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Responding to the Street: Government Responses to Mass Protests in Democracies

Abstract

This article proposes two models that address the neglected relationship between protests, government countermovement strategies, and democratic politics. By contrasting centrifugal and centripetal dynamics triggered by government responses to mass protest, the models theorize the link between government counterframes and opposition politics in democracies. The strategies deployed by the Argentine and Brazilian governments during the cycle of mass protests that erupted in these countries in 2012-13 are used in illustration. The counterframing models developed in this article shed new light on the role of government responses in the dynamics of contentious politics, with potential for application to other contentious episodes and political contexts.

Introduction

Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow recently concluded that ‘the relations between social movements and elections have seldom been specified in a systematic way’, and that the social movement field remained overly focused on static categories that paid ‘too little attention to the mechanisms that connect contention to outcomes of interest’ (McAdam and Tarrow 2010, 532, 529). This article tackles this deficit, expanding on the linkages connecting contentious action and routine politics and elucidating dynamic mechanisms relating mass protests, governmental responses, and political institutions. Gaining a better understanding of this relationship is important in light of the frequently underplayed consideration that ‘state institutions and parties are interpenetrated by social movements, often developing out of movements, in response to movements, or in close association with movements’ (Goldstone 2003, 2). This article therefore explores an overlooked element in the theorizing of these linkages: the counterframing responses that democratic governments may deploy in response to mass protest episodes, and the contrasting centrifugal and centripetal dynamics that may subsequently develop in respect of party politics and electoral campaigns.

By outlining a model linking government counterframing strategies in response to protest with subsequent electoral campaigns and results, this article goes beyond the traditional focus in the literature on contentious politics on the performance, repertoires, and framing strategies of protesters (Noakes 2000; Tarrow and Tilly 2009; Walder 2009). Furthermore, whereas existing literature on framing processes has commonly concentrated upon the dynamics of framing and framing contests in themselves (Benford and Snow 2000; Esacove 2004), this article explores the interactions between framing processes and routine democratic politics. In so doing, the article also goes beyond existing literature considering the relationship between social movements and national democratic institutions, which has tended to evaluate the issue independently from the framing literature (Schlozman 2015;

McAdam and Kloos 2014; McAdam and Tarrow 2010; Kitschelt 2006; Roberts 2002; Yashar 2005; Kitschelt 1993), although framing's role in movement and party identities has received some treatment (Heaney and Rojas 2015).

Moreover, through its evaluation of contrasting counterframing dynamics in relation to Argentine and Brazilian government responses to the mass protests episodes of 2012-13, the article contributes to the incipient literature dealing with the strategies through which different political regimes manage social unrest. To date, a range of authors have made advances in the study of countermovement tactics deployed by authoritarian, hybrid, and segmented composite regimes (Robertson 2011; Chen 2012; Alimi and Hirsch-Hoefler 2012; Thornton 2002), as well regarding the policing of large demonstrations (Gillham, Edwards, and Noakes 2013; Fernandez 2008). However, the analysis of the implications of counter-responses by governments to contemporary mass protests remains underdeveloped, generally discussed around repression/concession categories (Gerschewski 2013; Carey 2006; Goldstone 2003; Tilly and Goldstone 2001). In addressing this gap, the article incorporates into the contentious cycle government responses, the reaction of opposition actors and parties, and the often unexpected impact of their decisions, both in terms of movement dynamics and election results.

Lastly, the article addresses an empirical gap in the substantial literature on popular mobilization in Latin America. Much of this literature has been dedicated to challenges to the military governments during the 1980s, or to protests in the context of neoliberal reforms and economic crisis in the 1990s and early 2000s (Petras and Veltmeyer 2011; Franklin 2013). Some analyses have also been conducted on the causes of protests in the post-democratization era (Bellinger and Arce 2011), into government co-optation of protest actors that result in demobilization (Wolff 2007), and into the transformation of indigenous social movement actors into political parties (Rice 2012). However, the recent wave of protest

under ‘pink-wave’ administrations has received much less attention, and there is as yet no comparative study of the viral, broad-based, and multi-issue protests in Argentina and Brazil in 2012-13 (McNeish 2013; Saad-Filho 2013).

The article uses these two national episodes in the pursuit of typological theorization, by which in-depth comparative case exploration is used ‘to develop theories about different configurations of variables and the outcomes to which they lead’ (Bennett and Elman 2008, 507). Thus, the two cases provide an empirical basis for two analytical pathways following from contrasting government counterframing strategies in response to protest under certain democratic conditions, enabling us to examine the broader dynamics these may trigger, and their potential impact upon the political system. Following the case analyses, further analytical trajectories and outcomes are elaborated in the concluding discussion.

The Centrifugal and Centripetal Models

When confronted with protest, democratic governments have a range of options with respect to response, some of which may be used simultaneously. These can range from ignoring the protest, to employing strategies for containment and suppression through the use of police and armed forces, plus subversive strategies such as orchestrating agents-provocateurs or counter-movements, as well as political strategies of co-optation or new legislation that responds to protesters’ demands. Traditionally literature on social movements, when it has dealt with government responses, has concentrated on concessions and repression (Tilly and Goldstone 2001). This article, on the other hand, elaborates on the ideal-type political dynamics that may proceed from two types of government counterframing responses to protest. These have been labelled centrifugal and centripetal models, since in the former protesters and the government are pushed apart, while in the latter they are brought together. Relevantly, these two models and the trajectories examined in this article do not exhaust the

spectrum of analytical possibilities for protest-government-opposition dynamics, with further possibilities discussed in the last section.

The dynamics of the centrifugal and centripetal models may be separated into three stages: (i) the counterframing response by the government to protest; (ii) the subsequent potential reconfiguration of government-movement-opposition relations; and (iii) the potential repercussions for democratic functioning of the alternative reconfigurations. They involve interactions among three key sets of actors: (i) the government, in particular the governing political party or parties; (ii) the participants in the mobilization; and (iii) the formal institutionalized opposition, in particular the opposition political parties.

(i) Government counterframing responses to protest

In the study of social movements, framing refers to ‘the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers’, and protesters deploy ‘collective action frames’ defined as ‘action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization’ (Benford and Snow 2000, 613–4). Counterframing refers to ‘opponents’ attempts to rebut, undermine or neutralize the movement’s collective action frames’ (Zuo and Benford 1995, 139). Framing and counter-framing are not limited to discursive practices: as Doug McAdam (1996, 354) postulated, frames involve what actors do as well as what they say, and movement strategies also have a framing function.

Assuming that a government confronted with protest engages with protesters’ claims and frames rather than ignoring them, there are two logical possibilities for this engagement: (i) an oppositional approach challenging the claims and frames, and (ii) an inclusive approach that emphasizes the commonalities of the protesters’ frames and those of the government. While the former tends to aim towards rebuttal and undermining of contentious frames, the

latter may be directed towards neutralization and incorporation. The processes involved in each are elaborated in figure one (the lines in this figure and in figures two and three should not be interpreted as indicative of automatic processes, but are subject to the contingencies discussed in the text).

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

An oppositional approach to counterframing is the one most commonly identified in the literature. It may come in a number of forms including ‘explicitly countering opponents’ diagnostic claims’ and ‘diversionary reframing of which issues are most pertinent to the debate’, as well as ‘boundary distinction’ intended ‘to clearly distinguish movement protagonists and antagonists’ (Gallo-Cruz 2012, 24). It is the last of these aspects that is central to the first stage of the centrifugal model put forward in this article. Boundary distinction involves the demarcation of an in-group and an out-group, and in this study the in-group refers to those who are those identified with the governing political party or parties, and the out-group refers to those who are not identified with the governing political party or parties. Should this approach to counterframing resonate with participants in the protest movement, one might expect polarization between the protest movement and the governing political party to take place, since those participating in the protests, despite the divisions that may exist among them, are demarcated together on the other side of the boundary from the government and its supporters. In the terminology of Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow (2007, 215) the mechanism of ‘boundary activation’, i.e. ‘increase ... in the salience of the us-them distinction separating two political actors,’ contributes to the broader process of ‘polarization’, i.e. ‘increasing ideological distance between political actors or coalitions’.

An alternative approach to counterframing to one based on boundary distinction is one based on ‘boundary negotiation’, i.e. ‘the discursive effort to define a contested social object as existing within collectively held boundaries’ (Gallo-Cruz 2012). In the centripetal model, the inclusive counterframing approach adopted by the government blurs the boundary between it and the protest movement. Rather than emphasizing the differences between an in-group and an out-group as in the oppositional approach, in the inclusive approach the commonalities between the government and the movement are emphasized. If this approach to framing resonates with participants in the protest movement, the scope for compromise between government and protesters may be increased, and those participating in the protests may become divided between those prepared to compromise/negotiate with (and potentially become co-opted by) the government, and the radical flanks that either refuse or are not invited to do so (Haines 1988; Coy and Hedeem 2005). Again, in the terminology of Tilly and Tarrow (2007, 215–217), the mechanism of ‘boundary deactivation’, i.e. ‘decrease in the salience of the us-them distinction separating two political actors’, contributes towards ‘attribution of similarity’, i.e. ‘identification of another political actor as falling within the same category as your own’, between the governing party and the movement.

These proposed ideal-type counterframing dynamics have been developed with a set of assumptions in mind with respect to both the nature of the political opportunity structure and the nature of the protest movement. It is assumed that the protest in relation to which the counterframing responses are directed takes place in a state where institutionalized democratic procedures such as elections and competing political parties are established rather than in the process of formation, and where the extent of foreign government interference in domestic politics is not substantial. It also assumes the existence of a government in which there is sufficient unity for a clear counterframing approach to be developed and identified: while acknowledging that in democratic states different government actors may respond in

different ways, even in the most divided and pluralistic states governments have the capacity to put forward clear positions (Mayhew 2005), particularly when facing crisis situations, let alone Presidentialist systems that concentrate executive authority in a single directly elected office. The form of protest to which the counterframing response is directed is assumed to be broad-based and promoting general demands for reform, rather than drawing from a particular ethnic or social group in relation to which there may already be powerful in-group / out-group distinction from the governing party, or concerned with the promotion of a particular sectoral demand in relation to which boundary distinction and blurring may not be viable approaches to counterframing. This article does not assume unity and cohesion in the movement beyond these criteria. Other analytical possibilities when these conditions are not met are discussed in the conclusion.

Moreover, one would expect the characteristics of the political opportunity structure to play a significant role in determining whether an oppositional or an inclusive approach is taken forward. As Rice has argued, the degree of institutionalization of a party system appears to play a significant role in relation to whether governments are likely to adopt confrontational responses to protest (in the case of weak institutionalization) or to seek to manage protest through legislative means (in the case of strong institutionalization) (Rice 2012, 28). Furthermore, as Polletta and Ho have highlighted, one should note ‘frames’ indebtedness to political traditions’ (Polletta and Ho 2006, 195). Counterframing responses that blur boundaries may therefore be expected to be more likely to be encountered where there is a tradition of inclusiveness in institutionalized political processes and a limited history of protest, while oppositional responses may be more likely to be expected where there is an exclusive political culture and an extensive protest tradition. Whether or not a counterframing response resonates with the protest movement and contributes to either polarization or attribution of similarity is also likely to be influenced by these historical

experiences. Although it is not the objective of this article to test competing explanatory variables, the analytical narratives developed ahead take into consideration these and other contextual aspects, as well as politicians' strategic calculations in light of them.

(ii) The reconfiguration of government-movement-opposition relations

When confronted with governing party counterframing responses, participants in protest movements may respond in multiple ways. The protest movement may, for instance, be either radicalized or deactivated (Wolff 2007). Or in respect of institutionalized democratic politics participants in the protest movement may form a new political party and thereby potentially transform the party system (Rice 2012). An alternative to these three pathways is for the protest movement to respond within the configurations of the existing party system through alignment with either the existing parties of government or those of the opposition. Assuming that the protest movement was not already clearly aligned with either the opposition or governing parties, and that the political system consists of an identifiable government and opposition, there are two principal possibilities for this reconfiguration of movement-government-opposition relations, illustrated in figure two.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

In the centrifugal model the governing party and the protest movement are pushed further apart, while the opposition parties and the protest movement are brought together. As outlined in the previous section, boundary distinction may, by emphasizing the us-them distinction between the government and the protesters, reduce the scope for compromise between the governing party and protesters, and if the movement fails to stick to non-institutionalized politics or to develop new opposition parties of its own, it may provide an

opportunity for the existing opposition parties to exploit. The boundary distinction mechanism may contribute towards this, since the boundary drawn in the government's counter-frame distinguishes both the movement and the opposition parties together on the other side of the boundary from the governing party and its supporters, potentially supplanting divisions that may previously have existed within and between the protesters and the opposition parties. Should this fail to happen, new opposition parties may form from the movement, a possibility considered further in the conclusion.

In the centripetal model, on the other hand, the governing party and the protest movement are brought closer together, and the opposition and the protest movement fail to align. Since as a component of the boundary blurring process the government seeks to identify commonalities between its frames and those of the protesters, scope for compromise between government and protesters is increased. The calculation behind such an approach is to assume that the moderates within the protest movement have the potential in this manner to be drawn into the institutionalized political procedures aligned with the governing party, leaving only the radical components of the movement behind: an easier target for policing and delegitimation. With the governing party having captured the moderate component of the protest movement, the scope for opposition parties to exploit the protest movement may thereby be neutralized.

Each of the characteristics of the political opportunity structure likely to be significant for understanding why an oppositional or an inclusive approach to counterframing is adopted, such as the institutionalization of the party system, whether the political culture is inclusive or exclusive, and the extent of the protest tradition, is likely also to be influential in determining whether the movement responds in accordance with the patterns identified here. Also likely to be important is the scale of the protest movement and the proximity to an election, as one would expect government and opposition parties to take a greater interest in

capturing participants in a protest movement the greater and more widespread the popular participation in the movement, and the closer the date to an anticipated election.

(iii) Potential repercussions for democratic functioning

A further contribution of this article is its enhancement of our understanding of how government responses to protest movements may have repercussions for the democratic functioning of established democracies. In particular, it may be argued that, under certain conditions, centrifugal dynamics could enhance representative democratic features, such as enhanced electoral competition, while centripetal dynamics may be conducive to features more associated with improvements in participatory democracy, such as the widening of political deliberation and/or participation. In neither case is the process prescriptive, and it should be noted that alternative understandings of representative and participatory democratic features to those put forward here may challenge either or both the representative nature of party competition and the participatory nature of government concessions to protesters.

INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE

The understanding of democracy adopted in this article is not one in which there is a simple distinction made between democratic and undemocratic governments. Instead, democracy is seen as multifaceted concept that has different forms, each of which has variable intensities and characteristics. The principal forms that concern this article are representative democracy and participatory democracy, and it is posited that the contrasting centrifugal and centripetal processes identified in the preceding section may have differential repercussions for features of each of these.

Representative democracy is the most commonly understood approach to democratic government: while there are many facets to representative democracy, as Alonso et al. argue it may be understood to mean ‘a type of government in which the people, in their role as voters faced with a genuine choice between at least two alternatives, are free to elect others who then act in defence of their interests’ (Alonso, Keane, and Merkel 2011, 2). With the development of party systems, representative democracy has commonly been associated with competitive party politics (Bara and Weale 2006; Pitkin 1967). Party competition may vary in terms of its intensity, which can be measured in a number of different ways such as the scale and frequency of alternative party majorities (Solé-Ollé 2006). An increase in these might therefore be interpreted as indicative of the potential invigoration of aspects of representative democracy.

Participatory democracy, on the other hand, involves an interpretation of democracy that extends significantly beyond the electoral process and competition among political parties. While it may come in a number of forms, it has commonly been associated with institutional reforms intended to facilitate citizens’ capacities to exercise ‘voice’ beyond the opportunity to vote for competing political parties in elections, spanning an array of new institutions aimed at ‘accountability, responsiveness, and indeed representation’ (Cameron, Hershberg, and Sharpe 2012, 5). In addition to institutional reforms, participatory democracy can involve a variety of ‘deliberative’ moments, modes of decision-making, and forms of enhanced political debate, ranging from interest group bargaining to citizen assemblies and protest events (Thompson 2008). The scale, reach, and effectiveness of these moments may form means towards understanding the intensity of participatory democracy.

The dynamics of the centrifugal and centripetal models put forward in this article may lead one to expect potential effects over the functioning of democracy in both representative and participatory terms, affecting enhanced electoral competition in the former case, and the

openness of political debate and participation in the latter. As figure three highlights, neither of these is an automatic consequence of the counterframing dynamics identified in section (i). Polarization between the government and the protest movement in the centrifugal model may not necessarily lead to alignment between the movement and the opposition: instead, the movement may radicalize or effectively be delegitimated by the counter-frame. In the centripetal model, on the other hand, attribution of similarity has the potential to contribute to co-optation of the protest movement rather than significant concessions towards participatory democracy: as Wolff (2007) argues, movements embedded in particular local settings may be especially vulnerable to co-optation.

Nevertheless, assuming a facilitative configuration of political opportunities and protest movement characteristics, each model reveals potential mechanisms towards the invigoration of features of either representative or participatory forms of democracy. In the centrifugal model, the adoption of an oppositional approach and the subsequent in-group/out-group demarcation limits the prospects for participatory democratic reforms, given the exclusion of out-groups that this process involves. On the other hand, the alienation of the participants in the protest movement from the governing party facilitated by the out-group demarcation, as highlighted in section (ii) provides an opportunity for the opposition parties to make common cause with the participants in the protest mobilization. If this leads subsequently to the acquisition of a greater mandate for the opposition political parties in an election, the increased party competition may be indicative of enhancement of aspects of representative democracy.

In the centripetal model, on the other hand, the prospects for invigoration of representative democratic features may be limited, since the blurring of the boundary between the government and the protest movement may leave limited scope for opposition parties to attract movement participants, if this approach to counterframing resonates with

movement participants. However, if in order to blur the boundaries between the government's frames and those of the movement, the government makes significant and substantial concessions to the movement's demands, the engagement processes with protest actors involved in the making of these concessions may be considered to be indicative of the widening of participatory democratic opportunities, as may be the formation of new institutionalized fora facilitating such engagement on a longer term basis.

Counterframing Dynamics in Motion

The 2012-2013 protest episodes in Argentina and Brazil serve to illustrate contrasting counterframing dynamics when a government explicitly adopts either an oppositional response, as in Argentina, or an inclusive one, as in Brazil. In this sense, the cases constitute archetypal cases of the responses considered in the two models. In the following two subsections, the cases are presented according to the main dimensions of the models: Government Counterframing Approach, Impact on Government-Movement-Opposition Relations, and Potential Repercussions for Democratic Functioning. The article uses these cases in the form of 'analytic narratives', aimed at generating a detailed and textured account of 'the relationships among the actors, institutions and structures that are constituent parts of a complex phenomenon' (Levi 1998, 16). The inductive approach adopted in this article aims to illustrate empirically the operation of a parsimonious model while accepting the complexity – path dependence, multiple causality, and uncertain decision making – of social reality. The article does not seek to explain why governments chose a certain countermovement strategy, but rather to inform on how the proposed theoretical scenarios play out during historically and institutionally situated protest episodes. Empirical observations in the analytic narratives thus serve to enable assessment of the premises in the model and derivation of new implications and hypotheses (Trampusch and Palier 2016, 9).

The article is based on qualitative analysis of an extensive array of government and media sources to elucidate the frames identified and the subsequent dynamics in an approach consistent with that adopted in existing literature on counter-framing (Zuo and Benford 1995; Gallo Cruz 2012). The article's especial focus on Presidential sources to elucidate the government's counterframing approach is consistent with existing work on the Argentine and Brazilian governments' responses to the protest episodes in question (Sweet 2014; Sotero 2014; Mauro 2014).

The cases were selected as they share certain features appropriate for the purpose of the article. For instance, as will be shown, both episodes are typical of 21st century mass mobilizations, involving heterogeneous political claims, lack of clear leadership, varied participation profile, and social media diffusion; and took place in a similar period. Furthermore, the protests confronted and triggered responses from democratic governments, in terms of having free and routine elections, a stable constitutional structure, free media, and open electoral competition. Both these governments are considered to be representative of the 'new' Latin American Left, with incumbent presidents belonging to political parties – the Workers' Party (PT) in Brazil, and the Peronist *Frente para la Victoria* (FPV) in Argentina – that dominated the political landscape over the previous decade, and that share a marked social movement orientation (Levitsky and Roberts 2011; Ciccariello-Maher 2013; Arditi 2008).

Nevertheless, each case has its own particularities and political opportunity structures. Under the Kirchner administrations, Argentina maintained its hyper-presidential character and a populist political culture, with an extensive protest tradition and a weakly institutionalized party system (Mazzuca 2013; Etchemendy and Garay 2011; Levitsky and Murillo 2008). Brazil, instead, is a coalitional presidentialism, with a more inclusive political culture and institutionalized party system (since the 2000s), and possessing a rather limited

protest tradition, with the last major mass protest previous to 2012-2013 taking place two decades earlier, during the impeachment of President Collor de Melo (Pereira and Melo 2012; Power 2010; Pogrebinschi and Samuels 2014). In both cases, the centrality of the executive (more marked in the Argentine case) and its capacity to influence political incentives and debate (for example, given ample budgetary discretion), supports the focus on ‘national’ (counter)frames and responses emanating from the presidency, as was previously explained.

The context anteceding the protests in both cases was characterized by growing social unrest against government policies. Argentina’s President Cristina Fernández had been re-elected in October 2011 with a record 54% of the votes, beating the second contender by a 37% margin. Initially, this emboldened her party to suggest the possibility of a constitutional reform enabling the president to run for a third consecutive mandate, causing outrage in both the opposition and sectors of the population (LPO 2012; Calvo and Murillo 2012). However, four events tainted this euphoria and negatively affected her level of approval. First, an accident in one of Buenos Aires’ main train stations, in which 51 died, led to a strong debate about the government’s responsibility for the poor state of public infrastructure. Second, the FPV experienced the end of its alliance with the influential labor movement. Third, the government accentuated its conflict with private media, passing a controversial anti-monopoly media law. Fourth, the deceleration of economic growth, double-digit inflation, and decaying monetary reserves, led the government to impose currency controls that were unpopular with middle-class and business sectors (Tagina and Varetto 2013).

In Brazil, Dilma Rousseff’s popularity started to suffer immediately after her election in 2010 in light of a slowdown of economic growth and the threat of rising inflation, while facing pressure from the conservative media, politicians, economists, and financial markets to adopt more orthodox economic policies (Ban 2013). This was a result of what Saad-Filho and

Morais (2014) called a ‘confluence of dissatisfactions’: the discontent of the traditional middle-classes and elites from losing ground due to the PT’s socially-oriented programs, and the discontent of ‘new’ middle-classes and informal workers that saw their gains obtained during the Lula governments threatened. Additionally, the issue of corruption, which had flashed with the *Mensalão* scandal of 2005, re-appeared as a cause of social discontent in October 2011, when 20,000 people marched in the streets of Brasilia and other cities, calling for political reforms and stronger anti-corruption and transparency legislation (Clausen 2012; MCCE 2012).

Argentina: Boosting the opposition

The Argentine episode involved three mass mobilizations occurring in the evenings of 13 September 2012 (13-S), 8 November 2012 (8-N), and 18 April 2013 (18-A). The dates were proposed and promoted by individual and collective opposition bloggers, but diffusion occurred virally through informal contacts, mailing lists, and social media, with no organized group leading the protests (Marquez 2012; Pagni 2012). Figure four below provides a timeline of the events until 27 October 2013, when legislative elections took place.

INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE

The number of mobilized people is disputed: police sources estimated 220,000 and 500,000 protesters for the first two events in downtown Buenos Aires alone, and *La Nación* newspaper mentioned over a million people for the third event, which included mobilizations in front of Argentine embassies around the world (Nación 2013; BBC 2013a). Also disputed is the socio-economic composition of protesters, but an academic survey indicated that 40% of attendants of the second 8-N event were of middle- and upper-middle class extraction –

with 21% reportedly possessing higher education qualifications – but also including an important number of pensioners (11%) and working-class participants (10%). Moreover, 25% of attendants claimed that it was their first protest (Gómez 2014). Protesters rallied behind a diverse array of themes signaling dissatisfaction with the administration’s policies. Prevalent issues were economic concerns (inflation, currency restrictions, taxes, falling salaries), crime levels, deteriorating quality of living and public services, corruption, the erosion of institutions, and excessive political polarization and aggressiveness.

Government Counterframing Approach

The governing party’s approach aimed from the start at delegitimizing the protesters and their motives, and reinforcing the distinction from its own camp, policies and ideology. As the protest episodes reoccurred and increased in size this approach was somewhat moderated, but nonetheless remained dominant. Thus, immediately after the 13-S protest, important government figures publicly questioned the spontaneity of the mobilizations – hinting that they were supported by clouded conservative groups – and the supposed ideological neutrality of the protesters (Rossi 2012). These were framed as a minority historically opposed to the policies of social inclusion, labor rights, and national development advanced by the Peronist movement and governments. Common at this point was the use of derogatory class-based epithets and references. The protesters were referred as ‘gorilas’, a dated term meaning ‘radical anti-Peronist’. The Chief of Staff claimed that the protesters ‘did not step on the grass’ on the government square (*Plaza de Mayo*) ‘in order to avoid getting dirty’, while the director of the National Library considered that participants included sectors of the far-right, disoriented ‘ladies that just left the shopping mall’, supporters of the rural aristocracy, and racist and class-prejudiced components of the middle class (González 2012).

After the second protest, this counterframe was extended to portray the protests as a symptom of the weakness of the opposition, a clear example of In/Out demarcation. Thus, the presence of middle-class protesters was portrayed as revealing the inability of the opposition parties to channel the demands of a sector of society that had lost representation after the 2001 crisis, when the traditional middle class party, the *Unión Cívica Radical* (UCR) collapsed. A few hours after the 8-N protests, President Fernández stated: ‘This is the problem of contemporary Argentine politics: the absence of a political leadership that presents *us* with an alternative political project, but that is not our fault. We believe in our project, it is the job of those that don’t believe in it to create ideas and proposals to deal with what the *rest* of society wants’ (Pagina12 2012). This strategy aimed at establishing a clear divide between the protesters and the rest that had electorally endorsed the government: between what pro-government commentators referred as the ‘54%’, and a staunch anti-Kirchnerist minority whose demands and numbers were amplified by the conservative media. Under this frame, the protests challenged the will of the majority, a fundamental difference from the ‘legitimate’ pot-banging protests of 2001.

When the third event was being promoted the government moderated its initial antagonistic stance. This moderation suggests strategic recalculation in light of increasing polarization and increasing protest intensity in the build-up to an election. The Presidential Office did not make any immediate reference to the 18-A in the two days after the event, the largest mobilization of the three.¹ Cabinet ministers and high public officials, avid commentators in the previous instances, reproduced this silence. The few comments made by officials pointed to a new counterframing strategy, aimed at denying importance to the protests while accepting them as legitimate expressions of discontent. However, this will be shown to be too late and ineffective in light of the unfolding centrifugal dynamics.

Impact on Government-Movement-Opposition Relations

After the first protest, opposition parties were hesitant about how to proceed, considering that formal support for the protests could tarnish their spontaneous character, while concerned by the risk of being publicly shunned by protesters. This stance suggests that the character of the protests as ‘anti-government’ was not fully established at this stage. However, in the period before and after the second event, the government counterframe had polarized the protests and public opinion, consolidating in/out group demarcation between pro and anti-government camps. This clearly incentivized opposition parties to exploit this distinction.

Thus, on the eve of the second episode, some opposition groups started endorsing the mobilizations under non-partisan calls. Supporters of the conservative party PRO reportedly distributed national flags and blue and white ribbons prior to the marches. Other opposition party leaders and dissident labor groups made supporting statements in the media but refrained from attending the events in person. This still cautious stance was dropped when the third protest was upcoming, suggesting that by then in/out group demarcation was complete. At this point, the opposition actively reproduced the government-promoted polarization to try to orient discontent along party cleavages and expand its electoral appeal (Rodríguez 2013). Thus, the 18-A event was characterized by active and visible involvement from opposition parties across the political spectrum, with many opposition leaders marching at the front of protesting columns (Pagina12 2013; Lanacion 2013a).

The proximity of electoral competition appears to have been an important feature driving strategic recalculations by government and opposition parties. Initially, it may be assumed that the governing party considered that polarization would not translate into opposition expansion: if the protesters were a minority anti-government group their vote was already lost. Moreover, in a context of a fragmented opposition, this would result in vote dispersion, consolidating the government’s position. But as the protests grew in size, this

premise was thrown into question and vote capture became a possibility, driving both government and opposition parties to change their initial strategies.

Potential Repercussions for Democratic Functioning

It is important to note that counterframing dynamics continued after the mobilizations ceased. In Argentina, the effects of polarization persisted in driving opposition expansion and consolidation in the months prior to the elections. Opposition leaders highlighted the need to establish common political agendas in order to capitalize on the discontent: the Socialist Party leader, for example, claimed that the protests were a ‘demand for unity’, a vision that was shared by the PRO, on the other side of the ideological spectrum (InfoR 2013). Electoral coalition-building complemented opposition expansion, as parties tried to channel discontent according to broader political ideologies and policies, anticipating the October elections. In June 2013, the formation of a wide center-left front, UNEN, was announced. Almost by coincidence, Sergio Massa, President Fernández’s former Chief of Staff, launched the *Frente Renovador* (FR), a right-of-center Peronist party, which for a time flirted with establishing an alliance with PRO. Moreover, all these groups adopted many of the central claims of the protests in their political agendas: in particular issues of crime, corruption and economic management, but also the promotion of less confrontational political discourse and the need for collaboration with other parties and social actors.

This article claims that the counterframing dynamics embodied in the government’s confrontational strategy contributed towards reinvigoration of a more competitive party system that had virtually disappeared after 2001. The governing party’s attempt to polarize the protests was effective but backfired as it rallied protesters and disenchanted sectors towards the opposition without garnering increasing support for the government. This is

supported by the evidence in figure five, which indicates that the level of approval for the president remained around 30% during and after the protest period.

INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE

The outcome of these dynamics was apparent in results of the primaries and legislative elections of 2013. In comparison with the results in the previous legislative elections the government lost over 3 million votes. In line with the approval level, the FPV obtained 32% of the total number of votes (falling from 52% in the 2011 elections), non-aligned Peronism 25%, UNEN 25%, and PRO 8%, with opposition votes outnumbering pro-government votes by two to one (Tagina 2014; Lanacion 2013c). The PFV and its allies were defeated in all major cities including Buenos Aires metropolitan area, a traditional Peronist powerhouse where the FR candidate beat that of the FPV and immediately became a potential presidential candidate (Lanacion 2013b).

The Argentine case appears to illustrate centrifugal dynamics contributing towards enhancement of aspects representative democratic functioning, given the reinvigoration of party competition that took place (Cavarozzi 2012; Ramos 2012; De Luca and Malamud 2010). It is perhaps too early to comment on the long term consequences of these developments, nor may it be presumed that the protests were the only causal variable behind this outcome (Tagina and Varetto 2013; Calvo and Murillo 2012). Nonetheless, the electoral defeat following the protests resulted in the end of Kirchnerist hegemony, as it ended any chance of obtaining a 2/3 Congressional majority to reform the constitution and enable a third government by President Fernández. The closing of this possibility, and the electoral success of wider opposition fronts, triggered further factionalization inside the ruling party in the struggle to find a viable presidential contender. This would prove a burden from which the

ruling party would not be able to recover, with the FPV candidate Daniel Scioli eventually losing the Presidential elections of December 2015 to Mauricio Macri, as the head of the new center-right coalition *Cambiamos*.

Brazil: administering discontent

The protests in Brazil illustrate the centripetal trajectory of democratic government response to protest. The protests began as a minor mobilization on 6 June 2013 organized by a small left-wing group *Movimento Passe Livre* (Free Fare Movement or MPL) against a minor increase in bus fares in São Paulo (SP) (MPL 2013a; Lowy 2014). The MPL conducted a number of pickets in the city that were initially disbanded by the police, leading to follow-up marches in the next few days which resulted in more violent clashes and the use of tear gas and rubber bullets. Mobilization spiraled and peaked between 17 June and 20 June, when one million people are reported to have taken the streets, including the occupation of public buildings such as the National Congress in Brasilia (OGlobo 2013a; Estadão 2013). As this happened, the protests received wider media attention locally and internationally – the latter partly facilitated by the events coinciding with the Confederation Football Cup (Economist 2013a) – drawing more participants mostly from young middle class and educated sectors of society, while spreading to other parts of the country. According to a Datafolha survey of June 18th, 77% of protesters in São Paulo had higher education and 22% were students (Lissardy 2013). By late June, the protests mobilized significantly more than one million people in hundreds of Brazilian cities, and in early July labor unions launched a series of strikes, culminating with the first general strike since 1991 on 11 July.

As the party in government, the PT was a central target of the protests, though state and city authorities in the hands of other parties, particularly in large cities such as SP and Rio de Janeiro, were also targeted (Winters and Weitz-Shapiro 2014, 145). As in Argentina,

protesters raised a multiplicity of slogans dealing mostly with the poor quality of public services and education, the rising cost of living, political corruption, lack of accountability in public spending, the cost of 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics, and a variety of other issues (Saad-Filho and Morais 2014). Although the MPL provided a loose form of leadership in the initial phase, participation was largely self-organized as protests spread across the country, facilitated by social media. Moreover, by late June the MPL decided to suspend calls for mobilization, concerned by the presence of radical anarchist groups that resorted to acts of violence (Bottini Filho 2013).² This referred in particular to the ‘Black blocs’, an anti-establishment group that attended the protests in black and wearing balaclavas, openly clashing with the police and attacking the offices of banks, corporations, and government buildings with Molotov bombs (Monteiro 2013). The cycle of protests lasted through most of July and a new mobilization was called for late August, but by that time protesters had fragmented and participation dwindled. Presidential elections took place in October 2014. Figure six shows the timeline of the events.

INSERT FIGURE 6 HERE

Government Counterframing Approach

The Rousseff administration responded cautiously as events unraveled rapidly. Initially, many of the protesters had adopted an anti-government stance targeting the president and the ruling party, an aspect that was emphasized by traditionally anti-PT media groups such as *O Globo* (Fonseca 2013). There were reports that groups associated with the PT or the CUT, its associated trade union federation, were prevented from participating in some marches. As shown in figure seven, the popularity of President Rousseff suffered greatly during the first part of the episodes (Datafolha 2013). In this context, some pro-government supporters in

civil society promoted a framing of the protest as an elite revolt, calling for a more oppositional stance similar to Argentina's (Leblon 2013).

INSERT FIGURE 7 HERE

However, the Brazilian executive appears to have been more aware of the detrimental potential implications of an oppositional strategy, and adopted instead a conciliatory discourse aimed at narrowing the divide from the protesters and their claims. Thus, on 17 June as some protesters attempted to occupy government buildings, President Rousseff stated that 'peaceful demonstrations are legitimate and corresponding with democracy. It is appropriate for young people to mobilize' (Dame 2013). Moreover, the following day she gave a speech from the *Planalto* Palace, the seat of the federal government, praising the civic behavior of both the police and people in the streets, while claiming that the size of the mobilizations proved the energy of Brazilian democracy and the civility of the population (Calgaro 2013).

With this counterframing the government not only tried to avoid polarization, but actively sought to establish commonalities with protesters' claims. As noted earlier, successfully blurring the boundary between protagonists and antagonists may carry two potential benefits: first, it may increase the space to establish common points of dialogue and identity, and, second, it may facilitate the distinction between moderates and radicals among protesters. This, in turn, may enable co-optation and concession-based strategies, and the exclusion and eventual repression of radical groups.

These analytical possibilities materialized in the Brazilian situation. After the presidential response, the government moved to establish communications with leading movement figures; on 24 June the President invited the leaders of the MPL to a meeting, and

offered concessions to some immediate demands: for instance, the government of São Paulo quickly cancelled the raise of the bus fares (although this did not stop the mobilizations) (MPL 2013b). Following this, President Rousseff caused surprise by unilaterally proposing a ‘national pact’ to reduce corruption and improve service provision, accompanied by a plebiscite call to evaluate the reform of the political system.

This proposal included the creation of the National Council of Public Transportation, a multi-sectoral organ involving permanent civil society and user representation, seen mostly as an attempt to co-opt the MPL (BBC 2013b). Additionally, on 25 June the Health Minister announced the expansion of the health system, opening 35,000 physician positions, while suggesting that foreign doctors (mainly Cubans) should cover some of them to address the local deficit. On 9 July, the Congress passed a law stipulating that the royalties from Petrobras, the largely state-owned oil company, should be dedicated entirely to education (75%) and health (25%) (Alencastro and Dame 2013). After the protests subsided, on 12 September, the government took further measures exempting public transport companies from taxes, to support lower fares.

This inclusive strategy was successful in preventing polarization. As shown in figure seven, as concessions were rolled out, the President’s image started gradually to recover in the polls after the massive initial slump (in contrast with the Argentine case). The government also managed to conduct dialogue with movement representatives, and even when it failed to co-opt the MPL, its collaborative stance weakened the latter’s oppositional stance. Thus, the inclusive strategy, rather than polarizing the episode between pro and anti-government camps, served to distinguish moderates willing to accept concessions from the government, and uncompromising radicals, who do not. This was the dilemma faced by the MLP, which had to choose between accepting the government’s olive branch and maintaining a contentious stance while sharing the street with radicals groups such as Black Bloc, which

since July had displaced it from the media spotlight (Zúquete 2014). Hence, as a centrist consensus emerged in public opinion in support of peaceful demonstrations and deliberative solutions, the desire for continuous mobilizations decreased. By early 2014, journalist João Erthal considered that Black Bloc had ‘killed’ the June protests not only due to its violent tactics, but because of its radical anti-media, anti-police, and anti-government agenda (Erthal 2014).

At the same time, the case indicates that a strategy aimed at the attribution of similarity facilitates bridging with, and eventually appropriating, protesters’ frames. Thus, when the initiative to hire foreign doctors was blocked by the medical lobby, the PT claimed this was an example of the need to sustain its struggle against corporate power and neoliberal parties (Saad-Filho and Morais 2014, 239). By the end of June, pro-PT groups such as the MST and the CUT became involved in the protest, further eroding the notion that the protests were anti-government while introducing new claims, such as the democratization of the media, which served the government’s left-of-center agenda (Domingues 2013). These centripetal dynamics had further positive consequences in terms of preventing opposition expansion.

Impact on Government-Movement-Opposition Relations

By blurring the boundary between protagonists and antagonists, the government reduced the space for the opposition to benefit from in/out group demarcation, while pushing it towards devising alternative framings to distinguish itself from the government. Moreover, the opposition appears to have miscalculated its response by adopting an initial confrontational stance: at the onset of the protests the governor of São Paulo, belonging to the main opposition party PSDB (Brazilian Social Democratic Party), referred to the protesters as ‘vandals’ destroying public patrimony. However, after the president’s conciliatory response,

former President Cardoso, an historical figure within the PSDB, posted on his Facebook page that ‘disqualifying them [the protesters] as troublemakers is a big mistake’ (OGlobo 2013b). This was repeated by José Serra, then a PSDB potential presidential candidate, noting that ‘young people have taken to the streets throughout the country and their demands must be heard’ (Serra 2013). Moreover, the condemnation of excessive police repression by the government also led the conservative media and opposition figures to moderate their initial framing, whereby the protests were portrayed as violent actions by disenfranchised youths, and increasingly to adopt the government discourse of legitimate expressions of civil discontent (Fonseca 2013).

Moreover, by granting concessions by decree, the President cleverly passed the buck from the executive to the opposition, as presidential decrees have to be ratified by Congress. This initiative left the opposition in a catch-22 situation: it had either to support the government’s proposals, or to challenge them in Congress and risk alienating protesters and potential voters. Unsurprisingly, the presidential decrees triggered strong criticism by opposition leaders (Terra 2013a; Galhardo 2013), with Marina Silva – a rising figure then considered the President’s main rival – claiming, quite correctly, that the plebiscite proposal was an attempt to make the protests an issue between ‘the Palace [Planalto], the governors, and the Congress’ (Terra 2013b). However, the relative recovery in the president’s popularity shown in figure seven suggests that the strategy was successful in splitting the opposition – with São Paulo’s PSDB governor Gerardo Alckimin lauding the President’s allocation of funds to improve transport infrastructure (Sweet 2014, 74) – and deterring opposition expansion (Economist 2013b; Azevedo 2013). This continued in the months preceding the presidential elections, when the opposition blocked in Congress many of the concessions by the government, as outlined next.

Potential Repercussions for Democratic Functioning

A number of Brazilian authors have debated whether the 2013 protests represented a Brazilian Spring with the potential to alter the political landscape, or an exceptional flare of social discontent (Saad-Filho and Morais 2014; Vianna 2013). By 2016, the answer appears to lie in-between. Although contentious mobilization certainly persisted in the following months to July 2013 – with large strikes by teachers, new actions by the MPL, clashes with the police on Independence Day, actions by Black Bloc groupings, and even a movement against the 2014 World Cup (Folha 2014a; BBC 2013c) – none of these events rallied the numbers of the peak period. Nonetheless, neither was a return to the pre-protest situation, and this case illustrates how centripetal dynamics not only enabled containment of public discontent, but also contributed towards the invigoration of participatory dimensions of democracy, by widening the political debate and consolidating calls for institutional reform.

In contrast to the Argentine experience, the balance of forces among political parties in Brazil remained unchanged, with the opposition struggling to capture the pervading social discontent following the protest episodes and no major change to the party system.³ The government's centripetal strategy enabled Dilma Rousseff to recover some ground in the polls, and be eventually re-elected to the presidency a year after the events. Significantly for this article's argument, the PT and the competing opposition parties obtained a relatively similar number of votes to the previous elections, with the PT obtaining in the first round 47% of the votes (vs 42% in 2010), the PSDB 33% (vs 34%), and the PSB 19% (vs 21%).⁴

Nonetheless, beyond containment, centripetal dynamics appear in the Brazilian case to have expanded citizens' voice and contributed to shape policy-making, representing in this sense a widening of the political debate. As shown, to moderate centrifugal dynamics the government rolled out a series of proposals addressing protesters' claims with measures in areas including addressing corruption, public health, and transport, rapidly sanctioned by

Congress, including the creation of the multi-sectoral National Council on Public Transportation (and new state-level transport councils formed in SP and Rio).⁵ Already in June the government launched ‘Participa.br’, a public consultation website where it uploaded the draft of its ‘National Policy on Social Participation’, an ambitious project to precede political reform which was open for comments for two months. In May 2014, President Rousseff sanctioned this policy through Decree No. 8243, which in its first article stated ‘...the objective of strengthening and framing the mechanisms and democratic instances of dialogue and joint action between the federal public administration and civil society’. The norm aimed to recognize direct democracy as a civil right and as a legitimate method of government, raising multi-sectoral councils and participation mechanisms advanced by the Lula da Silva administrations to the level of state policy (Rousseff 2014).

Admittedly, congressional opposition to many of these proposals – including a lower chamber rejection to the Decree No. 8243 two days after Rousseff’s reelection (Folha 2014b) – has limited the reach of these reforms. Nevertheless, the protest episodes have contributed to consolidate a number of social demands in Brazilian political debate and public opinion, both prior to and after the 2014 elections. Marina Silva’s political platform, for instance, continues to revolve around a vision of a more inclusive form of movement democracy opposing traditional parties and institutions. Demands for the quality of public services, addressing corruption, and particularly, political reform, have become central aspects in political bargaining among all parties, with a political reform bill approved by the lower chamber in June 2015 (with civil society calling for more inclusive measures) (Schreiber 2015). Moreover, in light of ongoing mobilizations and corruption revelations (and calls for the impeachment of President Rousseff), the country seems to have entered a cycle of active contentious politics, characterized by political parties reacting to intensified social participation and voice.

Conclusion

The analytical narratives developed in this article elucidate how the interaction between specific causal mechanisms and path dependent political opportunity structures (Falleti and Lynch 2009, 1161), can condition the trajectory of protest-government-opposition relations. Thus, the Argentine case illustrated how centrifugal dynamics – commencing with an exclusive counterframe – contributed towards coalition-building and a more balanced electoral landscape, while an inclusive response and centripetal dynamics helped the Brazilian government to contain public discontent and opposition expansion, but also widened the scope for political debate, participation, and contention.

In this manner, the proposed models accommodate insights from process theory and rational actor models. On the one side, countermovement dynamics appear to be influenced by pre-existing opportunity and mobilizing structures, such as regime type, political culture, and organizational capacity, as well as by past experiences and ideological and institutional legacies.⁶ At the same time, the article indicates that political actors engaged in contingent decision-making, altering their initial responses as protest dynamics unfolded. This is evident in the Argentine situation, as the Fernández government attempted to moderate its initial polarizing strategy when it became clear that its actions were fueling further mobilization and rallying the opposition. In Brazil, instead, the conciliatory response by the Presidency seems to have taken protesters, the media, and opposition parties by surprise, and led to a moderation of their initial oppositional stances. In this sense, iterative reactions represent a critical source of dynamism behind the evolution of a contentious cycle, particularly under conditions of mass viral mobilization, when both authorities and observers lack accurate information to assess rapidly evolving developments. As Tilly and Goldstone (2001, 187) noted, by underestimating the extent of public discontent when choosing to oppose and/or

repress protesters, authorities risk considerable hazards, such as increasing mobilization and demands, or contributing to higher polarization.

By linking structural conditions, agential decision-making, and systemic socio-political processes, the centripetal and centrifugal models delineate a framework for broader ‘typological theorizing’ (Bennett and Elman 2008) about the interface between contentious and routine politics, capable of encompassing a wider combination of variables and outcomes of protest/counter-protest dynamics. While it is not possible to provide an exhaustive analysis of these alternative trajectories here, the rest of this article develops a preliminary discussion of some potential outcomes by incorporating variables and mechanisms highlighted in early social movement research and comparative political literature, both under democratic and non-democratic conditions.

First, it is possible to conceive alternative outcomes to the ones suggested in the current models, where centrifugal dynamics lead to opposition alignment and vote shifting, and centripetal dynamics to boundary blurring and opposition containment. Hence, in terms of centrifugal dynamics, authorities can indeed ‘succeed’ in their attempts to delegitimize protesters (or a sector of the protesters) in public opinion, and gain a wider mandate to repress. This could be expected in situations where the ‘resonance’ of the protests is low, and there is little or no interest by opposition forces to side with protesters. In these circumstances, authorities can combine confrontational frames with more assertive repressing and policing strategies, as it happened following the 2011 London riots, when no British political party or leadership showed any interest in disputing the official framing of the rioters as ‘vandals’ and ‘thugs’, or with the incarceration of the Pussy Riot members in Russia in 2012 (Smyth and Soboleva 2013).

Another possibility for centrifugal dynamics in conditions of opposition indifference, appears to be the emergence of movement parties. Relevantly, Kitschelt (2006, 282)

concluded that these parties are likely to emerge when collective interests are intensely held by a large constituency willing to articulate their demands through ‘disruptive, extrainstitutional activities’, when *established parties make no effort* to embrace such interests, and when formal and informal thresholds of political representation are low. In other words, movement parties are a potential result of centrifugal dynamics when polarization does not trigger opposition activation. This behavior was observed repeatedly, for instance, during the rise of indigenous movement parties in diverse Latin American countries in the late 1990s (Yashar 2005; Van Cott 2000), with the expansion of new extreme right parties in Europe, and more recently in the aftermath of the anti-austerity movements, with the electoral success of parties such as *Podemos* in Spain and the Five Star Movement in Italy.⁷

In this manner, beyond expanding electoral competition, polarizing strategies have the potential to alter and/or destabilize the political order, either by consolidating new political cleavages and parties (e.g. ethnic parties, new populist parties), or by fueling political conflict. The latter relates to the risks associated with countermovement reactions that combine polarization with repression, as the use of violence can either contribute towards reinforcing in/out group demarcation and enhancing the legitimacy of protesters, if repression is excessive – as in Sharp (1974)’s political jujitsu – or lead to the radicalization of hardliner factions, fueling political struggle (Goldstone 2003; Della Porta 1995, 82). In this regard, the literature has observed that (i) movement fragmentation generates incentives and opportunities that increase the likelihood of protests turning violent (Pearlman 2012), and (ii) escalating violence is a major variable guiding renewed intervention by authorities (Tilly and Goldstone 2001, 190). These dynamics open other potential scenarios depending on regime type and capacity. For example, in low-capacity regimes (even more if non-democratic), extensive discontent, violence, and the aligning of opposition forces with protesters can result

in regime collapse, as occurred following the Ukrainian Euromaidan (particularly if this is accompanied with elite fracture, as mentioned ahead). However, in high-capacity regimes, the state can rely on the security forces to reinstate order more aggressively, with the danger of widespread repression and democratic regression, as events in Turkey, Thailand, and Egypt illustrate (Shekhovtsov and Umland 2014; Farrelly 2013). For these reasons, the calculated management of public discontent has been noted as a fundamental component of the stability of modern authoritarian and hybrid regimes, which have developed sophisticated countermovement repertoires combining oppositional, co-optational, and conciliatory strategies (Gerschewski 2013; Robertson 2009). In the case of Putin's Russia, Robertson (2011, 33) highlights the role played by *ersatz* social movements, possessing dual state-sponsored and independent features, as a way of rallying public support while avoiding violent confrontation. More institutionalized is the *xinfang* system used to administrate social petitions in China, intended to facilitate controlled boundary demarcation between 'undesirable but tolerated' claims that the government can accommodate, and forbidden ones, that it cannot (Chen 2012, 110).⁸

At the same time, the literature suggests that authoritarian and hybrid governments face major risks also when adopting inclusive tactics: Trejo (2014) observed that when autocrats consent to government-controlled multiparty elections as a conciliatory measure, this can incentivize opposition parties to attempt to recruit social movements into electoral coalitions, contributing towards expanding a given protest cycle, if successful. This possibility outlines a new pathway whereby inclusive responses generate centrifugal dynamics, weakening the capacity of authorities to demobilize protesters (with the rapid dissolution of the Soviet Union after Gorbachev's Perestroika being perhaps an extreme yet illustrative case). Under these considerations, limited concessions and severe repression

emerge as a potentially effective strategy to hedge against these effects, as exemplified by the brutal crackdown by Chinese authorities on student protesters in 1989.⁹

The previous considerations point towards another variable that can be included in a wider counterframing model, involving the impact of centrifugal and centripetal dynamics on the cohesion of elites, and the consequences of elite division/unity in terms of subsequent political dynamics. Elite unity has been noted in the literature to be a key dimension shaping the outcome of revolutionary processes, democratic transitions, and the possibility of violent civil conflict (Tilly 2004; Goldstone 2001). A relevant mechanism linking elite unity with social mobilization is indirectly suggested by Henry Hale (2011), while studying regime cycles in post-Soviet Eurasia. He noted that the intensity of mass protests often functions as a signaling mechanism of popular support informing elite competition and expectations regarding the popularity of an incumbent leader. These signals affect the desire of other elites (for instance, the military) to endorse repressive strategies, considering that ‘massive street rallies are costly to suppress, and the more blood that will likely be shed in doing so, the more likely it is that the military will hesitate to engage in violence on behalf of a lame-duck leader or an unpopular would-be successor’ (Ibid., 141). At the same time, centrifugal dynamics were noted to affect the integrity of democratic governments. As seen in the Argentine case, though the Kirchner government did not fracture, the protests did incentivize the appearance of a moderate Peronist faction. Moreover, Van Dyke (2003) observes that elite mobilization can also serve to facilitate reformist responses from the authorities, if some elite sectors align with the movement, or contribute to higher levels of protest activity, if they actively oppose it.¹⁰ Accordingly, incorporating the effect of centrifugal and centripetal forces over the unity of ruling parties and elite institutions is a potential avenue to nuance intra-government and intra-opposition developments, and to further discern the role of other actors, such as media and civil society.

On this basis, we propose that the centripetal and centrifugal dynamics examined in this article serve as platform to develop a more encompassing model of contentious politics that incorporates government counterframes and opposition behavior as central factors in protest evolution and their subsequent effects over institutionalized politics. This model not only facilitates a much needed extension of current conceptualizations of protest cycles, but acts as a bridge between social movement process and framing theory, and diverse insights stemming from comparative political science. In so doing, this article opens the door to new and exciting possibilities in terms of further interdisciplinary research and theorization, in light of different political structures, repertoires, governmental strategies, and outcomes.

Endnotes

¹ This is revealed by examining the sequence of presidential speeches available in Presidencia (2014).

² Thus, another relevant distinction between the Brazilian and Argentine protests was the extensive presence of police repression in the former case.

³ However, the decline in the PT's popularity in SP and Rio areas continued. See Winters and Weitz-Shapiro (2014) and Melo (2015).

⁴ Marina Silva, in 2014 with the Brazilian Socialist Party (PBS), ended up in third place behind the PSDB candidate Aécio Neves. Statistics from Datafolha.

⁵ The campaign slogan of the PT for the 2014 presidential elections was '*Fez, faz e fará*' ('did, does, and will do'), promoting a 'new phase' of state involvement in public services, urban reform, and education and health.

⁶ Accordingly, a more populist regime such as Argentina's could be expected to more readily resort to 'us versus them' polarizations when responding to perceived threats: this was a successful strategy used by the government in previous mobilizations, such as the 2004-6

anti-crime marches and the large 2008 rural protests (Svampa 2011). Similarly, the conciliatory response of the Rousseff government is in line with the quasi-corporatist methods previously applied during the Da Silva administrations to co-opt civil society, business, and labor actors (Sola 2008).

⁷ Heaney and Rojas (2015, 4) pose a subsequent caveat in this regard, noting that the electoral success of a movement-endorsed party can lead to demobilization, if party-based identity trumps that of the movement.

⁸ Chen also points to the importance of time considerations when devising government responses, claiming that Chinese officials are aware that ‘concessions is a safer strategy than repression because concessions often only have long-term side effects, [...] whereas harsh repression tends to have short-term consequences’ (Ibid., 76).

⁹ The same rationale appears to be informing the steady confrontational approach maintained by Hong Kong authorities towards the 2014 ‘Umbrella’ protests (Hui 2015).

¹⁰ Moreover, the structure of elite conflicts, when they have the capacity to mobilize significant publics, can also shape the identity of protesters and the geography of protests (Robertson 2011, 10).

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Figures

Figure 1. Oppositional and Inclusive Counterframing Responses

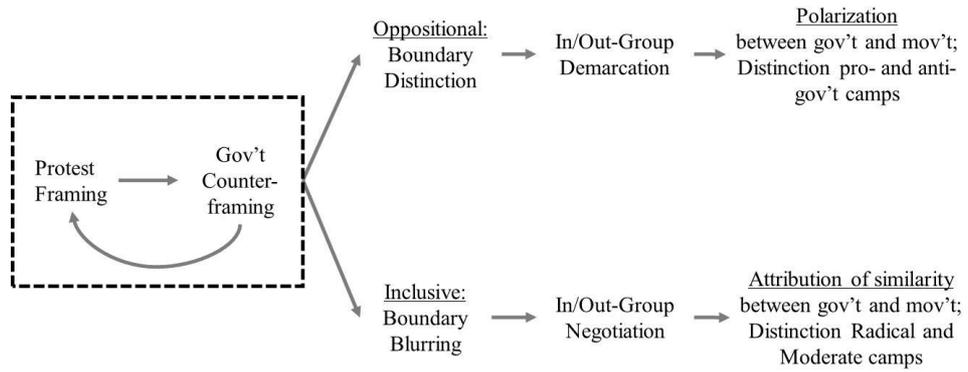


Figure 2. Centrifugal and Centripetal Reconfigurations of Government

(G) – Movement (M) – Opposition (O)

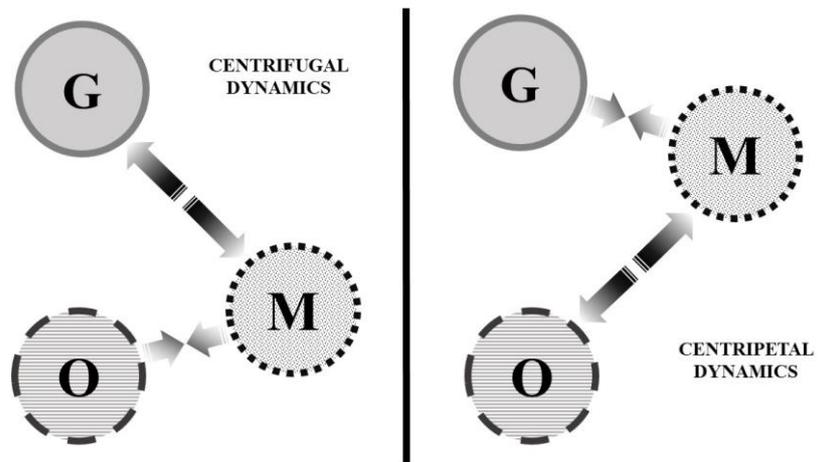


Figure 3. Potential Repercussions for Democratic Functioning

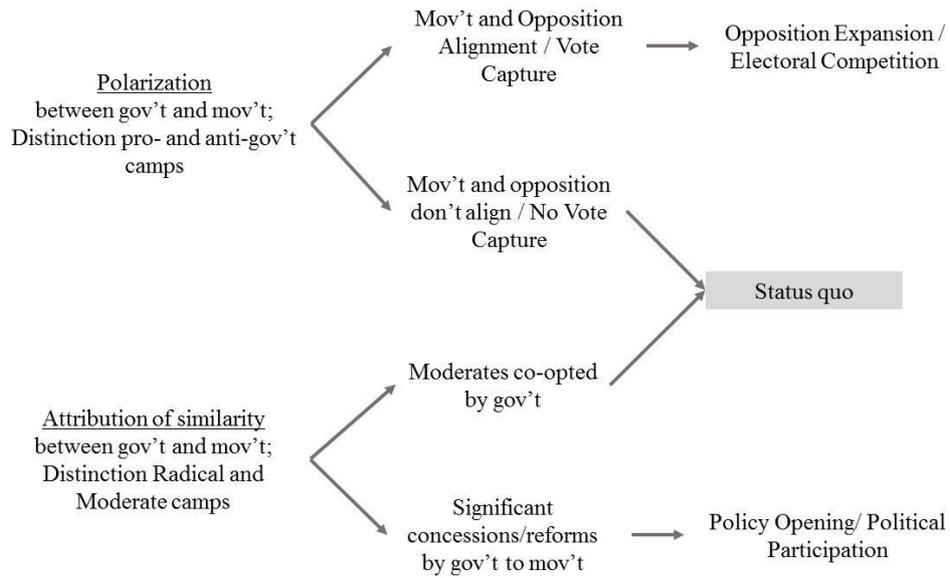


Figure 4. Timeline of Argentine Protests

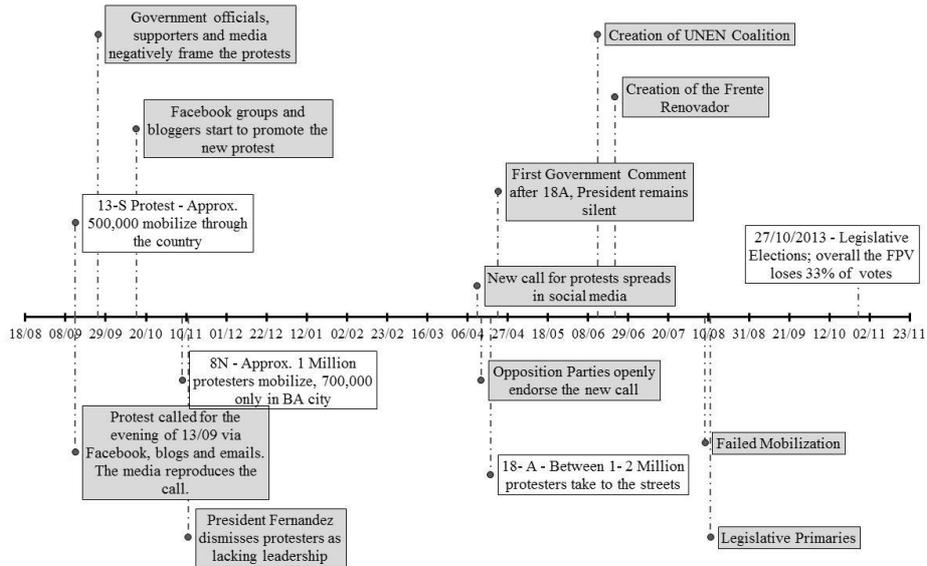
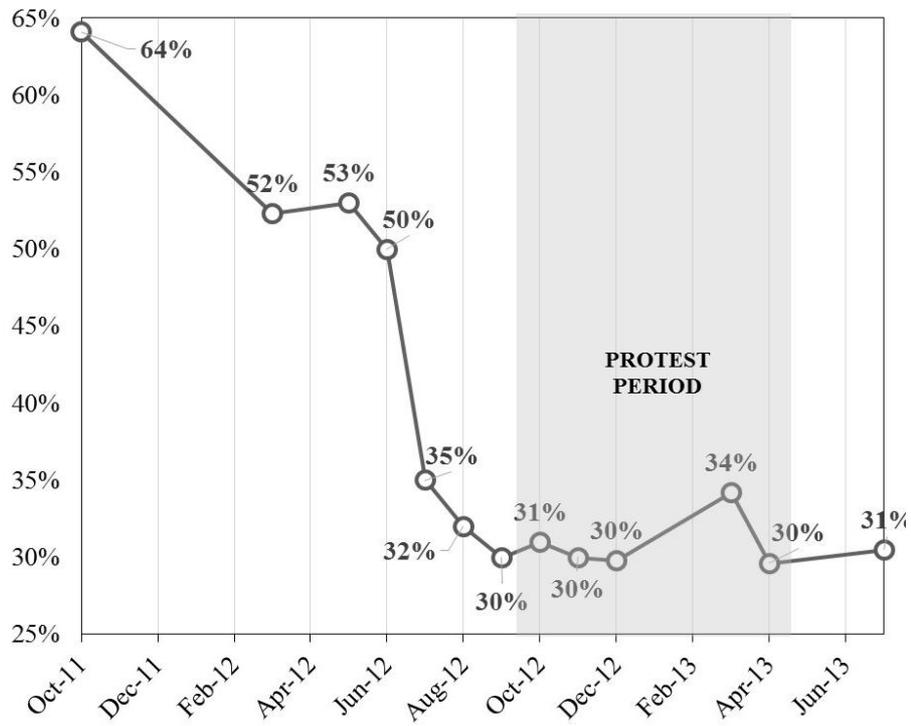


Figure 5. Fernández Government Approval Level



Source: Management & Fit

Figure 6. Timeline of Brazilian Protests

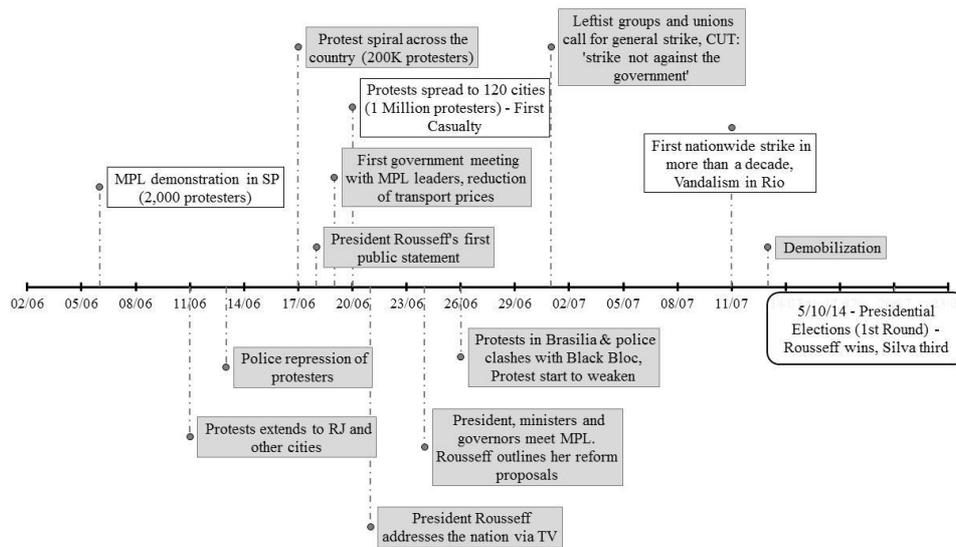
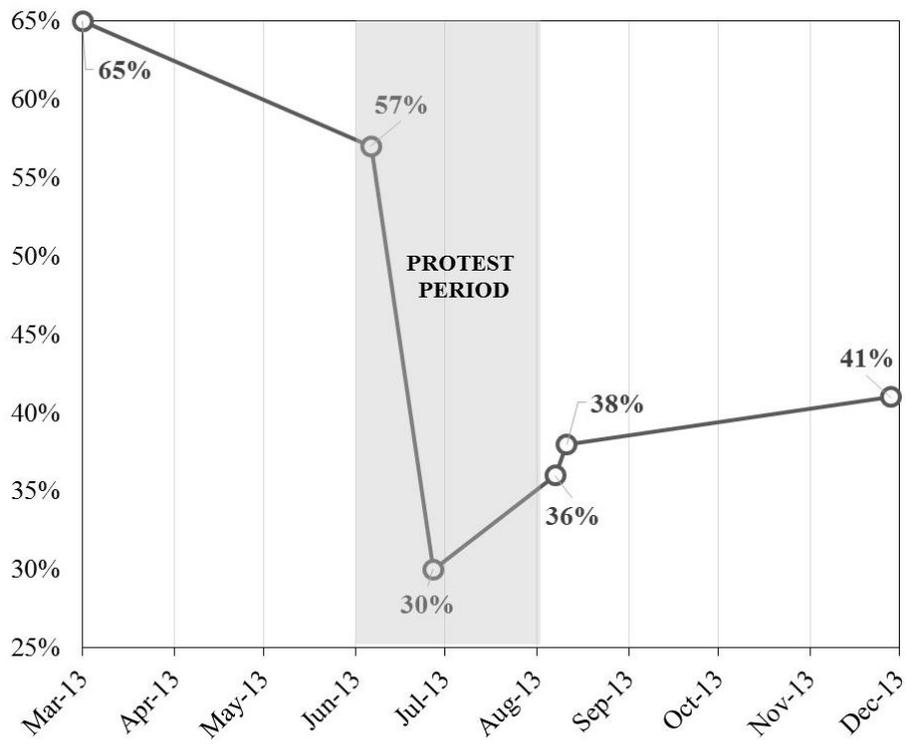


Figure 7. Rousseff Government Approval Level



Source: Datafolha