1

Riding the Tiger

Popular Organizations, Political Parties, and Urban Protest

One who rides a tiger will find it hard to dismount.

Chinese proverb

Madero has unleashed a tiger! Let us see if he can control it!

Porfirio Díaz, ex-dictator of Mexico

On October 27, 2002, a man who first came to public notice when he led a major wave of protests against Brazil's military regime was chosen as its third democratically elected president. Luis Inácio da Silva, more familiarly known as "Lula," ran a campaign that downplayed his radical roots and his connections to some of Brazil's most militant and disruptive popular organizations. Beautifully produced and heart-wringing television ads depicted him as a man of the people, emphasizing his working-class background, his struggle for education, and his status as an outsider uncontaminated by the stigma of association with Brazil's often corrupt political class. He formed an electoral alliance with a conservative party, said he had learned to value moderation, and pledged not to renege on promises made to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – promises he had strongly criticized in prior presidential campaigns. Downplayed were references to his militant unionist background, his long-standing support of socialist economic policies, and his role in the formation of Brazil's most powerful Leftist party, the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party), or PT. He campaigned, in the pungent Brazilian expression, as "Lula Light."

1

Yet even as he tried to calm the fears of economic elites and international investors, his electoral success depended on harnessing opposition to their neoliberal economic program – much of it coming from organizations linked to his own party who repeatedly staged general strikes, demonstrations, and land seizures throughout 2001 and 2002. Elites expected him to rein in these protests while leaving previous economic agreements intact. The protesters warned that he could not expect unconditional support if he failed to implement real policy change. Yet his honeymoon was painfully short; in a matter of months, long before any positive changes could have been expected, the celebratory banners of his inauguration day were replaced by banners proclaiming him a traitor to the cause of the workers and peasants who elected him. This was due in part to his effort to pass a controversial pension reform plan that hurt public-sector unions within his political base. However, other groups seized upon his election as an opportunity to increase their demands. For example, the Landless Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, or MST), a PT supporter, more than doubled its rate of land invasions in the first year of his administration (Comissão Pastoral da Terra, http://www.cptnac.com.br).

What factors best account for variation in the propensity to protest? Do organizations channel demands through state institutions when their partisan allies gain power? Do they increase their rate of protest when their political opponents assume power and the threat is greater? Does protest vary cyclically with budgetary or electoral cycles? Or do organizations decide whether to protest based on incentives coming primarily from within rather than changes in the political environment?

This book examines patterns of protest in two large cities, comparing the protest strategies of organizations without partisan alliances and organizations that at some point enjoyed special access to the government by virtue of a political alliance with a party in power. Much of the party literature has argued that parties with deep roots in civil society stabilize political systems. As organizations develop an alliance with a political party they become more likely to trust the party as an interlocutor. When the party wins power, they transfer this trust to the government. Therefore protests will not be necessary for the organization to achieve its goals. Moreover, protesting can be

costly, not only to the organization that mounts the demonstration, but also to the ally in power. From this perspective, we should see organizations protest less when an ally takes office in order to avoid damaging the very ally they sought to have elected.

Conversely, when political parties unsympathetic to the interests of a social organization win power, their preferences threaten the interests of the organization and its members. Hard-won benefits may be lost unless protests and other pressure tactics can discourage the government from attacking existing privileges. Fears of harming the party in power would not constrain the organization, but instead encourage it to discredit the enemy and undermine its ability to govern. Consequently, the protest level should rise when one's political antagonists gain office.

An alternative view is that organizations may see their political allies as softer targets, already prone to support them and therefore more likely to respond to protest than an enemy. As the efficacy of protest increases, organization leaders gain prestige and power with their members for delivering the goods.

In each of these three scenarios, shifting political opportunities produce strategic shifts in behavior. But even though much of the political science literature focuses on political opportunities as the main incentive for protest, there may be other motivations. Sociological approaches often point more toward the nature of organizations in order to explain strategic choices. Protest as part of a tactical repertoire may become embedded in an organization's structure and political culture. In this case, the structural, cultural, and organizational characteristics internal to protesting groups may constrain their strategic flexibility.

Finally, there may be a temporal dimension to protest propensity that is generally overlooked in the scholarly work on long waves of social protest and demobilization. Specifically, to the extent that protest plays a role in setting the political agenda, influencing budgetary cycles, or framing electoral competition, it may be advantageous to protest more at some times during a given administration than at others.

This book builds on a large body of work on social movements and protest, but departs from most previous work in three ways: (1) in its explicit focus on the intersection between movements, the state, and political parties; (2) in its systematic and quantitative analysis of

urban protest by a wide variety of organization types; and (3) in its focus on protest in the context of new democracies rather than the advanced industrial democracies, which have claimed the attention of the majority of researchers up to this point.

Most work on protest has focused on either the micro-level (individual behavior or individual social movements) or the macro-level (aggregate changes in protest over time). The first approach focuses on individual participation, using survey data to predict the likelihood that a given individual will take part in protest (e.g., Opp, 1988; Lewis-Beck and Lockerbie, 1989; Sussman and Steel, 1991; Norris, Walgrave, and Van Aels, 2005). These analyses have provided us with rich evidence about the elements that lead individuals to participate in collective action. They tell us much less about how organizations make tactical decisions regarding whether and when to call for protest. Yet this decision by organization leaders is usually what triggers individual participation in protest: you have to be asked.

Case studies of individual social movements focus on the decision to protest, as well as the question of how movements use symbolic and material resources to mobilize support from members. The majority of works in this tradition are concerned with social movement emergence; however, strategies of rhetorical framing, selective payoffs, repertoires of action, identity formation, and so forth have implications for the role of protest in movement reproduction. The challenge for this approach lies in how to draw generalizable conclusions out of the particularities of a handful of cases. Individual case studies do a better job of developing the (long) list of factors that facilitate mobilization than of determining their respective weight.

Finally, cross-national statistical analyses isolate aspects of the institutional context that can have systematic effects. For example, research on protest cycles pays less attention to the calculations of individual movements than to the factors that may create or deny opportunities to many movements at the same time (e.g., Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly, 1975; Francisco, 1996; Moore, 1998). However, this kind of analysis is not well-suited to uncover the factors, such as party alliance, that differentially affect specific movements in the same institutional context.

This book does not attempt to explain individual decisions to participate in protest, or – except in general terms – cross-national

variation in protest patterns. It focuses on individual organizations, but not exclusively or even primarily through the lens of in-depth case studies. The core of the book is an extensive and original dataset of protest in two Latin American cities, with a sample from a third for comparative purposes. The two primary cities – São Paulo and Mexico City – are two of the largest cities in the world. Each experienced two periods of Left municipal government, which are contrasted with data from two non-Left municipal governments. For each city, I coded newspaper accounts of protests from two major daily newspapers according to type of protest, target, sponsoring organization, demands, location, and attendance (if available). The Mexico City database contains entries for 4,501 events over a twelve-year period and 846 separate organizations. The São Paulo database contains entries for 2,485 events over a fifteen-year period and 481 organizations. Because I include every identifiable protest, the analysis does not single out any one type of organization. Instead, I compare the protest behavior of different types of organizations and find interesting systematic differences.

Finally, I use information about specific organizations to identify their party alliance characteristics and conduct quantitative analysis of the impact of party alliance on protest, both when the ally was in and out of power. In singling out this aspect of the political context, I fall short of specifying the full range of factors that shape the political opportunity structure (POS), defined as "consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent or national – dimensions of the political environment which either encourage or discourage people from using collective action." (Tarrow, 1994: 18) Originally attributed to Eisinger (1973), the current usage reflects the definition of Sidney Tarrow (1983, 1989a). Tarrow (1989a: 34–35) singles out four general aspects of the POS: (1) the "extent to which formal political institutions are open or closed to participation by groups on the margins of the polity"; (2) the "stability or instability of political alignments ... [including] changes in the parties' electoral strength"; (3) the "presence or absence of influential allies"; and (4) "political conflicts within and among elites."

However, POS "threatens to become an all-encompassing fudge factor for all the conditions and circumstances that form the context for collective action. Used to explain so much, it may ultimately explain

nothing at all" (Gamson and Meyer, 1996: 275). Only by isolating specific aspects of the POS and engaging in explicitly comparative work can we begin to uncover their relative causal significance.[1]

Parties are a key component of the political opportunity structure. They can provide individual organizations with symbolic and material resources and offer access to policy-making bodies. They may attempt to co-opt, repress, or demobilize movements and thus affect the costs of protest. Yet parties have been under-studied as they relate to protest and strategic decision making by social organizations. The literature on parties tends to focus on formal behavior, like campaigns and legislative action, while the literature on popular movements tends to focus on informal and unconventional activity. As a result, the intersection between these two worlds is too seldom explored despite the reality – increasingly acknowledged – that "there is only a fuzzy and permeable boundary between institutionalized and non-institutionalized politics" (Goldstone, 2003: 2). Many organizations use both conventional institutional channels and unconventional and noninstitutional tactics to achieve their goals. My central question is what factors incline them toward one tactic versus another.

This book makes three major claims, all provisional but highly suggestive:

1. The internal structures and political culture of social movement organizations significantly shape protest behavior, and constrain the ability of organizations to respond rapidly to changes in political opportunity. Protest can be a key part of organizational maintenance and survival. Because of these organizational motivations, the election of one's partisan ally does not necessarily reduce protest.

2. Nevertheless, continuity is not immobility. Organizations do respond to changes in the political context, even if these factors are not the most important ones driving protest behavior. In particular, governmental cycles matter. In the first year of a new

[1] I was inspired to try this approach by McAdam, who suggests that researchers, "recognize that a number of factors and processes facilitate mobilization and resolve to try to define and operationalize them so as to maintain their analytic distinctiveness. Only by doing so can we ever hope to determine their relative importance to the emergence and development of collective action" (McAdam, 1996: 26).

government, organizations have particularly strong incentives to protest in order to establish their priority order in the policy agenda. Allies, in fact, may be seen as particularly soft targets, more likely to respond positively to protest than opponents.

3. Not all organizations respond in the same way to changing political opportunities. We need to know their resources, political culture, and level of institutionalization to understand how different kinds of organizations are likely to react.

The findings of this study have important practical as well as theoretical implications. Protest can bring down governments, result in major policy change, or handicap the economy by scaring investors. Protest can clarify the meaning of a broad electoral mandate by supplying specific issue items about which people feel most strongly, or place on the political agenda the demands of intense minorities. More generally, the analysis of protest behavior over time can address broader theoretical questions about the limits of strategic flexibility in social organizations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The complexity of protest makes it difficult to study effectively. The number of variables and levels of analysis that can affect protest generates many possible combinations. Consistent findings based on individual cases or even small samples can therefore be elusive. The problem is complicated by the difficulty of obtaining reliable information about protest – often, only a semilegal activity. And finally, this project focuses on the intersection of three large literatures: the literature on political parties/party systems, on protest/contentious political action, and on social movements in general. With some stellar exceptions (e.g., Burstein, 1985; Tarrow, 1989b; 1994; Costain, 1992; Jenkins and Klandermans, 1995; Andrews 1997; 2001; McAdam and Su, 2002), these literatures often fail to talk to one another; as one author notes, "neither the relationship between movements and parties nor their joint impact on policy has been studied very much. Disciplinary boundaries are partly to blame: sociologists primarily concerned with social movements pay little attention to political parties, and political scientists studying parties seldom devote much effort

to examining movements" (Burstein et al., 1995: 289). The fragmen-
tation of scholarship as well as the complexity of protest has gene-
rated a fairly messy and contradictory set of findings about the
underlying causes of variation in protest behavior.

Resource Mobilization and Identity

The first set of hypotheses comes from sociological traditions that
view movement tactics as reflecting its set of resources, both material
and nonmaterial. Most basically, "the greater the resources of groups,
the more they will employ 'insider tactics' (e.g., lobbying, litigating);
the fewer the resources commanded by such groups the more they
will use 'outsider' tactics (e.g., demonstrating)" (McCarthy et al.,
1996: 305). Protest is the weapon of resource-poor groups that lack
regular access to government officials and have few other methods for
influencing policy (see also Piven and Cloward, 1977; Walker, 1991).
Many scholars of social movements interpret protest as a sign of
movement health. The decline of protest signals a transition from
social movement status to mere (boring) institutions. Indeed, the very
conceptualization of social movements as,

> outsiders ... [who] seek to represent a constituency not previously mobilized
> to participate in politics ... create[s] an ironic problem for those who analyze
> movement outcomes. Both [Tilly and Gamson] suggest that once a movement
> begins to succeed – by mobilizing its constituency or gaining formal repre-
> sentation – it ceases to be a movement, even if its goals, membership, and
> tactics do not change. (Burstein et al., 1995: 277)

Thus, "a true movement organization must continue to emphasize
movement over organization or risk losing the initiative to more
institutionalized groups" (Tarrow, 1989b: 274). Even a temporary
reduction of protest at the behest of a party ally might permanently
discredit the movement, reduce its future mobilizational capacity,
and eventually result in its extinction, a sociological version of the
"use it or lose it" rule.

Specific tactics may also follow from the organizational form and
resource configuration of a movement. When unions decide to protest,
for instance, they are more likely to strike than to block a street
because their primary leverage comes from their ability to disrupt the

workplace. However, this was not always the case. In Tilly's fasci-nating discussion of the "invention of the strike," he mentions increas-ing concentration of workers in large shops as well as residential segregation and changing views of the role of workers as among those factors affecting the propensity to adopt strikes as a form of collective action (1978: 159–166). More generally, he notes, "unquestionably, the type of organization of interest...affects the *type* of collective action of which a contender is capable; in many circumstances it affects the quantity of collective action as well" (Tilly, 1978: 58–59).

Beyond the initial linkage between resources and types of action, organizations "learn" how to perform specific tactics. They get good at that tactic. When a new cause of discontent arises, they fall back on what they know how to do. Thus, protest repertoires become fairly sticky characteristics of movement organizations. Previous mobiliza-tion also leaves lasting traces. Compared to equally poor and pow-erless groups, organizations that have successfully mobilized once are more likely to act collectively again, to claim new rights, or to defend against new threats (Tilly, 1978: 75–76).

Finally, mobilization may become intertwined with identity. New social movement theory places great emphasis on identity (and soli-darity based on a common identity) as an important nonmaterial resource sustaining collective action. Even though most new social movement theory refers to identity in terms of established social cate-gories such as women or ethnic groups, identity is at least in part a social construction resulting from mobilization itself. Thus, pro-test repertoire may overlap with protest culture and group identity. Essentially, "The answer to 'who are we?' need not be a quality or a noun; 'We are people who do these sorts of things in this particular way' can be equally compelling" (Clemens, 1996: 211).

It may be difficult for such groups to stop protesting without jeop-ardizing that sense of common identity. For example, some Salvadoran unions born in the context of a civil war had trouble adapting to peace: "although labor leaders recognized that these old institutions had served their purpose and should be discarded or radically altered, to date they have not been able to create new labor forces that can meet the challenges of participating in a democratizing postwar society" (Fitzsimmons and Anner, 1999: 117). From this point of view, protest tactics are not infinitely flexible. Thus, one would expect considerable

continuity over time in levels, tactics, and targets of protest regardless of fluctuations in external conditions.

> **Hypothesis 1: The propensity to protest reflects endur-ing organizational and sociological characteristics of movements themselves, including type of resources and internal structures.**
> **Hypothesis 2: The propensity to protest reflects previ-ous experience with protest, which builds resources/ skills and shapes movement identity.**

Political Opportunity Structures and the Impact of Parties

Much of the early literature on protest saw it as a symptom of a dysfunctional political system, for which political parties were the cure. In particular, parties with deep roots in civil society, allied to mass organizations, tended to inhibit protest and stabilize political systems. One of the first formulations came from scholars working within the modernization theory paradigm. The structural–functionalist view (e.g., Almond, 1960; Smelser, 1963) described the role of parties as reconciling the interests of many groups through the creation of a program that aggregated and prioritized demands. By successfully channeling demands through institutional channels and providing access to policy making, parties offered a viable alternative to protest. While the absence of protest might have many causes (such as the difficulty of organizing collective action or the costs of repression), the *presence* of protest indicated the failure of formal political structures to perform these aggregative and expressive functions. The very def-inition of protest often incorporates this notion, that protest is "used by people who lack regular access to institutions" (Tarrow, 1994: 2).

Huntington (1968) further highlighted parties as the solution to the social dislocations created by modernization in the developing world. Essentially, Huntington saw violence and instability as the result of a gap between rapid socioeconomic modernization and slow political modernization. The challenge was to construct political institutions that could absorb the rising participation produced by modernization. Huntington assigned this role principally to parties. Thus, "violence, rioting and other forms of political instability are more likely to occur