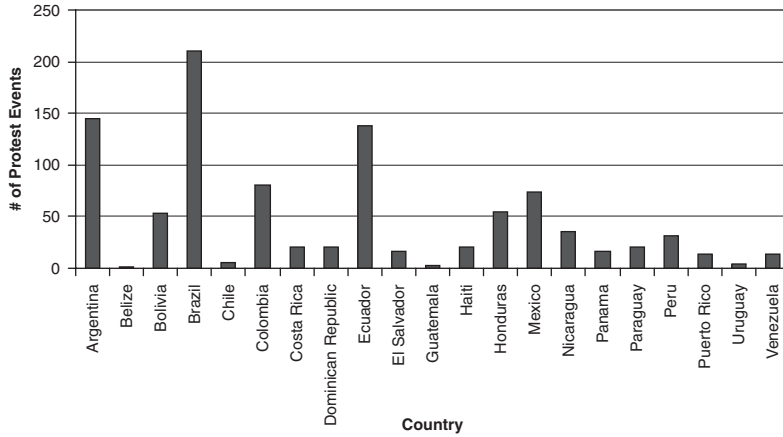


Figure 5. Number of Anti-Neoliberal Protest Events by Country, November 1995–March 2001.

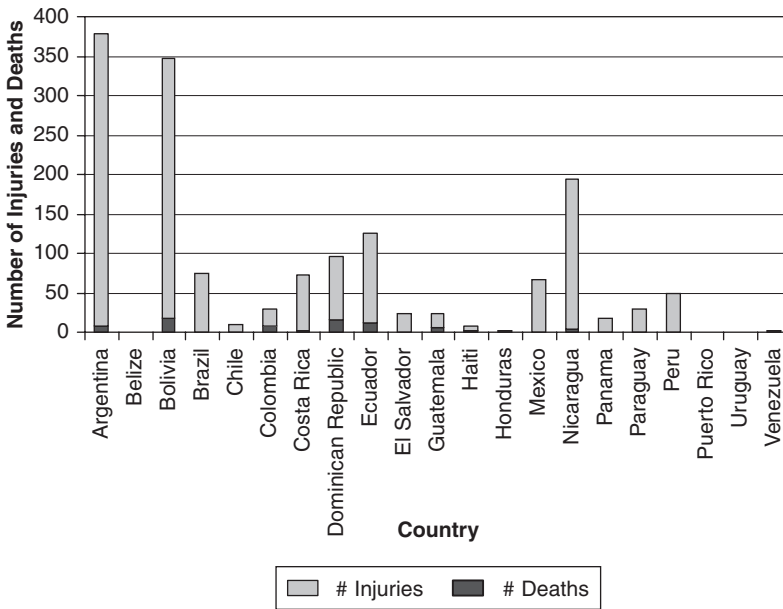


Figure 6. Injuries and Deaths during Anti-Neoliberal Protests by Country, November 1995–March 2001.

registered the largest numbers of injuries and deaths in this period. In Argentina, several pitched battles took place in the late 1990s and early 2000s between unemployed workers’ associations and police at roadblocks in the country’s interior provinces, at times devolving into protracted conflicts between jobless youths wielding slingshots and public security forces decked out in state-of-the-art riot-control gear and weaponry. The conflicts resulted in at least six reported protester deaths in the late 1990s. In Nicaragua, violent campaigns took place beginning in 1995 between elite riot police units (popularly known as “robocops” on the streets of Managua) and university students

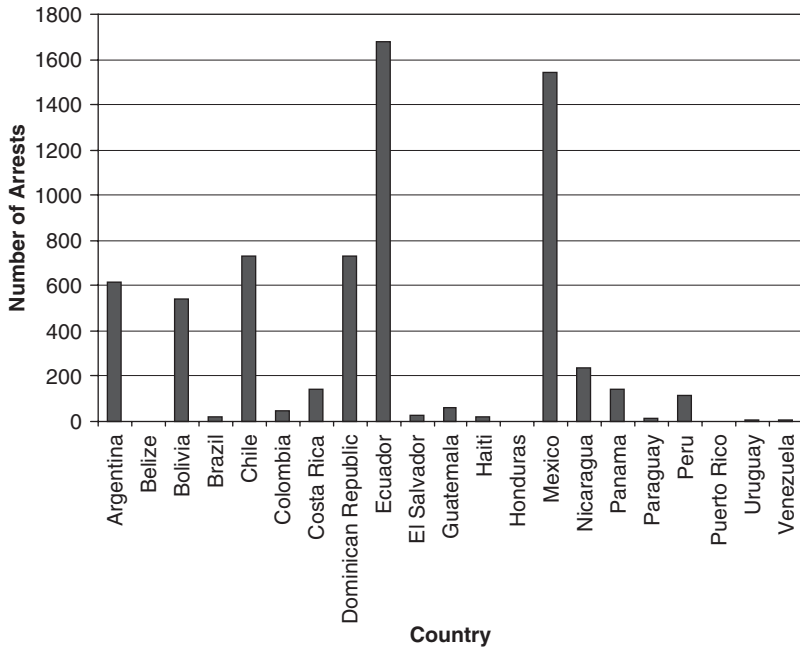


Figure 7. Arrests during Anti-Neoliberal Protests by Country, November 1995–March 2001.

demanding an end to the cutbacks in the public university budget, resulting in at least three deaths and scores of injuries (including amputations).¹⁰ There was also substantial variation by country in the level of repression exercised by national governments, as measured by the number of arrests (Fig. 7). Ecuador had both a large number of protests and a large number of arrests. Mexico, Chile, and the Dominican Republic had large numbers of arrests with lower levels of protest activity.¹¹

CONCLUSION

Between 1996 and 2001, reports of popular protest against economic austerity and adjustment policies in Latin America increased. The cooling-off period brought about by the region's democratization in the 1980s and 1990s appeared to be over; the popular sectors returned with dramatic force to the public stage. If democratization had institutionalized earlier political struggles, it now provides a more open context for civic organizations to mobilize against a reduction in government commitments to social welfare. An emergent incentive structure of austerity measures threatening economic and social benefits and citizenship rights was generating a Latin America-wide wave of contestation against the deepening of neoliberal reforms. The most active social sector in these protests was the working class, and public-sector employees, as the workers most directly affected by austerity measures, exhibited the highest rates of participation. Peasants and students also participated more than other

social sectors. Anti-neoliberal campaigns also frequently involved multisectoral alliances of several groups.

The countries with the largest campaigns against structural adjustment in the 1980s, Argentina, Brazil, and Bolivia, continued to report high levels of discontent in the new century. Furthermore, the Central American countries of Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and Guatemala experienced major battles over neoliberal policies. Privatization programs were involved in 45 percent of all reported protest campaigns. State repression of popular movements was highest in Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. In Ecuador, the repression does not seem to have been very effective in controlling the level of anti-neoliberal protest and may have served to increase protest intensity. Latin American nations averaged more than 12 major protest campaigns and 43 protest events in the period between 1996 and the first quarter of 2001. Popular unrest appears to have been a more frequent and enduring feature of Latin American political life at the turn of the century than it was in the 1980s. The contested transition to a neoliberal regional order evident in these data continues to unfold.

NOTES

1. Of course, these benefits were distributed unevenly, and even at the high point of the developmentalist state large sectors of the population (e.g., landless peasants, slum dwellers) were excluded from them (Safa, 1987). It was largely the *urban* working and middle classes that profited from state-led development policies (Walton and Seddon, 1994).

2. However, in South America several left-of-center governments were elected in the late 1990s and 2000s (i.e., Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and Venezuela) that may moderately mitigate this trend.

3. See Almeida (2002) for information on these data.

4. At the same time, public-sector unions have been the most combative in expressing dissent over government austerity measures. Sandoval (2001) found that civil service unions accounted for nearly half of the strikes in Brazil in the 1980s. In Argentina, state workers were present in 63 percent of working-class protests in the 1990s.

5. For example, in Argentina public school teachers accounted for 27 percent of all strikes reported in the country in 2003.

6. The famous battles of Carlos "Perro" Santillán, the leader of the municipal workers' union in San Salvador Jujuy, in alliance with the Argentine State Employees' Association against the austerity measures of the provincial government of Jujuy raged throughout the early 1990s.

7. Colombian state workers (led in part by the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia (Unitary Workers' Central of Colombia—CUT) also held massive strikes in September 2002, June 2003, and October 2004. The September 2002 event was a one-day strike by public servants to protest proposed increases in pension contributions and in the official retirement age. The 2003 strike was over 40,000 public-sector job cuts in telecommunications and oil processing and threatened employment reductions in the Social Security Institute. The October 2004 actions involved over 700,000 participants, including a 300,000-person-strong march through Bogotá. The protesters' grievances included a new value-added tax on basic consumer items and a proposed free-trade treaty with the United States.

8. Campaigns against structural adjustment were defined as more extensive struggles against a specific policy such as a privatization program, a new tax, or cuts in public budgets that usually involved several protest events. For example, the four-month-long struggle against telecommunication privatization in Costa Rica in 2000 is considered a single campaign. Individual protest events were measured as each individual protest within a larger campaign (e.g., a single street march, roadblock, or strike).

9. For instance, several regionwide conferences such as the annual Foro Mesoamericano have been held to discuss free-trade agreements from the popular sectors' perspective. In addition, activist groups carried out campaigns in October 2003 and 2004 throughout the isthmus against the Central American Free Trade Agreement. The actions on both occasions included roadblocks along the Pan-American Highway in multiple countries. In addition, popular organizations and labor unions across the Americas have coordinated protests (usually in capital cities) during conferences such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) meetings in Quebec, Miami, and Buenos Aires.

10. Given their relatively smaller population sizes, the anti-neoliberal protests in Bolivia, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic appear to be the most violent. These data do not incorporate the 29 protesters killed in Argentina in late December 2001 or the two unemployed protesters killed by security forces during the dispersal of the Buenos Aires/Avellaneda roadblock in June 2002. They also fail to include the 66 Bolivian demonstrators who died during the "gas war" of October 2003 and other violent conflicts over neoliberal policies that have occurred in the country between mid-2001 and 2005.

11. Additionally, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Mexico have experienced anti-austerity protests since March 2001 that are not reported here. For example, unionists from the Mexican Social Security Institute and several other strategic-sector unions launched a nationwide strike in early September 2004 against pension and retirement benefit reforms in the Institute (*La Jornada*, September 2, 2004). In Chile, the first national strike in nearly 20 years was called by the CUT on August 13, 2003, to demand better working conditions and benefits from the Lagos government. The actions included a 3,000-person march through Santiago (BBC News, August 14, 2003). In fact, popular movements in the Dominican Republic produced two major general strikes in February and November of 2003. The November strike resulted in 6 protesters and 1 police officer killed, 50 persons injured, and 1,200 arrests (*Periódico Hoy*, November 12, 2003). The protesters' demands included an end to foreign debt repayments and termination of agreements with the IMF.

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