

REANALYZING SMALL-SCALE PROTESTS: IS SUCCESS MORE THAN JUST A  
NUMBERS GAME?

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# REANALYZING SMALL-SCALE PROTESTS: IS SUCCESS MORE THAN JUST A NUMBERS GAME?

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## Abstract

This paper seeks to redefine how researchers analyze small-scale protests. Because of their small size, these sorts of opposition efforts are often ignored. However, by looking at the salience of the issue, rather than the number of participants, researchers can better explore the impact that these groups have on national policies. I first propose how networks play a key role in the success of a protest movement. I explore this proposition by analyzing two cases within the Peruvian context. In addition, I analyze two other cases of small-scale protest. The first is the contention over the privatization scheme of the telecommunications company in Costa Rica. I supplement this case with an analysis of contention over mineral extraction in Guatemala. My empirical results demonstrate that the success of a small-scale protest is a function of the presence of networks, which supplement the organizational and resource capacity of concentrated movements.

## **1.) Introduction:**

Since the “third wave” of democratization, Latin America has seen significant changes in its political and economic institutions. Liberalization of both sections of society has caused deep structural changes generating fundamental differences for the respective populations. Contentious politics are a common theme forming as a response to these neoliberal restructuring projects (Silva 2009).

A frequent question in the literature is how a state works to balance constituent concerns with the concerns of maintaining and deepening neoliberal reforms. These reforms can cause internal contention because of the threat posed to vulnerable consistencies. Within the context of a democracy, government officials are more sensitive to concerns within the country, particularly if the grievances are uniform among disparate groups within society. Often, there are groups protected prior to reform who become threatened by the conditions of the agreement (Bulmer-Thomas 2003). Labor unions are a source of particular contention when a state moves towards free trade agreements. High labor unionization rates are one of the best predictors of high levels of austerity protests (Walton and Raigin 1989; Walton and Raigin 1990; Walton and Shefner 1994). Ultimately, we can analyze the move towards neoliberalism as a two-stage process, which helps us understand the effects of various policies at specific stages: the first stage being fiscal austerity packages and the second being the promotion of free trade.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, the case of Costa Rica is best explained in this two-stage process to understand the foundation of the protest movement that occurred long before the CAFTA proposal.

In the first stage of neoliberal reform, austerity packages often aim to freeze wages and cut subsidies to protected groups in an effort to maintain fiscally stable policies. This experience was common in the 1980s and early 1990s throughout most of Latin America as struggling governments aimed to get government budget deficits under control (Remmer 1986).

In the second stage, government officials pursue free trade more heavily, which promotes increased competition by outside producers risking higher unemployment among historically protected groups. When these reforms are targeted towards public utilities, such as electricity, telecommunications, and insurance, the effect of these privatization efforts can make the issue salient to consumers. Residents may fear increasing rates and reduced services, and rational actors are more responsive to losses than to gains (Jerit 2009).<sup>2</sup>

Aside from the threats posed to increasing prices, there is also the present surplus of new consumer goods (Baker 2003). Beyond looking at the impact of reforms on labor, Baker proposes to look at how consumers view trade reform. Given that these measures increase the amount of products available to consumers, typically at lower prices than equivalent goods made domestically as a result of comparative advantage, support for such reforms is actually much higher than what many observers would suspect. However, as Baker states, this is not to say that labor groups are still not negatively affected by trade reform, only that consumer tastes outweigh the negative impact on labor. Therefore, we may still witness

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<sup>2</sup> This occurrence mirrors the “Water Wars” in Bolivia (Assies 2003).

protest movements against reforms that garner strong support in the country of analysis.

However, as demonstrated in the cases below, these consumer tastes may still not be as strong as originally perceived, or it could be that support for negatively affected groups can outweigh reduced costs of products. As demonstrated in the Costa Rican case, consumer groups *joined* with the opposition movement despite calls that privatization would lower the cost to the consumer. Therefore, these efforts are more dynamic than is exhibited in survey responses. Qualitative analysis is, therefore, the appropriate empirical analysis method for exploring the more dynamic experiences exhibited within the states in question.

In addition to analyzing this case, this paper will also look at the tactics employed by these various actors, including efforts to organize comprehensive networks against the privatization proposals and foreign investment schemes by mining corporations. However, the ultimate focus of this paper is to see how seemingly concentrated, even arguably particularistic groups, can garner enough power to influence specific parts of neoliberal reforms. At first, the case will seem counterintuitive. The conventional wisdom is that with the expansion of neoliberal policies being pushed throughout Latin America, that particularistic pressures would generally be ignored in an effort to protect free market policies. These pressures are those that aim to target benefits to a specific group and, as such, politicians are less likely to make changes that concentrate the benefits of concentrated interests. As demonstrated in this paper, however, cases of small-scale protest can run counter to this conventional wisdom.



Why study political protests as a main source of change in neoliberal negotiations? An analysis centered on the importance of institutions in countering collective action in the streets explains why in some countries discontent towards economic liberalization proceeds through the legislative arena, while in others this dissatisfaction explodes onto the streets. When these channels become 'clogged' and unresponsive, disaffected citizens then turn to protest activity to relieve pressure (Tarrow 1998). Countries with weaker political institutions thus breed a higher propensity to use protest as an alternative means to achieve political goals or express policy demands (Machado, Scartascini, and Tommasi 2009). This is particularly troubling in regions where institutions appear to be static and unresponsive to citizens' demands (Kitschelt et al. 2000).

This piece seeks to develop a new understanding of these sorts of small-scale protests. By re-exploring these contentious events through the new lens of low salience events rather than number of participating demonstrators, further research can be conducted to better understand these often ignored displays of grievance. Here, low salience contention simply means that a contentious policy only draws grievance from a small group within society: either by geographic location (the 'where') or the group ('who') is protesting. These protests do not exhibit the same attention from a large number of constituent groups because the policies themselves do not directly affect a wide number of interests. Rather, low salience contention is formed as the result of targeted policies that affect a small portion of the population.

The first part of this paper will present the theoretical foundations of my argument. This section will include the basic understanding of what concentrated salience or low salience means, as well as the two variables that are necessary for a successful small-scale protest movement: low democratic accountability and the presence of organized networks. Secondly, I will explore two cases of small-scale protests. I will conclude with how this research agenda can be expanded to explore more rigorously the theoretical foundations presented in this piece. Given that this is an early attempt at examining these ignored forms of political participation, the scope of the paper is narrow in order to explore in depth the causal mechanisms and illustrate the foundations more clearly.

## **2.) Theoretical Foundations:**

Based on the literature, the probability of protest activity occurring is a function of the economic threat presented by globalization according to its salience within various constituencies, as well as, the opportunities presented in democracy to convey grievances. If the democratic channels for constituent grievances are not functioning as they should, then the likelihood of protest activity occurring is greater. Therefore, I can assume that when political institutions are stronger, I am less likely to witness political protests as an avenue of conveying grievances.

For example, in a strong democracy, such as Costa Rica, with a long tradition of institutionalized channels by which citizens can relay grievances to political leaders, then we would not expect to see protests. Therefore, if protest activity is witnessed, then it is reasonable to believe the democratic institutions are not functioning as proper grievance channels (Tarrow 1998). When these channels

become “clogged,” they fail to relieve citizen pressure, leaving the accountability of government actions in question. As such, protests form in the streets as the alternative form of political expression.

Beyond their formation, the idea of small-scale protests has to be explained in greater detail. The idea of small-scale protests and successful networks can mean many things. Generally, when I refer to small-scale protests, I am *not* referring to the size in terms of numbers. Rather, I am looking at protests with small *direct* salience in response to a particular policy passed by the government. Typically when a protest remains concentrated within a specific region or by a small collective group within the population, the movement looks particularistic and illegitimate. By illegitimacy I mean simply that the government is not likely to view the protest movement as a viable participatory mechanism by which to express grievances, particularly when there are alternative democratic institutions to serve this function.<sup>3</sup> Given that democratic channels are functioning as a form of representation, turning to protest activity may seem to be the work of particularistic pressure groups. An example of these particularistic pressure groups is public sector employees. When a policy aims to privatize a government entity, threatening public sector employment, these individuals are likely to protest. These protests, however, seek their job security, making the benefits of success concentrated to a specific group.

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<sup>3</sup> Other ‘legitimate’ forms of expression would be such mechanisms as: voting, writing congressional members, or other less contentious forms of grievance expression.

In the same light, the government may not support these claims as other groups with similar causes may take up the available 'legitimate' democratic channels as an avenue to convey grievances such as: voting, interest group formation, or lobbying government officials. The government will be more likely to support the group that uses these channels and be more likely to dismiss the demonstrations. However, in the examples analyzed in this paper, social movements can be low salience grievances and still draw support from disparate groups across society. By strategically framing the issue to be one in which more interests have an incentive to act collectively as a comprehensive network, demonstrators are better able to make the issue salient, drawing on a larger swath of groups that provide greater organizational capacity for the movement. Therefore, even groups that lack significant amounts of resources and organizational capacity to compete with government officials, protest leaders are able to join with other segments of society generating a level of legitimacy that would not be available without such a network.

Specifically, I explore four cases of small-scale protests. These examples can be divided into two sections. The first section explains the importance of networks. The first section's examples come from Peru to leave the structural and institutional features of the state constant across the two cases, while only have a change in the independent variable of the presence of networks. The first case will explore AIDSESEP (the Inter-ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Amazon). This organization represents various indigenous communities in protecting the Amazon rainforest from continued resource extraction by the

government. This example demonstrates how network formation was successful network formation with outside organizations. The second case, which represents the counterfactual to AIDSESEP's success, is the Frente (the Front for the Defense of...). This organization is dispersed geographically, the formation of which occurs only during periods of contention. This implies that the organization lacks the capacity and resources to maintain structural elements in between contention, severely limited their long-run impact.

The second section of cases will be purely descriptive. The purpose of this section will be to explore the new definition of small-scale protests (protests defined by the low, targeted salience of the goal, rather than the size of the event itself). The examples will follow a 'where' and 'who' typology. The 'where' is the location of the protest itself. Given that my definition of small-scale protests is dependent on the salience of the issue, protest activity that forms around a policy that only affects a specific region will qualify. The 'who' is, instead, the group that is protesting. Protests are considered small when they are formed around a policy that targets a specific group within society, with their own issues at stake.

The majority of this piece will explore Costa Rican contention formed over the privatization of the state-run telecommunications and electricity companies as a precondition of CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement) approval. This qualitative case explores a 'who' type of protest, given that the policy directly targets a specific interest within society.

The second descriptive case will follow the 'where' framework mentioned previously. Again, these protests are concentrated in their salience based

geographically. This case will analyze protest activity in the Guatemalan department of San Marcos. Protest activity occurred because of the expanding Marlin Mine owned by Canadian multinational Goldcorp. The region is largely made up of indigenous peoples, and as such only directly impacted a subset of the population, making it fall under the definition of small-scale protest explained in this piece.

By reanalyzing small-scale protests in this way, I can better understand the formation of successful protest networks. Because these sorts of movements are often ignored because their size leaves them more complicated to study, a new approach should be offered to explore these types of cases. By re-exploring small-scale protests through this lens of low salience events, I hope to expand our understanding of the impact of these protest activities on government policy. To assume they are ineffective is to wash out a number of potentially powerful explanatory cases of protest.

Finally, for clarity, I will explore this idea of a 'successful' social movement as many connotations can come to mind. I use 'success' in the most conventional sense in this paper. A protest movement is 'successful' when the stated goals of the *initial* groups are met, rather than using a more subjective view of success, from the position of leaders, which may keep the concept fuzzy. Instead of meeting the general goals of the protest movement, leaders could claim that efforts at generating a network of support are enough to mark a demonstration as a success. The stricter definition is more objective and meets more of the qualifications of the hypotheses as stated below. Also, by having a more strict definition of success, I am more

accurately testing my research question. The point of this research design is to analyze the impact of networks and democratic accountability channels on the success of a small-scale movement.

There are two conditions that make small-scale protest successful: the first being the necessary condition of low democratic accountability, and the second, sufficient feature being the presence of networks. When these two conditions are met, then a small-scale activity is more likely to be successful. These necessary and sufficient conditions, however, are probabilistic and not deterministic.

When democratic accountability channels are “clogged” or low (hereby used interchangeably), then protests movements are likely to form. When channels are functioning, or high, then normal politics are observed. Normal routes of channeling grievances are voting, lobbying, interest group formation, etc. However, if these channels of grievance conveyance are not functioning, grievances are likely to turn to protest activity (Tarrow 1998). Despite the formation, there must be the sufficient condition of the presence of networks in order for a protest activity to be successful.

In order to better understand these hypotheses, I will first explain my typology of successful small-scale protests. This figure will better express some of the conditions necessary for a protest network to be successful (using the definitions explained above).

As this project expands into more quantitatively rigorous analysis, further studies will demonstrate the validity of the other points. However, given the

typology as it stands two main hypotheses can be tested within the scope of this paper.

**H1:** When democratic accountability channels are “clogged,” then protest movements will form as a collective activity to convey grievances.

**H2:** Protests are more successful when cohesive networks are present among the opposition movement.<sup>4</sup>

This type of analysis lends itself to having the protest event itself as the unit of analysis. The independent variable in these cases is the democratic channels and the presence or absence of networks. My dependent variable, therefore, is the type of protests that we see and whether or not they are successful. This early analysis and case study will provide the foundation for further quantitative and qualitative analysis. In the next section, I will explore the impact that networks have on the success of a small-scale protest movement.

### **3.) Network Formation and Their Importance:**

What makes these networks so influential to the success of a social movement? If we think of these groups as having minimal bargaining power towards the government, making them move to extraparliamentary tactics, particularly when democratic accountability is ‘clogged.’<sup>5</sup> In the following section, I will explore two cases of network formation: one in which networks are present and the other one where networks are absent. By exploring these cases, I am presenting

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<sup>4</sup> This second hypothesis is conditional on the first. When both pieces of the typology are present, the probability of success is greater as these are both necessary and sufficient conditions.

<sup>5</sup> Minimal bargaining power comes from the resource model of social movements (Lipsky 1986).



a counterfactual of when networks are weak or non-existent, that the protest movement will likely not be successful (as predicted in my hypotheses).

By combining aspects of both resource model (Lipsky 1986) and the political process model (McAdam 1982) within the social movements literature, we can get a clearer picture of how these social movements function, and why networks are so influential for their success. These models incorporate protests as both a type of political resource and a form of political expression. Because these groups typically lack bargaining power, particularly when democratic accountability channels are not functioning properly, these groups rely on outside groups to give them the organizational capacity necessary to sustain the movement.

The political process model is included in this theory because it includes the ideas of limited political opportunities and restricted organizational capacity, which are crucial for the assumptions about democratic accountability channels being 'clogged.' Because these accountability channels are not functioning, social movements form to express these grievances. As pressure builds, with no outlet, it eventually is expressed through forms of social movements. If the networks are not there to sustain the movement and to concentrate the force through a concrete avenue, these movements can even turn violent and unsuccessful. The violence is due to the 'boiling over' of pressure by aggrieved groups.<sup>6</sup>

McAdams' political process model (1982) includes the idea of limited political opportunities and restricted organizational capacity. The former issue is

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<sup>6</sup> Contention erupted in the Amazonian region of Bagua in Peru in June of 2009. This is an example of when indigenous Amazonians in northern Peru turned to violence against the police because of a lack of dialogue in continued resource extraction in the rainforest.

resolved through extraparliamentary tactics. The latter is resolved through stable networks with national and transnational groups, who work to fill in resource deficiencies. These deficiencies are particularly important when looking at small-scale protests (as defined above).

Lipsky (1986) also explores cases of success to make a protest movement based on the resource model. Given these groups lack of bargaining power, concentrated movements often require extraparliamentary tactics in order to convey grievances to government officials. As my typology notes, the “clogs” in democratic channels, makes these tactics become the *only* form of political conveyance. As Lipsky notes, “alliance formation is particularly desirable for relatively powerless groups if they seek to join decision-making as participants” (Lipsky 1986, 1146).

#### **4.) Organizational Networks: AIDSESEP vs. the Frente:**

In order to illustrate the importance of the typology presented above in the real world, I will explore two organizations within Peru that have organized in opposition to resource extraction. Resource extraction is an important element of neoliberal restructuring in much of the developing world. Because of its effects on local communities, it has caused contention between constituents and mining corporations within these respective areas. These cases also exhibit examples when the democratic accountability channels are not functioning properly and are effectively “clogged.” Because problems related to resource extraction are important for the quality of democratic institutions themselves, this is an important

research question to understand how social movements impact democratic governance.

Why study both cases in Peru? By looking at two organizations within the same country, we are effectively controlling for idiosyncrasies within the country, and rather only looking at the effect of the networks alone. As this is the purpose of this paper, this methodology seems appropriate.

Firstly, AIDSESEP (the Inter-ethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Amazon) best represents the idea of a cohesive social movement. With its hierarchical structure, including a president, this organization is better equipped to form comprehensive networks for organizational capacity (Stetson 2010). However, delving deeper into their structure and formation, it seems like a counter-intuitive group to have such cohesion and yet empirically we find it is in fact the case.

Made up of 57 federations, divided into multiple organizations at the regional, sub-regional, and village-level, AIDSESEP envelops multiple ethnic groups with diverse languages, culture, and historical development. These movements involve a struggle for self-determination, organizational self-management and independent social and economic practices vis-à-vis the state and capital (Stetson 2010, 119). After 1974, these disparate organizations began to organize formally, giving them greater bargaining power against the state.

These groups have to have some *sustained* benefit to overcome the cost. Beyond the role of ethnic heritage sustaining the group, AIDSESEP faces a common

and consistent threat from resource extraction in the Amazonian Rainforest, this cost is borne and organizational structure is maintained.

Because of the group's hierarchical structure and cohesive nature, they are better equipped to gain transnational opportunities. These opportunities include transnational advocacy groups such as: the World Bank, Oxfam International, the International Labor Organization, and even the United Nations (Stetson 2010).

Why do these outside organizations help these concentrated groups, which would be seen as particularistic pressure groups domestically? The answer lies in their framing of the issue. Social movements must work hard to find the right frames, ones that properly align with potential recruits, and are involved in framing contests or "framing wars" with their opponents to win the support of the larger public (Stetson 2010, 120). The purpose of the framing is to make a concentrated issue into a more salient one in which multiple sectors of society join in with the cause of the social movement. When successful, these networks are able to form out of grassroots movements, the purpose being to protect territorial integrity of the Amazonian region as well as the promotion of sustainable development (Stetson 2010, 124). By framing the issue as one of indigenous rights and sustainable development, transnational organizations, including international NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), religious organizations, pro-indigenous activists, and academics became involved with the movement.

To counter the cohesion of AIDSESEP, and their success of creating cohesive networks, the Frente (The Front for the Defense of [name of the local community])<sup>7</sup> has played more into the idea of geographic concentration (as mentioned above). This concentrated nature of the organization keeps the group from gaining the same level of cohesion as AIDSESEP. Individuals will take up the name of the organization in the local community, typically against a mining concession or further mining concessions in the area (Haarstad and Floysand 2007; De Echave et al. 2009).

This is not to say that within the local community that the group cannot spread beyond their geographic concentration. In the case of Tambogrande, successful framing and “clogged” democratic accountability channels helped the group form national and transnational coalitions with multiple NGOs, taking a small-scale protest and making it a more salient issue within the country. However, the point of focusing on the Frente, as a whole, demonstrates their lack of cohesion and organizational capacity relative to AIDSESEP.

### **5.) Case Studies: Descriptive studies of Small-Scale Protests:**

The following two cases are descriptive examples of small-scale protests. These examples will demonstrate qualitatively that “clogged” democratic accountability and the presence of networks are necessary and sufficient conditions for protest activity. As explained in my theoretical description, when protest activity is observed there is an issue with the democratic accountability channel is “clogged.” Otherwise, normal, everyday forms of grievance conveyance would be observed. Therefore, any case of small-scale protest meets this general

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<sup>7</sup> The name varies depending on where the local community is located. For instance, the Frente in Tambogrande is known as The Front for the Defense of Tambogrande.

precondition. However, not all small-scale protests have the presence of networks, which is the sufficient condition necessary for the movement's success. The following two case examples will demonstrate the importance of networks in two different types of small-scale protests. These activities are low in salience based on either 'where' or 'who' the government policy targets.

#### **6.) Costa Rica: Protests in 2000 against Privatization of ICE:**

In order to understand the structural foundation of the protest movement against CAFTA, an analysis of the 2000 protests against similar privatization programs is essential. This case greatly expanded the strength, both through resources and organizational capacity, of these groups. These groups involved electricity and telecommunications markets which the CAFTA proposal would also target (Frajman 2009). These markets are collectively known as the Instituto Costarricense de Electricidad (The Costa Rican Electricity Institute – hereby known as ICE).

The privatization proposal was an effort to continue the structural adjustment programs as part of the neoliberal model, which began in the early 1980s in Costa Rica. The neoliberal model typically occurred in two stages. In the first stage, government officials sought to trim government budget deficits through austerity programs. Austerity meant leaner government services and a smaller bureaucracy. In the second stage, measures deepened towards privatization of many industries to promote efficiency for free trade. Costa Rica seemed to follow a similar model, although they were not as deep into the Import Substitution

Industrialization (ISI) proposals that were popular throughout Latin America following the Great Depression (Hirschman 1968; Vanden and Prevost 2011).

Beginning in the 1990s, there were significant changes in a number of sectors of the economy, including: health, insurance, and banking (Cox 2008). As these structural changes expanded, other sectors were expected to follow. None of these sectors experienced widespread protest activity, therefore government officials expected a similar reaction to ICE.

For many in Costa Rica, the privatization proposal was neither particularly salient nor relevant. There was more concern about immigration from Nicaragua (15.3%). More Costa Ricans were concerned about the President's attempt to raise his own salary (5.7%) than fear of privatization of state industries (3.9%) (Frajman 2009).<sup>8</sup> As the protest movement went underway, however, the issue would draw support from many unaffiliated sectors of society.

Government leaders had targeted ICE to deepen integration into the neoliberal model. Obviously, economic elites had supported the proposal. In addition, both of the major political parties, including the President Miguel Angel Rodríguez, supported the privatization proposal for Costa Rican's telecommunications and electricity markets.<sup>9</sup> These groups that were in support of the privatization proposal collectively became known as 'the Combo.'

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<sup>8</sup> Survey from UNIMER- *La Nación*, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> The two dominant parties prior to the 2002 elections were the National Liberation Party (PLN) and the Social Christian Unity Party (PUSC). After the 2002 elections, the two previous parties were still successful however the Citizens' Action Party (PAC) gaining beyond the PUSC.

On March 18, the demonstrations and roadblocks had spread across the country and into the cities. This manifestation means that the issue had crossed the rural-urban divide and that the issue had become more salient among more groups, particularly public sector workers who joined in the discontent to display their own grievances. Despite this large-scale event, legislators continued with the proposal two days after the demonstrations in a closed session. This angered protesters even more and drew more sympathy from the general public.

Demonstrations increased in the days following the legislative action, and the protesters were met with violence by law enforcement. As the protests increased, “in some cases clashes between police and protesters led to arrests, injuries and some accidental deaths; stronger police responses only fuelled the popular anger and were countered with bigger and more unruly crowds” (Frajman 2009, 47). For example, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, in only one day of protests, the crowd was reported as over 100,000 strong.

Despite the earlier survey that reported low salience on the issue, surveys conducted later found that 12.4 percent of the population had participated in some form of collective action over the issue and that 70 percent of the public supported the opposition (Frajman 2009). While the difference between public opinion and salience must once again be stressed, there was still over 4 times the number of the general public that found the issue of enough importance to participate than before the demonstration were met with violence.

Following the protests, President Rodríguez was forced to reverse course and engage in the political ‘U-turn.’ Before the president had argued that the



protests had not crossed the divide from being concentrated grievances into general public dissatisfaction. After the March protests, the president had to concede this point, seeing that the number of demonstrators, and their make-up, was from disparate parts of society engaging in collective action (Frajman 2009).

While these protests may seem disconnected from the CAFTA negotiations, they represent the important groundwork that was necessary for the success of the latter event. Not only was this a further example of how disparate groups can engage in collective action, it also demonstrates the power of democratic values, as well as how government deficiencies in framing an issue, as well as missteps in dealing with protesters, can leave an opening for demonstrators to take charge and gain the sympathy of the public at large. The success of these ephemeral networks “is often not the product of the issues that polarize society, but of the attitudes and forms of communication between the actors, which is politically as well as culturally contingent” (Frajman 2009, 61). This strengthened the organizational capacity of these groups, thereby making their efforts against CAFTA built around a stronger foundation of prior experience.

### **7.) Costa Rica: CAFTA Discontent:**

In early 2003 until 2004, Costa Rica became the fifth country in Latin America to show interest in a free trade agreement with the United States that became known as CAFTA.<sup>10</sup> In 2004, Costa Rica formally announced that it would plan on signing the agreement after initially agreeing to demands by the United States to liberalize Costa Rica’s telecommunications and insurance industries

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<sup>10</sup> The other countries were El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

(Becker 2004). During these early negotiations, the round table meetings between negotiators from the United States and Costa Rican officials were done behind the scenes, without input from the specific sectors within society. Given the earlier turmoil in 2000 over a similar argument, public sector employees began organizing against the agreement, in particular the privatization plan.

The issue quickly became a salient one. These organizations worked to frame the issue as one of restricted services at higher prices, which meant that consumers would be directly affected by the agreement, incentivizing them to join the network. The argument lasted into the next presidential election cycle in 2006. The candidates would become polar opposites, campaigning on the sole issue of the free trade agreement. Noble Peace Prize winner and former president of Costa Rica, Oscar Arias, ran on a campaign supporting the free trade agreement as beneficial to all Costa Ricans, and their failure to sign it as being “collective suicide” (*The Economist* July 12, 2007). His rival, Ottón Solís fought with the telecommunications companies. Despite being pro-American and pro-free trade, Solís feared that certain aspects of the agreement, particularly the privatization plans, would be damaging for the citizens. When election time neared, the country was hotly divided. Oscar Arias was elected president by a mere 18,169 votes (*The Economist* July 12, 2007). The argument would not end at the election, however, and the discontent would only increase.

Faced with a filibuster within the legislature by opposition parties, Arias pushed to have a referendum held on the issue directly. Despite the fact that the

election had become a single-issue vote, having a direct referendum on the issue would be the clearest way to know the support for sure.

In late 2007, over 100,000 Costa Ricans, some dressed as skeletons, joined together to protest job losses and cheap exports as a result of the free trade agreement. The public sector unions had been successful in generating opposition for the free trade agreement, including students, teachers, farmers, and unaffiliated individuals (*The New York Times* October 1, 2007). In a country with a population of only four million, a protest of 100,000 demonstrates the importance of networks in taking a concentrated protest movement into a salient issue within the country.

The referendum showed slight approval for the free trade agreement, but the telecommunications and electric companies would stay a state monopoly. This would still qualify the small-scale protest movement as a success. The goal of the social movement was not to stop the free trade agreement, merely to influence aspects of the agreement itself. Demands from the United States' side had called for the telecommunications and electric industry to be privatized. However, due to the networks being present and democratic accountability channels being "clogged," these groups were able to make the issue a salient one in which multiple sectors of society had joined the movement. These two conditions of the typology were influential in making this social movement a success.

### **8.) Costa Rica: Networks and Clogged Accountability Channels:**

Given that the proposals were popular among the major political officials and the powerful business leaders within the country, and not salient within society, how was this protest movement able to organize a successful campaign? First, I

provide a detailed description of these groups that I consider low salience events. Often times protest groups are concentrated within a specific territory, particularly during mineral extraction when the industry threatens agricultural sectors of the economy (Arce 2008). Other times, protest networks affect the middle class or the impoverished in cases of poor economic performance, such as hyperinflation or low output (Vilas 2006). In a similar way, when initiatives and restructuring programs affect only one industry, or a handful of industries, they are similarly concentrated. By focusing on the strategies of these groups, as well as the deficiencies of the Combo, we can get a clearer understanding of how the opposition became successful through the formation of a competent network of organizations.

One deficiency in the Combo's proposal was in their framing of the issue to the general public. As demonstrated through the literature on interest groups, interests are best served when the issue is salient and popular among the general public (Burstein 2003). When those two conditions are met, the probability of the general public becoming vocal supporters and participants of the original organizational structure becomes more likely. This takes protest movements that were originally low salient groups into broader networks with wide access to a more durable organizational capacity.

The Combo was unsuccessful in framing the issue in an appropriate manner to make the issue salient *and* popular among the general public, leaving the opposing side to fill the gap. The Combo was careful to not frame the issue as privatization, but rather as a process of liberalization in an effort to compete with the global economy (Frajman 2009). This focus on competition, however, did not

address the general concern towards the loss of employment in current industries. The idea of a leaner, market efficient economy did not address these concerns, nor did it account for the strong social democratic traditions that existed throughout the country (Seligson 2002). By attacking utilities, the damage had changed from that of banking or even the health care industry. Access was still available to the majority of the population, however, when utility companies are affected, the issue becomes more salient by the very nature of the industry.

Using the deficiency of the Combo to their advantage, the opposition network was able to frame the issue in a way that was beneficial to the cause. Using general discontent against political leaders, the manner in which the negotiation was settled, and the positive historical sentiment of the public towards ICE, the opposition campaign was able to positively frame the issue.

A few key elements should be explained about the way the negotiations were settled and the general opinion of the public against government officials around the time the privatization proposal was negotiated. These elements are crucial in understanding how the opposition was able to take an issue of little relative salience into an ephemeral, yet successful, organizational network to be used to the opposition's advantage with tens of thousands of supporters from disparate parts of the general public.

First of all, the general public did not perceive the issue through a purely cost-benefit analysis. The issue went well beyond this 'surface' analysis. The public saw the privatization of such an important and historically relevant piece of their history as going against a fundamental part of national identity and government

leadership (Frajman 2009). ICE was a part of national patrimony that the public had come to know. Because it was a more salient body of the government, the public had more of an interaction with it. Thereby solidifying the idea that political and economic transitions can be negated by national identity arguments and sentimentally for well-known institutions.

Secondly, the country was faced with increasing discontent towards government officials. This dissatisfaction was only increased with the way the negotiations took place. Government officials in Costa Rica negotiated with trade representatives from the United States through 'behind the scenes' roundtables. These discussions did not involve the general public, and the lack of participation and transparency, made government officials look as though they were negotiating without the interests of the public at heart (Frajman 2009; Seligson 2002). These perceived deficiencies harmed the legitimacy of the government to engage in positive policymaking. If the negotiations had been more transparent or participatory for sectors of society, the privatization proposal may have been more generally accepted.

Lastly, the government's negative response to protests after they had started further exacerbated the discontent within the country. Officials had ignored protesters as unimportant and met demonstrators with police brutality. This reaction brought credence to the opposition, generating sympathy for the movement. Given that the country has a history of strong democratic values, these reactions only served to make the negotiations seem anti-democratic and not of the

same value system of the historical structure of the country (Seligson 2002; Frajman 2009).

### **9.) Guatemala:**

About 40% of the Guatemalan population is indigenous. This large proportion of indigenous peoples is among one of the largest in Latin America. However, as historically noted, this large proportion does not translate into a political force. Rather, indigenous populations have historically been marginalized of political power, subjugated to lower socioeconomic classes, and discriminated against in the national political system. It is important to note these historical discrepancies as indigenous peoples represent a competent case study of socially marginalized groups attempting to engage in successful small-scale protests.

In the following case, I will explore the contention over the Marlin mine. Beginning in 2002, this extractive region has been hotly contested by the local population and provides an exemplary example of socially concentrated groups engaging in small-scale protests in an attempt to restrict the expansion of the mine and even attempt to eliminate the mining contract altogether. First, I will explore the case in chronological order of important events. Next, I will explore the case through the lens of my theoretical typology; analyzing the structure of the protest for both the presence of networks and clogged democratic accountability channels. As in the Costa Rican case, I hypothesize that having both networks and clogged democratic accountability channels are necessary conditions for a successful small-scale protest event.

Guatemala has experienced an explosion of investments in its extractive industries beginning in the beginning of 2002. Investments in 2012 had reached a record US\$770.5 million in foreign direct investment (FDI) in only the first half of the year (an increase of 47.2% from the previous year).<sup>11</sup> Projections for the year were well over US\$1.5 billion. Increased investments are attributed to flexible labor regulations and an efficient financial market. However, despite having the largest economy in Central America, there are still large pockets of poverty, as well as, weak public institutions, high crime and violence rates, and low business trust in politicians because of stubbornly high rates of corruption among government officials. In addition, as an increasingly large proportion of the economy is dependent on FDI and extractive industries, there is a greater proportion of contention with local populations over the use of land and sources of economic development. Although as demonstrated below, certain groups do not have the same participatory rights to relay grievances to the government.

The conflict over the Marlin mine in the Guatemalan department of San Marcos has a sordid history of conflict beginning in 1998 and continuing today. As the case begins to develop, it is important to note the two variables of the typology are present throughout the case: the mobilization of civil society to give the necessary resources to the indigenous movement to sustain the protest movement (Holden and Jacobson (2008)) and the lack of accountability in the authority structures (Shirley and Donahue 2009). Therefore, this provides us with a good

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<sup>11</sup> *Latin American Weekly Report*. 2012. "Record Foreign Investment in 2012."

October/November.



case of networks being present, while there were also clogged accountability structures; the two variables necessary for a successful protest event according to my theoretical typology.

First, it is important to note some historical changes in Guatemala that led to the creation of the mine, and the development of extractive industries generally. In 1997, Guatemala ended its 36 year long civil war. A bloody and costly struggle economically, the government turned to new sources of wealth creation to make up for the lost decades. With the passage of Legislative Decree 48-97, the government aimed at attracting international investment by reducing royalties payable on mining from a high of 6% to 1%, removing prohibitions on wholly foreign owned investment companies, and allowing duty-free imports to these companies (Shirley and Donahue 2009, 3). By 2002, an increase in gold prices had led to an explosion of investment in the country, as more companies sought to take advantage of soaring gold prices.

In 2002 and 2003, Montaña Exploradora de Guatemala (a Guatemala-based company owned by Glamis Gold Ltd.), began purchasing land for the Marlin mine project and began the appropriate environmental and social impact assessments (EIA and SIA) as required by law.<sup>12</sup> The EIA was finished in June of 2003 and the Ministry of Environmental and Natural Resources (MARN) presented the company with the appropriate licenses by the end of the year. However, the SIA had not been completed before the licenses were approved, effectively leaving the indigenous

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<sup>12</sup> In 2006, Goldcorp, a Canadian multinational, purchased Glamis Gold Ltd. Making the company switch hands from a United States owned company to a Canadian company.

populations out of the government's decision-making calculus and sparking grievances among the local indigenous population in the region (Shirley and Donahue 2009).<sup>13</sup> In addition, Article 45 of the mining law calls for public consultation and Article 46 defines the right to public opposition and a procedure to convey grievances to the government. Given that these two aspects of the law were not carried out in the Marlin case implies a disparity between formal and informal rules. In addition the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169, which was ratified by Congress by Decree NO. 6-95 on June 5, 1996, requires the government to provide prior consultation rights to indigenous groups when promoting extractive industries in historically indigenous lands.<sup>14</sup>

Given the unhappiness of the indigenous populations in the dealings of the government, they contacted international NGOs in an effort to provide their own impact assessments. In February 2004, the Guatemalan NGO Madre Selva Collective worked with Oxfam America to produce a new environmental impact assessment. This revised assessment found disparities with the government's results including: acid drainage, contaminant leakage from tailings ponds, and the impact on local water supplies.

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<sup>13</sup> The plan specifically called for an Indigenous Peoples Development Plan as a part in order to comply with federal law. However, the SIA, including the indigenous development plan was not slated to be completed until the middle of 2004, well after the licenses were granted.

<sup>14</sup> ILO 169 stipulates consultation is obligatory in: 1) Legislative or administrative measures that affect indigenous populations; 2) Exploration or exploitation of sub-surface resources; 3) Alienation of the lands or relocation; and 4) Special Vocational Training Programs (*Latin American Special Report*. 2012. "Gap between Prior Consultation and Right to Veto." March 2012.

Meanwhile, the international community wanted to continue investments in these sorts of extractive industries. In June of 2004, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) unveiled a plan that involved a \$45 million loan to Glamis Gold to begin the development of the Marlin mine. Officials in the Canadian government echoed these calls, believing the development of extractive industries was mutually beneficial. In early December 2004, the government convened an international conference on the benefits of mining. Bringing in over 350 participants from hundreds of various organizations and institutions (Shirley and Donahue 2009).

Joining with the indigenous groups, networks began to form outside of international environmental groups. Magalí Rey Rosa, an activist with Madre Selva, who worked at the daily newspaper *Prensa Libre* wrote a column arguing that the mine restricted indigenous rights in the region. Magalí quoted the Mayan Chief Seattle who had said of the mining corporations, “their greed will ruin the earth, leaving behind only desert” (Shirley and Donahue 2009, 9).<sup>15</sup> Providing more widespread attention to these issues, the indigenous population now had a voice through media support.

On January 11, 2005, Mayan community members mobilized near the mine. Blocking the entrance to the mine, the government sent in police forces to disperse the demonstration. The ensuing clash led to the death of one Mayan activist with many more injured, as the police forces fired upon the demonstrators. The presence of violence made the issue of indigenous rights a more salient issue to other relevant

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<sup>15</sup> Originally quoted from *PrensaLibre.com*.

communities. Following the death of the Mayan activist, religious groups and organized labor joined forces to assist the indigenous population near the mine.

Guatemalan President Óscar Berger established a new commission on mining, which was charged with promoting recommendations on new mining legislation that would avoid the kinds of conflicts with local populations as demonstrated above. The members of the commission included advocates of mining development as well as prominent anti-mining activists such as: Cardinal Rodolfo Quezada Toruña, Bishop Álvaro Ramazzini, and Magalí Rey Rosa). This commission presented the first dialogue, however, it was still not a direct channel of representation between the government and the local population.

The first community assemblies were organized in the summer of 2005 in the nearby municipality of Sipacapa. The assembly's membership included Mario Tema (a local indigenous activist and former mayor in the region), acting president of the Association of Indigenous Communities of the Americas, Magalí Rey Rosa, and World Bank president Paul Wolfowitz. In addition, other international NGOs also joined the assembly, including: Representatives of Friends of the Earth-Canada, Oxfam America, and the Bank information Center. The goal of the assembly was to begin a dialogue as to how businesses could better generate dialogue with the community and find peaceful solutions to violent contention.

Given the continually delayed dialogue between *government* officials and the local populations, tension continued to grow among the opposition. In July 25, 2006, the opposition movement gathered in the towns of Huehuetenango to present a consultation vote to the local communities. Voters overwhelming cast ballots

rejecting the mine. However, because the referendum was not organized through government channels, it was rejected out of hand.

On January 2007, 28 Mayan farmers went to the offices of the mining company to explain grievances about damages they believed the mine was causing to the agricultural industry in the region. Officials from the company refused to meet with the farmers, asking them to leave. Some of the farmers claim security forces used excessive force to harass and brutally exit them from the premises. The lack of dialogue led to hundreds of farmers gathering to blockade the main road into the mine for 12 days following the confrontation at the offices (Shirley and Donahue 2009, 9).

These sorts of displays continued into 2008, with handfuls of activists being arrested and charged with “aggravated usurpation” (Shirley and Donahue 2009, 9). Despite a new administration in 2008 the conflict had yet to be resolved. Not until 2012 had the Ministry of Energy and Mines (MEM) seek to address modifications to the mining law. These changes included modifications to 30 articles of the law, which would increase the royalties paid by the mining companies from the low level of 1% to somewhere around 5%. In addition, there were calls for the new mining fund to distribute income from royalties more evenly to the local communities: 35% for the municipality in which the mine is located, 20% for the other municipalities in the same department, 20% for the Ministry of Social Development, 20% for natural

disasters funds, 3% for the Energy and Mining Ministry, and 2% for natural resource development projects.<sup>16</sup>

### **10.) Guatemala: Networks and Clogged Accountability:**

As demonstrated in the space above, both variables of the typology are met: the Marlin mine contention displayed competent networks of support and clogged accountability channels between the local population and the government. Despite the government setting up business dialogue groups, these do not allow direct channels to convey grievances held by the local population. Despite contention beginning in late 2003, with the passage of the mining licenses to Glamis Gold Ltd., and continuing to present day, the network that formed to support the indigenous population provided the necessary resources to sustain the mobilization for over a decade. Without such resources, the mobilization would have been predicted to disperse, either by government repression or merely an ability to continue mobilizations for as long as they had.

It is important to note the trajectory of the movement and the development of the networks. The beginning forces that helped the indigeneous population were related to environmental issues. As security forces and the police had displayed violence, other groups became involved as the issue became framed as one of indigenous political rights. While this idea of framing the issue is beyond the scope of this piece, it is important to note its important impact on the development of social networks (both national and international).

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<sup>16</sup> *Latin American Weekly Report*. 2012. "Guatemala: Proposes Changes to Mining Law." June/July.

## **11.) Conclusion:**

This paper sought to redefine how researchers define small-scale protests. By focusing more on the issue of salience, instead of the number of participants in a protest movement, qualitative research can be an appropriate research design to study the effectiveness of these sorts of activities. The target of the contentious government policy determines the salience of the event. Grievances can be sparked by policies targeting specific geographic regions or specific collective groups within society. As such, the salience of the event is concentrated either geographically or by 'who' is protesting. In addition, protest activity is only formed when democratic accountability channels are not functioning. If the channels are "unclogged," then there is unlikely to be protest activity as there are other methods to channel grievances. "Clogged" democratic accountability channels, therefore, become the necessary condition for small-scale protests. But, what makes them successful protest movements?

The key to success is with the sufficient condition of the presence of networks. Without such networks, small-scale protests, by definition, will not have the organizational capacity and resources available to contend with national policy-makers. Therefore, a competent network of organizations, based both domestically and internationally, must be present in order to garner success.

This piece has first demonstrated the importance of these networks by studying two organizations within the Peruvian context to control for structural and institutional variation: AIDSESEP and the Frente. By having a competent network formation in the case of AIDSESEP, protesters were better able to contend with

government policy forcing officials to renege on resource extraction in certain regions of the Amazon rainforest. Counter to this example, the Frente lacked a comprehensive network in its formation, thereby eliminating its organizational and resource capacity, which severely limited the group's potential for success.

Secondly, I provide illustrative examples of small-scale protests based on 'who' or 'where' government policy was targeted. These targeted policies produced low-scale salient protests. However, with the formation of competent networks, these movements garnered success in pushing back at government policy.

These examples demonstrate the importance of small-scale protests in being a powerful mechanism to not only convey grievances, but also to effectively alter the trajectory of government policy. Against conventional wisdom, the number of participants does not determine the effectiveness of the protest event, but rather other, more nuanced, conditions are necessary to understand the formation and success of these contentious movements.

Future research should seek to expand this piece into comparison with larger forms of protest activity. Most notably, is it the case that small-scale protests can be equally successful as large-scale protests based on the durability of the movement? Therefore, if a small-scale protest can sustain itself in applying pressure to government officials, will this have an equally effective impact as a large-scale protest applied briefly? More research should be conducted in order to competently understand the context of the findings of this literature.



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