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Neoliberalism, Democracy, and Patterns of Social Protests in Latin America, 1980-2000

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Abstract

The repoliticization thesis of social protests suggests that the level of protest mobilization increases with deeper economic liberalization in democratic settings. While this theoretical perspective has been tested at the country level, it has not been tested at the individual social sector level. Using a unique dataset of social protests in 16 Latin American countries from 1980 to 2000, this paper examines the effect of neoliberal economic reforms on social protests in the context of democracy at different levels of analysis. At the aggregate level, the results provide confirming evidence for the repoliticization thesis. At the social sector level, the results show that labor and peasants, the sectors with stronger organizational structures, are more likely to mobilize protest in a free-market democratic political context. Overall, this paper complements the repoliticization thesis by taking into account the level of organizational strength of societal sectors for explaining protest mobilization.

Key Words:

democracy, neoliberal economic reform, social protest, Latin America, resource mobilization

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INTRODUCTION

The third wave of democratization has transformed Latin American countries from authoritarian regimes to liberal democracies since the 1970s. However, while these countries are formally democratized in terms of major political institutions, the quality of democracy remains low (Diamond 2008; Friedman and Hochstetler 2002, 21; Markoff 1996). One possible factor that influences democratic quality in this region is neoliberal structural reforms (Weyland 2004). To compete effectively in the global economy and resolve debt crises, Latin American governments adopt neoliberal economic reforms that involve the reduction of social welfare expenditures and privatization of state-owned assets, which have caused significant economic threat and erosion of citizenship rights (Almeida 2007, 124). While the incentive structure that drives collective action for removing authoritarian regimes had diminished by the late 1980s and early 1990s, an emergent incentive structure that revolves around the implementation of neoliberal economic reforms has triggered new waves of popular contention.

Social movements,² involving “continuous interaction between challengers and power holders” (Tilly 2003, 247), have played an important role in shaping Latin American politics (Almeida 2008; Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley 2003; Johnston and Almeida 2006; Van Cott 2005). For instance, Hochstetler (2006) and Pérez-Liñán (2007) argue that collective protests have played a crucial role in forcing elected Latin American presidents to end their terms prematurely. Among many other explanatory factors, Pérez-Liñán (2007, 190-196) convincingly shows that popular uprisings were the only condition necessary to remove an elected president from office before his term ends.

Existing literature suggests that neoliberal economic policies have greatly altered the political dynamics in Latin America. In particular, neoliberal economic reforms have posed a substantial economic threat for citizens who benefit from social welfare. Therefore, neoliberal economic reforms have triggered waves of anti-government mass mobilization in Argentina (Auyero 2001; Garay 2007), Bolivia (Kohl 2002), El Salvador (Almeida 2008), and Peru (Arce 2008).

Recent studies have provided more nuanced discussion of how the combination of neoliberal reforms and the presence of democracy affect protests. The repoliticization thesis suggests that the combination of higher levels of globalization and democracy encourages more protests in Latin America. While this theoretical perspective has been tested at the aggregate level, it has not been tested at the societal sector level. To fill the empirical gap, this paper examines the effects of globalization on protests in the context of democracy at both the aggregate level and the social sector level. Drawing on a pooled cross-sectional sample of 16 Latin American countries from 1980 to 2000, the results at the aggregate level provide confirming evidence for the repoliticization perspective. In contrast, at the social sector level, the results show that only the societal sectors with stronger organizational structures and

² For the purpose of the discussion, social movements are defined as “*collective challenges based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities*” (Tarrow 1998, 4; emphasis in original).

experience with mobilization are more likely to protest in a free-market democratic political context.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. The first section briefly provides a historical background of Latin American social movements. In the second section, I review different theoretical perspectives about the interaction effects of neoliberalism and the presence of democracy. I also discuss why stronger organizational structures matter for explaining why social protests take place. The third section presents an overview of the data, model specifications, and methodology, and then tests the hypotheses statistically using a sample of country-years in Latin America. The fourth section summarizes the findings and discusses the implications of the analysis. The final section develops some conclusions.

MASS PROTESTS IN THE CONTEXT OF FREE-MARKET DEMOCRATIZATION IN LATIN AMERICA

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a return to institutional politics and relative calm on the streets of Latin America associated with a new wave of globalization (Almeida 2008, 2). However, this declining trend of social movements greatly changed as Latin America entered the late 1990s and the twenty-first century. As Pérez-Liñán (2007, 188) argues, unstructured street coalitions of the middle-class and urban sectors have shown their power in the 1990s and early 2000s throughout Latin America. In particular, popular movements in Latin America struggling against the neoliberal structural adjustments have been on the rise (Almeida 2007; Shefner et al. 2006).

Examples of the neoliberalism-induced popular contention abound. “*Los piqueteros*,” the victims of privatizing state-owned oil and energy corporation YPF-Repsol of Argentina, manned the first roadblocks in the province of Neuquén in 1996. This strategy soon diffused and was adopted by many unemployed workers in Argentina over the next five years (Auyero 2006). In early 1997, the unpopular Ecuadorian President Abdalá Bucaram confronted mass movements of middle-upper class protesters and indigenous demonstrators opposing neoliberal reforms (Pérez-Liñán 2007, 27). In early 1999, Paraguayan peasants took to the streets demanding public banks forgive the agricultural debts, which turned into a large-scale march demanding the impeachment of President Raúl Cubas Grau (Abente Brun 1999). In Costa Rica, President Miguel Ángel Rodríguez’s plan to privatize the telecommunication and electricity industries led to mass street demonstrations and roadblocks, witnessing arguably the largest mass mobilization in recent Costa Rican history (Almeida 2006, 58).

According to Almeida (2007), the anti-neoliberalism movement, as a form of “defensive collective action,” was induced by the threats related to structural adjustment reform. In general, these threats led to more economic problems and erosion of social rights (Almeida 2003). Economic liberalization programs take place in the context of enduring foreign debt crises and pressures toward global market integration in this region (Babb 2005, 200). To stabilize their economy, Latin American governments were required to adopt structural adjustment policies designed

by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to obtain financial support. These policies range from imposing harsh budget austerity to privatizing public enterprise (Weyland 2004, 136). The implementation of the neoliberal policies often results in severe poverty and inequality, reductions in public services and subsidies, and mass unemployment (Eckstein 2002). Therefore, neoliberal economic reforms are often perceived by ordinary citizens as a threat to their standard of living.

The intensification of neoliberalism also coincides with the spread of democratization in Latin America (Johnston and Almeida 2006). The opening of political process in authoritarian regimes is one important factor that encourages social movements (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). Political liberalization and democratization have greatly reduced the mobilization costs for civil society actors (Meyer 2004) and thus established a political environment that is more conducive to greater levels of popular mobilization (Yashar 1998; 2005). As a result, democratization increases the leverage of challengers as well as their chances to achieve positive outcomes via collective protests (Arce and Bellinger 2007, 101). As Almeida (2008, 29) contends, “(s)ustained waves of neoliberal policy protests will be much more likely in societies that have undergone substantial regime democratization.”

Of course, not all of the contemporary social movements in Latin America are directly targeting neoliberal reforms. However, the widespread economic neoliberalism and the deepening democratization in Latin America do provide an opportunity for social sectors to act collectively to pursue their goals. Now the question becomes: How does the combination of economic neoliberalism and the presence of democracy shape mass protests of different social sectors? Are certain social sectors more likely than other sectors to mobilize protests in the context of free-market democratization?

THE SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF NEOLIBERALISM AND DEMOCRATIZATION

The theory of political opportunities suggests that social movements are influenced by a broad set of political constraints and opportunities, such as socio-economic determinants and institutional rules, unique to the context in which they are embedded (McAdam et al. 1996, 3; Markoff 1996; Auyero 2007). Tilly (1978) defines “opportunity” as the likelihood of challengers being better off if acting collectively. In other words, “opportunity” refers to the incentives that encourage people to take collective actions to pursue their interests. When political institutions or socio-economic structures provide such a favorable opportunity, social groups are more likely to mobilize collective protests.

Existing studies of social protests advance two competing views of the relationship between neoliberal economic reforms, democratization, and collective protests. First, the perspective of depoliticization suggests that neoliberal economic reforms strongly demobilize popular sectors and does not expect democratization to influence the social sectors to protest. As mentioned earlier, neoliberal economic reforms have posed a serious threat to ordinary people’s lives. Structural adjustment policies, a typical neoliberal economic reform, often involve austerity measures, such

as large government budget cuts, reduction of social spending, and privatization of public services. Although the implementation of such policies helps meet the lending prerequisites of the IMF, it has led to increased poverty and inequality and higher levels of unemployment.

As a result, the depoliticization literature suggests that neoliberal economic reforms have detrimental effects on the organizational bases of civil society (Wolff 2007). Oxhorn (2009) contends that neoliberal reforms demobilize civil society by generating a sense of political apathy. Moreover, the growing social inequalities and economic insecurities caused by neoliberal reforms further deteriorate the quality of democracy. It is because market reforms were generally implemented in a top-down manner by presidents in Latin America and thus destabilized democratic processes.

Therefore, the depoliticization thesis does not consider democracy as a favorable condition to address the social grievances caused by neoliberal economic reforms (Bellinger and Arce 2011, 690). For the depoliticization perspective, neoliberal policies have produced a “low-intensity” procedural democracy, whereby societal actors are presumed to be too weak to collectively challenge the economic policies that make their lives worse. Several empirical studies that adopt the depoliticization thesis have found that societal actors have little motivation to mobilize collective protests in the context of market reforms, even in a more open and democratic environment (Holzner 2007; Kurtz 2004; Oxhorn 2009).

Recently, however, the depoliticization literature has been challenged by the repoliticization literature, which argues that the combination of neoliberal economic reforms and the presence of democracy have a positive effect on protest mobilization. Similar to the depoliticization literature, the repoliticization literature also emphasizes that the implementation of neoliberal economic reforms has contributed to serious negative consequences in citizens’ lives. The threats posed by neoliberal economic reforms for societal actors include the loss of economic benefits (Walton and Shefner 1994), the erosion of social rights (Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley 2003), and the decay of democratic governance and administrative accountability (Markoff and Montecinos 1993). However, unlike the depoliticization literature, the repoliticization literature disagrees that deeper economic liberalization lowers citizens’ political efficacy and makes protests less likely. Instead, the repoliticization perspective indicates that neoliberalism has produced a “master frame” (Roberts 2008, 341) for various societal sectors to mobilize collective protests.

In addition to the triggering effect of neoliberalism, the repoliticization thesis also considers the effect of the democratic environment on protests, which is based on the insight from the approach of political opportunity structures of social movement studies. This approach suggests that social movements are influenced by a broad set of constraints and opportunities provided by socio-economic determinants and political institutions (Auyero 2007; Markoff 1996; McAdam et al. 1996, 3). When political institutions are open and less repressive, citizens have more incentives to act collectively to pursue their interests. Tilly and Tarrow (2007, 66) argue that the presence of democracy “guarantee[s] a more open political opportunity structure than their opposites” (see also Linz and Stepan 1996; Whitehead 2002). This more open

political opportunity is favorable for popular mobilization because it expands political channels for citizens, relaxes state repression, and facilitates coalition formation between important political actors and social actors (Goldstone 2004; Meyer 2004; Tilly and Tarrow 2007; Tilly 2007; Yashar 1998; 2005).

Taking the effects of neoliberalism and democracy together, the repoliticization thesis suggests that the threats posed by neoliberal reforms will have a positive conditional effect on fostering stronger popular mobilization when the political opportunity is more open and democratic. In other words, as Bellinger and Arce (2011, 691) contend, “grievances—as those generated by economic liberalization—create a strong will for collective activity, while democracy creates a favorable environment or opportunity for collective responses.”

Several empirical studies have provided evidence supporting the repoliticization thesis. For instance, Van Cott (2005) and Yashar (2005) find that the combination of economic liberalization and democratization has led to the rise of indigenous movements in several South American countries. Recent large-N empirical studies also demonstrate that economic liberalization leads to greater levels of collective political activity in the context of open and democratic politics in Latin America (Arce and Bellinger 2007; Bellinger and Arce 2011). More interestingly, Arce and Kim’s (2011) research of globalization and extra-parliamentary politics reveals distinct patterns of protest activity cross-regionally, showing that East Asia approximates the depoliticization trend, while Latin America follows the pattern of repoliticization. Based on the studies discussed above, a hypothesis about the repoliticization thesis can be derived: collective protests are more likely to occur in the context of free-market democratization compared to the context of non-free-market democratization in Latin America.

If the repoliticization perspective helps explain the general pattern of social protests in Latin America, does it also help explain protests mobilized by *all* societal sectors? Do some protests mobilized by certain societal sectors follow the repoliticization pattern while others do not? As some studies suggest, grievances and favorable opportunities are usually not sufficient to explain the emergence of social movements (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Jenkins 1983). To better understand how the combination of neoliberal economic reforms and the presence of democracy affect protests mobilized by different societal actors, I argue that it is necessary to take into account the strength of the organizational structures of different societal sectors. Below I elaborate my argument by incorporating the perspective of the approach of resource mobilization.

Based on the rational choice assumptions of Olsonian collective action (McAdam et al. 1997, 155; Olson 1965), the approach of resource mobilization focuses on analyzing the resources that can help social movements overcome free rider problems. Such resources for mobilization may include structured social movement organizations, informal social networks, or material support from other societal sectors or political elites. The approach of resource mobilization suggests that, in the absence of organizational resources, such as sympathetic institutions and associational networks, collective action will be less likely to take place.

While the presence of democracy provides a favorable opportunity for *all* social movements to mobilize collective protests, it is possible that some social movements might mobilize more protests than others. One important factor that explains the variation of protest frequency in the same political context is the level of organizational strength of societal actors. Specifically, it is expected that the societal actors with a higher level of organizational strength are more likely to mobilize protests than those with a lower level of organizational strength.

From the historical view, peasants and workers have been highly experienced collective actors compared to other societal sectors in Latin America. In the first half of the twentieth century, some of the most notable popular movements involved peasants in Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras, and El Salvador, and copper and silver miners in Bolivia and Peru (Melgar Bao 1988). Peasants in Southern Mexico were often considered by scholars as the main actor in the Mexican Revolution (Womack 1969; Knight 1986; Tutino 1986). State-initiated agrarian reforms and rural cooperative programs activated peasant movements in Guatemala in the early 1950s, Ecuador and Honduras in the 1960s, Brazil in the 1980s, and Bolivia in the 1990s (Almeida 2008, 16). Yashar (1998, 23) argues that active rural organizing within and between indigenous communities has traditionally been the reserve of peasant movements which “attempted to mobilize Indians to forge class, partisan, religious and/or revolutionary identities over, and often against, indigenous ones.”

In addition, labor movements in Latin America began to thrive as early as the 1920s when many countries in the region introduced labor codes to guarantee workers' rights and established official institutions to settle labor disputes (Edwards 1997, 127). According to Murillo's (2001) study, labor unions in Mexico, Argentina, and Venezuela gained official institutional power since the 1930s to 1940s and become very powerful and active societal sectors in the political arena. Murillo and Schrank (2005, 972) further contend that labor reforms from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s in Latin America “have enhanced rather than undercut labor's ability to organize and bargain collectively.” More importantly, labor movements have played a very important role in shaping the political arena and public policy outcomes in the early 1970s Chile (Winn 1986) and in the democratization process in Brazil (Keck 1992). Labor movements are so organizationally powerful and politically important that many Latin American governments and parties have made great efforts to incorporate the movements into institutionalized politics (Collier and Collier 1991).

Peasants and labor, due to their mobilization experience and organizational strength, are more able to mobilize collective protests to achieve their political goals. In Latin America, peasant movements and labor movements not only gained strong political resources earlier than other societal sectors, but also are highly experienced actors in mobilizing resources for collective actions. This fact helps complement the repoliticization thesis, which suggests that *all* social movements are generally likely to mobilize protests in the context of free-market democratization. To better understand why some societal sectors are more likely to mobilize protests than others, it is important to take into account the levels of organizational strength of different societal sectors. In short, a modified repoliticization hypothesis can be generated as:

societal sectors with higher levels of organizational strength are more likely than other sectors to mobilize collective protests in the context of free-market democratization.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In this paper, I examine popular protests at the aggregate level and at the individual societal sector level in 16 Latin American countries from 1980 to 2000.³ To properly specify the models, I use the dataset created by Lodola et al. (2005). This dataset looks at specific social sectors that mobilized a mass protest activity in a particular administration-year. The reporting source of their dataset is based on *Latin American Weekly Report* (<http://www.latinnews.com/latin-american-weekly-report.html>). This dataset provides good opportunities to conduct comparative analyses on protest events mobilized by different societal sectors based on a single reporting source.⁴ Moreover, the data are highly comparable over time.⁵

In this dataset, popular mobilizations are categorized for seven societal sectors: public employees, non-public employees, peasants/indigenous people, urban popular sector, middle class, upper class, and students/ NGOs/pensioners.⁶ To focus my analysis, I rearranged the data using country-year as the unit of analysis. I also recoded the protest data based on four main societal sectors: labor, peasantry,⁷ urban popular sector, and middle class/students/NGOs. Upper-class protest events are excluded from the analysis because they are rare events in the dataset.

The labor protest variable is coded 1 if public employees, non-public employees, or both, launched mobilization in a given country-year, and 0 otherwise. I combine protests by public employees and protest by non-public employees to construct this new “labor protest” variable because it is useful and meaningful to consider both types of labor as a single labor sector. The middle class protest is coded 1 if protests

³ These 16 countries are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

⁴ In contrast, Banks' (2005) CNTS database does not distinguish protests mobilized by specific actors. The major protest variables in the CNTS database are anti-government demonstrations, labor strikes, and political riots. Studies that use the CNTS database for testing the repoliticization thesis include Arce and Bellinger (2007), which examines anti-government demonstrations and political riots; Bellinger and Arce (2011), which examines the total number of anti-government demonstrations, strikes, and riots; and Arce and Kim (2011), which examines the total number of anti-government demonstrations and riots. Unfortunately, these authors fail to provide justifications for why they selected certain protest variables but not others for their empirical analyses.

⁵ Using a single reporting source helps reduce the problem of data comparability. The basic assumption here is that ideological tendencies and reporting preferences are relatively constant over time for a particular news source. As Castagnola (2006, 38-39) indicates, if the collected data do not come from sources with comparable ideological orientations and reporting preferences, the results of the investigation can be problematic. The dataset of Lodola et al. (2005) can avoid the problem of data incomparability because it uses *Latin American Weekly Report* as a single reporting source over time.

⁶ In fact, the category of students/NGOs in the dataset of Lodola et al. (2005) is the “other” category. The codebook of this dataset indicates that this variable is coded when the reported protests involved actors such as students, environmental activists, human right activists, and retired people.

⁷ Lodola et al. (2005) consider peasants and indigenous people to be the same group when coding their protest incidence. For convenience, this protest incidence variable will be called “peasant protest” hereafter in this analysis.

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mobilized by middle class, students and/or NGOs are reported in a given country-year, and 0 otherwise. I combined middle-class, students, and NGOs together as one category because these sectors share similar class position within a social structure. As Thompson (2007, 3) argues, the groups within the middle class include “higher paid professionals and administrators, as well as on students, intellectuals, and NGO activists”, and, more importantly, their status is defined largely via education instead of wealth. Warren (1998, 182) argues that the Pan-Mayanism movement in Guatemala is a middle class movement, whose activists include college students, intellectuals, and development NGOs workers.

The data of Lodola et al. (2005) is obviously not perfect. For instance, the media-derived data would not produce complete event populations (Koopmans 1998). In addition, it is possible that there are errors in measurement or even case selection biases in the media-derived data. Castagnola (2006, 38) points out two important shortcomings in the dataset of Lodola et al. (2005). First, since *Latin American Weekly Report* is a “summarizing” news resource, its editors would select only the relatively important protest events to report. Second, it is likely that *Latin American Weekly Report* will pay much attention reporting protests that occurred in larger countries and thus will underreport protests that occurred in smaller countries such as Caribbean or Central American countries.

However, while many studies use mass media reports for the source of data, those particularly focusing on analyzing the frequency, the duration, the level of violence, the claim-making, and the size of the participants for protest events may be more likely to suffer from validity and reliability problems in news report resources. In contrast, the main foci of this research are the level of social protest mobilization and the likelihood of a particular societal sector’s protest incidence, not other specific characteristics of the movements. Thus, while *Latin American Weekly Report* might not provide quality information on specific characteristics of a protest movement such as the size of the participants, it is able to provide relatively reliable information on whether a particular social movement emerged or not. In sum, the dataset of Lodola et al. (2005) is appropriate for my research design.

Dependent Variables

There are two types of dependent variables in this analysis. The first type is whether a protest movement involving a specific social sector occurred in a country-year (1 = occurred; 0 = not occurred). These social sector protest variables include: *Labor Protest*, *Peasantry Protest*, *Urban Popular Sector Protest*, and *Middle Class Protest*. The second type is the sum of each social sector’s protest incidences in a country-year (*Level of Social Mobilization*), with the value ranging from 0 (no protest incidence) to 4 (all four social sectors engaged in protest movements).

Independent Variables

This study focuses on testing two hypotheses about the repoliticization thesis. First, at the aggregate level, I examine the conditional effect of neoliberal economic reform on the overall level of protest mobilization in the context of democracy. To

test the above hypothesis empirically, three variables must be included in the statistical models at the same time: *Neoliberalism*, *Democracy*, and an interaction term *Neoliberalism*Democracy*. The data for *Neoliberalism* are the average economic reform index of Escaith and Paunovic (2004). Following conventional practices, *Democracy* is coded as a dummy variable using Polity IV data (Marshall and Jaggers 2002), in which a given country-year is coded 1 when the country's Polity IV score is higher than or equal to 7 in that year, and 0 otherwise.⁸

The interaction term *Neoliberalism*Democracy* seeks to capture the conditional effect of neoliberal economic reforms on protest in a democratic political context. Specifically, I expect that the coefficient of *Neoliberalism*Democracy* should be positive in the empirical models. In contrast, exploring the direct effect of *Neoliberalism* and that of *Democracy* on protests may be interesting, but it is not the major concern of this paper.

The second hypothesis is about whether societal sectors with higher levels of organizational strength would be more likely to mobilize protests in the context of free-market democratization. To test this hypothesis,⁹ I decompose the previous dependent variable and estimate models for protest incidences in each of the four societal sectors. Based on the earlier discussion, I expect that the coefficient of *Neoliberalism*Democracy* is positive and statistically significant for the models for labor protests and peasant protests. In addition, I expect that the coefficient of *Neoliberalism*Democracy* is statistically insignificant for the models for middle class protests and urban popular protests.

Control Variables

Political Scandals. Scandals about politicians and governments reported by mass media might delegitimize the government and lead to popular protests. Pérez-Liñán (2007, 65) defines political scandals as “news events disclosing acts of corruption or abuse of power performed by politicians.” Pérez-Liñán's (2007, 37) study shows that political scandals have been a common denominator in presidential impeachments in Latin America because they often ignited popular outrage that unified multiple social sectors against the executive. The data for political scandals used in this paper come from the dataset of Lodola et al. (2005). This variable denotes the number of political scandals reported in a country-year. All reported political scandals referred either to administrative corruption,¹⁰ to politicians' abuse of power,¹¹ or both.

⁸ The polity score in the Polity IV data ranges from -10 to 10 based on the autocracy-democracy scale. However, it is inappropriate to treat the Polity IV score as a continuous measure of democracy because the Polity IV data are categorical (Gleditsch and Ward 1997). Thus, I followed Jaggers and Gurr (1995) and Oneal and Ray (1997), defining a “coherent democracy” with Polity IV scores of 7 or above.

⁹ Ideally, to test this hypothesis, it would be helpful to collect the data about the resources a particular societal sector has, such as labor union density or the number of sub-organizations in a societal sector. However, such data are hardly available in Latin America.

¹⁰ According to the codebook for the dataset of Lodola et al. (2005), a corruption scandal is an incident when public officials used their position to obtain benefits for themselves or their friends.

¹¹ According to the codebook for the dataset of Lodola et al. (2005), a scandal involving abuse of power is an incident when the officials were accused of using their power to hurt their adversaries, to

Economic Conditions. Deteriorating economic conditions are direct threats to ordinary people's economic lives. Therefore, when the national economic performance is poor, the incentives for stimulating collective actions to call for ameliorating the economy would increase. I include three economic indicators in the models: *GDP Growth*_{*t-1*}, *logged Inflation Rate*_{*t-1*}, and *Change in GDP Per Capita*. The data for the first two variables are from the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2004), capturing the macroeconomic threat to the country. The data for the third variable is from the Statistical and Quantitative Analysis Unit of the Inter-American Development Bank, capturing the threat to people's personal economic life quality. In short, other things being equal, I expect lower *GDP Growth*_{*t-1*}, higher *Inflation Rate*_{*t-1*} and negative *Change in GDP Per Capita* to increase the probability of protests.

Ethnic Fractionalization. Social protests might be more likely to occur in a society with a higher level of ethnic fractionalization. As Elbadawi and Sambanis (2002, 310) suggest, a heavily ethnically fractionalized society implies "a higher number of competing groups with potentially different preferences over the outcomes of any sociopolitical conflict." If the government is controlled by a dominant ethnic group, other ethnic groups in this country would be more likely to mobilize protests struggling for their goals (Annette 2001). Studies have shown that, when a society has a high level of ethnolinguistic fractionalization, different ethnic groups tend to use their cultural identities to make claims on behalf of their collective interests (Gurr 1994, 348) and overcome collective action problems (Kaufman 2001), thus leading to a higher likelihood of mass protests. Using the data from Annette (2001), I include a variable for ethnolinguistic fractionalization in the models to control for the effect of ethnic cleavages on mass protests.¹²

*Electoral Disproportionality*_{*t-1*}. This variable denotes the distortion of political representation caused by translation of votes into seats. It is measured as the average vote-seat share deviation of the two largest parties in a country in one election (Lijphart 1984). In the literature explaining invalid votes in elections, higher electoral disproportionality punishes smaller parties, exhibiting higher levels of political alienation and lower levels of efficacy, thus leading to more invalid ballots (Power and Garand 2007). Following this logic, it is possible that people who are not well represented by larger political parties in a country would be more likely to engage in unconventional political participation such as protests. Using data from Power and Garand (2007), I include *Electoral Disproportionality*_{*t-1*} to control for the possibility that higher electoral disproportionality would increase the likelihood of popular mobilization.

Average District Magnitude. As Bhasin (2008, 71) argues, larger average district magnitudes create more incentives for social groups to form political parties to participate in the political process and thus decrease the incentives for engaging protests. Therefore, I control for the natural log of average district magnitude for lower house congressional elections in the models. I use Power and Garand's (2007)

cover-up for some crime, or to undermine the constitution.

¹² The ethnolinguistic fractionalization index measures the probability that two randomly selected individuals from the country in question do not belong to the same group (Annette 2001, 11).

data for *Average District Magnitude* to control for the possibility that a higher average district magnitude would decrease the likelihood of protest incidence.

Population. The natural log of population in thousands (World Bank 2004) is included in the model to control for the possibility that larger countries tend to be more likely to experience protest movements. See the Appendix for a description of and descriptive statistics for the variables used in this paper.

ESTIMATION TECHNIQUES

In this paper, I employ a negative binomial regression model to analyze the aggregate level of social mobilization. Due to the discrete nature of this variable, using an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model for count events can result in inefficient, inconsistent, and biased estimates (Long 1997, 217). For event count data, it is necessary to use either a Poisson model or a negative binomial model. However, it is inappropriate to employ a Poisson regression here since the conditional mean of total number of protests does not equal its conditional variance. Moreover, protest events in Latin America are often not independent from each other, which violates a critical assumption of the Poisson. Therefore, I employ a negative binomial regression model for the data of the overall protest mobilization.

In addition, to examine the protest incidence of particular societal sectors, I estimate probit models for the empirical analyses. Probit models are appropriate because the binary dependent variable reflects an underlying quantitative variable. Moreover, my dataset includes multiple observations from the same country both over time and in a given year, so observations within countries might not be truly independent. Therefore, in order to obtain more correct standard errors, I employ Huber/White/Sandwich robust variance estimators, setting to recognize the panel structure of the data. These estimators are robust to assumptions about within-group (country) correlation.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Before discussing my results, I first describe several interesting patterns in Latin American social mobilization from 1980 to 2000. Table 1 shows the frequency of observations based on different political contexts in Latin America. There are about 30% of observations that have no protest mobilization reported in an autocratic context. The same holds true for the observations in a democratic context.

However, in an autocratic context, the level of social mobilizations tends to be low. There are about 54% of observations that have lower levels of social mobilizations (with a level of 1 or 2) in an autocratic context. In contrast, there are about 40% of observations that have lower levels of social mobilization (with a level of 1 or 2) in a democratic context. Clearly, the statistics in Table 1 show that more open and democratic politics tend to encourage mass movements.

Table 1 Frequency Distribution of Observations for the Overall Level of Protest Mobilization in Latin America (1980-2000)

Level of Social Mobilization	Autocracy		Democracy	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
0 = No Mobilization	43	29.86	73	31.20
1 = Low	39	27.08	55	23.50
2 = Medium	39	27.08	39	16.67
3 = High	20	13.89	44	18.80
4 = Highest Mobilization	3	2.08	23	9.83

Source: Lodola et al. (2005)

Which countries have experienced more protest mobilization? As shown in Table 2, Ecuador and Bolivia are the countries that experienced the most intensive overall social mobilization from 1980 to 2000. Moreover, Argentina and Brazil are more likely to experience labor protests than other countries. Peasants tend to mobilize more protests in Bolivia than in any other Latin American countries. Finally, middle class and urban popular sector protest more often in Ecuador than in other countries in Latin America.

Table 2 Comparing Levels of Protest Mobilization in Latin American Countries (1980-2000)

Ranking	Labor Protest (nb. of years)	Peasant Protest (nb. of years)	Urban Popular Protest (nb. of years)	Middle-Class Protest (nb. of years)	Overall Level of Protest Mobilization
1	Argentina (19)	Bolivia (21)	Ecuador (13)	Ecuador (16)	Bolivia (58)
2	Brazil (19)	Brazil (15)	Argentina (11)	Venezuela (15)	Ecuador (57)
3	Ecuador (17)	Colombia (14)	Chile (8)	Peru (13)	Brazil (48)
4	Bolivia (16)	Ecuador (11)	Colombia (7)	Bolivia (12)	Argentina (46)
5	Peru (13)	Mexico (10)	Venezuela (7)	Mexico (12)	Colombia (43)

Source: Lodola et al. (2005)

Explaining Levels of Overall Protest Mobilization

Why do some Latin American countries experience higher levels of social mobilization than others? To answer this question, I test the repoliticization hypothesis by estimating a negative binomial regression model using the level of social mobilization as the dependent variable. The results are shown in Table 3. As can be seen, the coefficient of *Neoliberalism*Democracy* in Model 1 is positive and statistically significant, suggesting that a higher economic liberalization has a

significant and positive conditional effect on the overall level of protest mobilization in a democratic political context. This finding provides strong support for the repoliticization thesis.

Variable	Model 1 (Negative Binomial)	Model 2 (Ordered Logit)	Model 3 (Ordered probit)
Neoliberalism	-1.784*** (0.592)	-4.587*** (1.452)	-2.873*** (0.868)
Democracy	-1.469*** (0.453)	-4.003*** (1.271)	-2.442*** (0.796)
Neoliberalism*Democracy	2.150*** (0.682)	5.675*** (1.869)	3.510*** (1.152)
Political Scandals	0.105*** (0.029)	0.315*** (0.084)	0.180*** (0.045)
GDP Growth _{t-1}	-0.002 (0.011)	-0.0002 (0.031)	0.001 (0.017)
Inflation Rate _{t-1}	0.032 (0.046)	0.131 (0.151)	0.072 (0.081)
Change in GDP Per Capita	-27.775*** (06.345)	-83.180*** (18.172)	-47.171 (9.702)
Ethnic Fractionalization	2.121*** (0.502)	4.986*** (1.313)	2.955*** (0.805)
Electoral Disproportionality _{t-1}	-0.012 (0.013)	-0.036 (0.034)	-0.022 (0.020)
Average District Magnitude	0.068 (0.065)	0.129 (0.146)	0.088 (0.089)
Population	-0.044 (0.069)	-0.163 (0.215)	-0.084 (0.133)
Constant	0.680 (0.579)	—	—
Cut1	—	-2.829 (1.648)	-1.639 (1.071)
Cut2	—	-1.478 (1.610)	-0.833 (1.051)
Cut3	—	-0.334 (1.567)	-0.157 (1.027)
Cut4	—	1.324 (1.570)	0.766 (1.016)
N	289	289	289
Log pseudolikelihood	-415.204	-394.639	-394.421
Wald Chi-square (11)	455.53	357.09	351.13
Prob > Chi-square	0.000	0.000	0.000
Pseudo R ²	—	0.111	0.112

Entries in Model 1 are negative binomial regression coefficients. Entries in Model 2 are ordered logit coefficients. Entries in Model 3 are ordered probit coefficients. Clustered robust standard errors are given in parentheses (two-tailed tests). *** $p \leq 0.01$; ** $p \leq 0.05$; * $p \leq 0.1$.

The results in Table 3 also demonstrate that *Political Scandals* has a positive and statistically significant effect, suggesting that this variable is an important factor predicting the overall level of protest mobilization. Specifically, the more political scandals revealed by the mass media, the more likely the social mobilization level will increase. Economic threats are hypothesized to play an important role in predicting social mobilization. However, in Table 3 we see that only the coefficient of *Change in GDP Per Capita* attains statistical significance. The finding suggests that when GDP per capita increases compared to the previous year, societal actors would be less likely to mobilize protests, holding other variables constant. In contrast, the coefficients of *GDP Growth_{t-1}* and *Inflation Rate_{t-1}* are statistically insignificant. The findings about economic threats suggest that people tend to protest for their personal economic life rather than the macroeconomic performance.

The effect of *Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization* on protest mobilization is positive and statistically significant, showing that a society with a higher level of ethnolinguistic fractionalization is more likely to have a higher level of protest mobilization.¹³ In addition, the results show that the electoral institution factors do not have statistically significant effects on the level of protest mobilization. The coefficients of *Electoral Disproportionality* and *Average District Magnitude* do not achieve statistical significance. Finally, the results show that *Population* does not have a statistically significant effect in predicting the level of protest mobilization.

The coefficient for *Neoliberalism* and the coefficient for *Democracy* are statistically significant and have a negative sign. Interpreting the coefficients of these two variables must be careful because of the inclusion of the interaction term. The negative effect of *Neoliberalism* indicates that in the political environment of a non-democracy (*Democracy* = 0), more intensive economic liberalization would be more likely to discourage mass mobilization. The negative effect of *Democracy* suggests that, in a hypothetical situation where there was no economic liberalization (*Neoliberalism* = 0), a more democratic context would decrease the level of popular protests.

In order to check for the robustness of my analysis, I also employed ordered logit and ordered probit methods. The estimated results in Model 2 (ordered logit) and Model 3 (ordered probit) of Table 3 do not change much and are similar with the results of Model 1. The variable of interest, *Neoliberalism*Democracy*, attains

¹³ To further check the validity of the theoretical basis of this finding, I used other different measures of ethnic fractionalization, including the widely used ELF index (Atlas Narodov Mira 1964) and the indices constructed by Alesina et al. (2003) and by Fearon (2003) to test the framing process hypothesis. The results do not change much, suggesting that ethnic structures do influence the level of social mobilization.

statistical significance in both the ordered logit model and the ordered probit model, indicating that the finding that supports the repoliticization thesis is quite robust across different models.

Explaining Protest Incidence in Different Societal Sectors

The results in Table 3 provide strong evidence to support the repoliticization thesis, confirming the findings of some recent studies (Almeida 2008, 29; Arce and Bellinger 2007; Arce and Kim 2011; Bellinger and Arce 2011). However, to further test whether the repoliticization thesis works only for societal sectors with a stronger organizational basis, I estimated probit models for protest incidences mobilized by labor, peasants, urban popular sector, and middle class in Latin America.

Variable	Model 4 (Labor)	Model 5 (Peasant)	Model 6 (Urban Popular)	Model 7 (Middle Class)
Neoliberalism	-2.730** (1.092)	-4.714** (1.942)	0.685 (1.595)	-1.096 (1.063)
Democracy	-2.083* (1.114)	-4.947*** (1.513)	0.674 (1.016)	-0.672 (0.860)
Neoliberalism*Democracy	3.122** (1.537)	7.125*** (2.247)	-0.776 (1.644)	0.681 (0.125)
Political Scandals	0.177** (0.073)	0.106* (0.059)	0.154*** (0.058)	0.125** (0.051)
GDP Growth _{t-1}	0.009 (0.020)	0.012 (0.019)	0.008 (0.020)	-0.026* (0.015)
Inflation Rate _{t-1}	0.125 (0.090)	0.027 (0.076)	0.050 (0.061)	0.043 (0.071)
Change in GDP Per Capita	-32.724*** (8.831)	-34.425** (17.063)	-59.918*** (17.188)	-31.168** (13.105)
Ethnic Fractionalization	2.228** (1.021)	3.066** (1.491)	2.499** (1.016)	2.117*** (0.437)
Electoral Disproportionality _{t-1}	-0.030 (0.021)	-0.028 (0.029)	-0.023 (0.024)	-0.008 (0.019)
Average District Magnitude	0.143 (0.132)	0.151 (0.155)	-0.306* (0.170)	0.138 (0.118)
Population	-0.135 (0.175)	-0.142 (0.238)	0.131 (0.123)	-0.081 (0.091)
Constant	1.403 (1.644)	2.358 (2.158)	-3.487** (1.554)	0.043 (1.044)
<i>N</i>	289	289	289	289
Log pseudolikelihood	-176.277	-160.121	-118.322	-173.036
Wald Chi-square (11)	95.45	62.57	185.27	525.39
Prob > Chi-square	.000	.000	.000	.000
Pseudo <i>R</i> ²	.119	.1466	.198	.1221
Percent Correctly Predicted	66.090%	75.087%	80.277%	66.09%
Proportional Reduction in Error	31.819%	21.524%	3.176%	20.174%

Notes:

The statistics for the proportional reduction in error are calculated according to Hagle and Mitchell (1992): (% correctly classified – % in modal category) × 100 (100 – % in modal category). Clustered robust standard errors are given in parentheses (two-tailed tests). *** $p \leq 0.01$; ** $p \leq 0.05$; * $p \leq 0.1$.

Table 4 presents the empirical findings for labor protest, peasant protest, urban popular protest, and middle-class protest, respectively. The coefficient of *Neoliberalism*Democracy* is positive and statistically significant for labor protest incidence (Model 4) and for peasant protest incidence (Model 5). In contrast, the coefficient of does not reach statistical significance for urban popular protest (Model 6) and middle-class protest (Model 7). These findings provide strong evidence complementing the repoliticization thesis, suggesting that the repoliticization thesis works well only for explaining labor and peasant protest mobilization but not for urban popular protest and middle-class protest mobilization. Specifically, labor and peasants—the social sectors which are traditionally more resourceful and historically more experienced in organizing collective actions—are more likely to engage in collective protest movements in the context of free-market democracy.

As expected, the variables of *Political Scandals*, *Change in GDP Per Capita*, and *Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization* attain statistical significance and are in the expected direction. Specifically, the more political scandals are uncovered, the more likely it is that labor would protest. Moreover, an increase in GDP per capita leads to a reduction in the likelihood of labor protest. Last, the more ethnolinguistically fractionalized a society is, the higher the probability that labor would mobilize to protest. These all hold true for peasant, urban popular sector, and middle class/ students/ NGOs protests. In short, for either overall social mobilization or individual social sector protest, *Political Scandals*, *Change in GDP Per Capita*, and *Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization* are very important explanatory factors.

Unlike OLS coefficients, the substantial effects of the variables in probit models cannot be interpreted straightforwardly. Hence, I calculate a series of predicted probabilities for protest incidences in the four societal sectors under a variety of interesting scenarios for more substantive interpretation of the variables' coefficients.¹⁴ The calculated results are presented in Table 5.

<i>Situation^a</i>	<i>% Probability of Labor Protest Incidence</i>	<i>% Probability of Peasant Protest Incidence</i>	<i>% Probability of Urban Popular Protest Incidence</i>	<i>% Probability of Middle-Class Protest Incidence</i>
All variables at mean	52	34	15	42
Lower free-market democracy ^b	16	1	27	33

¹⁴ Predicted probabilities were generated using CLARIFY (King et al. 2000; Tomz et al. 1999).

Higher free-market democracy ^c	82	93	13	50
No political scandals	45	30	12	37
4 political scandals	71	46	29	57
8 political scandals ^d	86	62	51	74
Decline in GDP per capita ^e	60	42	26	49
Increase in GDP per capita ^f	45	27	9	35
Less ethnolinguistic fractionalized ^g	38	18	8	28
More ethnolinguistic fractionalized ^h	68	56	28	57

Notes:

- a. All variables are held at their means, except the variable listed.
- b. *Neoliberalism*Democracy* at one standard deviation lower.
- c. *Neoliberalism*Democracy* at one standard deviation higher.
- d. The maximum number of *Political Scandals* in the dataset is 8.
- e. *Change in GDP per capita* at one standard deviation lower.
- f. *Change in GDP per capita* at one standard deviation higher.
- g. *Ethnic Fractionalization* at one standard deviation lower.
- h. *Ethnic Fractionalization* at one standard deviation higher.

As shown in Table 5, holding other variables at their means, the lower free-market democracy suggests a 16% increase in the likelihood of labor protest, while the probability that the labor sector would protest in a higher free-market democratic environment is 82%. In addition, holding other variables at their means, a peasant protest has only a 1% chance to occur in a lower free-market democracy context, while the likelihood of a peasant protest in a higher free-market democratic environment is increased dramatically to 93%. Similarly, the probability that the middle class mobilizes protests in a higher free-market democracy is higher than that in a lower free-market democracy, but the difference is small. In contrast, the probability that the urban popular sector mobilizes protest activities in a free-market democracy is a bit lower than that in a lower free-market democracy, suggesting weak evidence for the depoliticization perspective.

Other variables have substantive effects on the probability of protest incidences in various societal sectors. Holding other variables at their means, the probability of protest incidence for all societal sectors increases with the number of reported scandals. For labor, peasants, and middle class, when there are eight political

scandals revealed, the predicted probability of protest incidence almost doubles compared to the situation in which no political scandals are revealed. For the urban popular sector, the predicted probability of protest incidence when there are eight political scandals is more than four times of the probability of protest incidence when there are no political scandals revealed.

In Table 5, we can also see that the predicted probability of protest incidence for each of the four societal sectors is lower when there is an increase in GDP per capita. Finally, the results demonstrate that the predicted probability of protest incidence is generally higher for each of the four societal sectors in a society with a higher level of ethnolinguistic fractionalization. For peasant protests, the difference in the predicted probability between a less ethnolinguistically fractionalized society and a more ethnolinguistically fractionalized society is almost 40%, which is the largest compared to other societal sectors. This finding suggests that the level of ethnolinguistic fractionalization has a strong effect on peasant protest incidence in Latin America.

CONCLUSION

Social movements have profoundly shaped the Latin American political arena. Recent literature suggests that Latin American social movements have been repoliticized by the combination of neoliberal economic reforms and a deeper democratization. The unwanted policy outcomes, along with the implementation of neoliberal structural adjustment such as cutting social welfare spending and privatizing public health care system, are often perceived by social groups as threats to their economic life. Moreover, a democratic environment provides favorable opportunities such as less state repression for social groups to mobilize protest actions. The repoliticization thesis underlines the importance of democracy in creating a favorable opportunity for social sectors to mobilize protests to address the threats caused by neoliberal economic reforms. In this sense, the level of protest mobilization increases in response to free-market reforms in democratic contexts.

This paper empirically tests the repoliticization thesis using data at the aggregate level and complements the repoliticization perspective by using data at the individual societal sector level. At the aggregate level, the empirical findings show that free-market democratization has a strong influence on enhancing the overall level of social protest mobilization. In addition, when the government's legitimacy suffers from political scandals and when people's economic life is greatly threatened, the

society tends to mobilize to resist these threats and push the government to solve the problems. Furthermore, I find that in a highly ethnolinguistic fragmented society cultural identities tend to be used or constructed by activists to overcome the collective action problem. These findings remain robust across a number of control variables and different estimation techniques.

More importantly, estimating models for protest incidences in different social sectors, I demonstrate that sectors that are historically resourceful and traditionally experienced in mass mobilization are more likely to launch protest movements in a free-market democratic context. Specifically, as neoliberal economic reforms deepen, the more democratic environment would enhance the likelihood of peasant protest incidence and that of labor protest incidence. This finding complements the repoliticization thesis by taking into account the level of organizational strength of the societal sector. Therefore, this paper contributes to the literature by providing a nuanced insight for understanding protest behavior in a free-market democratic context.

Given that the data regarding individual social sector's endowments in mobilization are limited, the research strategy of this paper in testing the effects of mobilizing structures is feasible and practical, although not perfect. To better understand how mobilizing structures influence social actors' capability and potential for mobilizing collective action, future research should put more emphasis on collecting data for various organizational characteristics of social movement organizations.

More fundamentally in terms of research design, a convincing empirical social movement study should also take into account the "micro-foundation" of systemic phenomenon. Therefore, future studies should use public opinion surveys, elite interviews, or experimental research to provide more evidence and insights in studying social movements.

This paper facilitates a better understanding of politics and societies in Latin America and joins a growing body of empirical political sociology literature (Arce and Bellinger 2007; Bellinger and Arce 2011; Kurtz 2004; Schatzman 2005; Wada 2004). Overall, while there is more to be done, this paper has shown systematically the relevance and importance of political opportunities and mobilizing structures for studying protest mobilization in Latin America.

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APPENDIX

Table A1 Variables Descriptions for the Models

Variable	Variable Descriptions
<i>Dependent Variables</i>	
Labor Protest	1 if labor was reported engaging in a protest event in a country-year 0 otherwise
Peasant Protest	1 if peasant were reported engaging in a protest event in a country-year 0 otherwise
Urban Popular Sector Protest	1 if the urban popular sector was reported engaging in a protest event in a country-year 0 otherwise
Middle Class/Students/NGOs Protest	1 if middle class/students/NGOs were reported engaging in a protest event in a country-year 0 otherwise
Level of Social Mobilization	Ranging from 0 (none of the four social sectors engaging in protests) to 4 (all of the four social sectors engaging in protests)
<i>Independent Variables</i>	
Neoliberalism	The average economic reform index, as calculated and reported by Escaith and Paunovic (2004)
Democracy	1 if Polity IV scores of 7 or above 0 otherwise
<i>Control Variables</i>	
Political Scandals	The total number of scandals reported in a country-year, as reported by Lodola et al. (2005)
GDP Growth _{t-1}	Gross domestic product growth rate, lagged 1 year
Inflation Rate _{t-1}	Natural log of inflation rate, lagged 1 year
Change in GDP Per Capita	Change in natural logged GDP per capita
Ethnic Fractionalization	The ethnolinguistic fractionalization indices, as calculated and reported by Annette (2001)
Electoral Disproportionality _{t-1}	The average vote-seat share deviation of the two largest parties in each election, lagged 1 year (Power and Garand 2007)
Average District Magnitude	Natural log of average district magnitude for lower house elections (Power and Garand 2007)
Population	Natural log of population in thousands

Table A2 Descriptive Statistics for Variables for the Models

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Observations</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>
Level of Social Mobilization	378	1.444	1.271	0	4
Labor Protest	378	.497	.501	0	1
Peasant Protest	378	.317	.466	0	1
Urban Popular Protest	378	.204	.403	0	1
Middle Class/ Students/ NGOs Protest	378	.425	.495	0	1
Neoliberalism	336	.680	.141	.341	.878
Democracy	378	.619	.486	0	1
Neoliberalism*Democracy	336	.448	.355	0	.872
Political Scandals	378	.860	1.216	0	8
GDP Growth _{t-1}	378	2.635	4.730	-26.479	14.819
Log of Inflation Rate _{t-1}	378	3.070	1.711	-2.659	9.372
Change in Log of GDP Per Capita	378	.0005	.006	-.024	.030
Ethnic Fractionalization	378	.47	.180	.15	.71
Electoral Disproportionality _{t-1}	326	5.839	4.526	.15	22.6
Log of Average District Magnitude	340	2.140	.914	.693	4.787
Log of Population	378	9.267	1.148	7.581	12.030

Source: Lodola et al. (2005)