
Since the late 1980s, scholars of Latin American politics have produced a significant body of research on social movements. These works have produced valuable insights concerning the causes of social movement mobilisation in Latin America, as well as factors contributing to their success or failure. However, it has had limitations. Much of the research has featured case studies of movements over short time spans. Consequently, the explanations they provide for social movement dynamics lack generalisability across time and political environments. In the book *Waves of Protest: Popular Struggle in El Salvador, 1925–2005*, Paul D. Almeida has produced a superb longitudinal analysis of protest that avoids these limitations and makes a major contribution to the comparative study of protest.

Drawing on the political process model, Almeida identified key processes driving three waves of protest in modern Salvadoran history and shaping the forms of collective action during these protest waves. The three periods of time under investigation were
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1927–1932, 1967–1981 and 1996–2005, each of which were characterised by large-scale collective action. Almeida systematically enumerated and coded protest events reported in the Salvadoran newspapers *La Prensa Gráfica* and *Tribuna Libre* between 1962 and 1981, and 1949 and 1966, respectively. Additionally, Almeida used archival sources, including Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare official statistics on strike activity and records from human rights organisations. The result is a rich and rigorous study of social protest dynamics.

Almeida theorises that the key conditions underlying the outbreak of protest waves in authoritarian and democratising states are political opportunity and threat. The two relevant dimensions of political opportunity are institutional access and competitive elections, while threat includes state-attributed economic problems, erosion of rights and state repression. Although both opportunity and threat drive protest waves, the dynamics of protest during these waves vary, depending on which condition (opportunity or threat) is present.

Based on this theoretical framework, Almeida identifies three environments that have produced protest waves in the global South, and the forms of collective action associated with the environments: (a) liberalisation-induced mobilisation; (b) intimidation-induced mobilisation; and (c) globalisation-induced mobilisation. Liberalisation-induced mobilisation breaks out during periods of regime liberalisation, when institutional access is open and/or competitive elections provide previously marginalised groups incentives to organise. During these periods, challengers make demands for reforms primarily utilising non-violent forms of collective action. Historical periods in El Salvador characterised by liberalisation-induced mobilisation include 1927–1930 and 1967–1972, periods when regime liberalisation facilitated the development of organisational infrastructures to mobilise protest.

Intimidation-induced mobilisation, on the other hand, occurs during periods of liberalisation reversal. During these reversals, regimes strip away newly won political rights and apply significant repression. Additionally, organised groups may attribute economic problems to the state. Under these conditions, the claims of challenger groups become more revolutionary and anti-systemic, and forms of collective action increasingly violent and disruptive. Examples of intimidation-induced mobilisation in El Salvador were the periods 1931–1932 and 1972–1981, when citizens blamed the government for rural landlessness and unemployment, and highly repressive regimes rolled back reforms and used massive repression to crush the protest movements.

Globalisation-induced mobilisation occurs during periods of regime democratisation. During these periods, institutional access re-emerges and competitive elections provide organisations and oppositional parties the political space to challenge the state. Additionally, neoliberal economic policies and state-induced austerity characterise such periods. In globalisation-induced protest waves, movement claims tend to be reform-oriented and designed to protect state services, and non-violent forms dominate the repertoire of collective action. An example of globalisation-induced mobilisation was the period 1996–2005, during El Salvador’s post-war democratic transition. This period was characterised by the expansion of civil society, legalisation of the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation as a political party, and government efforts to privatise the public health care system.

Almeida’s chronicling of collective action from 1925 to 2005 in El Salvador provides a powerful theoretical framework for understanding the conditions that drive protest waves and influence their forms of collective action. The research confirms the expectations of political process theorists that expanding political opportunities,
particularly institutional access and competitive elections, are associated with waves of protest. Additionally, the work demonstrates that these conditions result in reformist claims and non-violent forms of collective action. More important, though, and in contrast with the expectations of the political process model, Almeida shows that threat also drives protest mobilisation. In situations where liberalisation persists and groups have time to develop inter-organisational connections, threat produces more radical claims and violent forms of collective action. Although this study focuses on the experiences of a single country, El Salvador, Almeida’s analysis of multiple collectivities over an extended time period and under different regime types permits him to make important contributions to the comparative study of social movements.

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