

Latin American Anti-government Protests:

An Analysis of the Contributing Factors

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This research project poses the question: Why are contemporary Latin American anti-government protests occurring? The time frame that will be analyzed will start from 2005 and will look at Nicaragua's 2018 protests and Chile's 2019 protests in order to try and answer this question. Researchers and scholars have put forth different theories that explain why citizens protest against their government and theories regarding mobilization. There are four distinct categories in which each of these explanations can be placed in: social factors, political/institutional factors, and finally, economic factors. The explanations within the social factors categories are loosely connected and related to the psychological and social factors of protest explanation. The political/institutional, economic, and technological factors within their respective categories are all interconnected and build compounding explanations. These four main categories embody the main literature that seeks to answer why protests against the government occur. The research's findings would support the notions put forth in the explanations that revolve around the existence of opposition groups; opposition groups are a necessary factor for the proliferation of anti-government protests.

Anti-government protest refers to a populace protesting against its own government for a myriad of reasons. Although such a definition sounds self-explanatory, there are a large number of reasons and factors that instigate anti-government protests and lead to such widespread discontent. In the Latin American context, there has been a noted proliferation of anti-government protests around the region, specifically in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and others. The purpose of this thesis is to answer the research question: Why are contemporary Latin American anti-government protests occurring?

There are a wide variety of explanations and theories regarding the factors that instigate anti-government protests that are debated in the field of comparative politics. For the purposes of this research analysis, the focus on anti-government protests that are being analyzed in Latin America are Nicaragua's 2018 and Chile's 2019 protest movements. Theories regarding the factors that instigate protest incidents are vast; however, for the purposes of foundation, the major theories will be subcategorized into four major categories: social, political, economic, and technological elements. Many of the theories outlined in the literature review

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will be called upon for an examination regarding the nature and proliferation of anti-government protests in Latin America. Following this section, the research design and methodology section will justify and explain why specifically Nicaragua and Chile's protest movements were selected as well as how the research is to be conducted. The analysis and findings sections will discuss the results that were found regarding explanations and the evidence gathered from the Nicaragua and Chile case studies. The analysis section will test different explanatory variables in order to see which case study supports the different theories regarding why anti-government protests occur. Due to the contemporary nature of the protests being analyzed and lack of comprehensive databases on other factors, there was a need, in some instances, to use secondary sources for a detailed and accurate portrayal of the factors that were contributing to the proliferation of anti-government protests. The findings of this study may be applied to other instances of anti-government protest in Latin America.

Research Question

My research question is as follows: Why are contemporary Latin American anti-government protests occurring? This thesis will analyze the factors and influences that scholars have put forth in explaining the proliferation of anti-government protests in Latin America. In this study, I will analyze economic, social perspective-based, political institution strength, and opposition group explanations that scholars have put forth in order to understand which factors have broad application across Latin America.

This question is pertinent for various reasons. For one, Latin America is currently experiencing a wave of anti-government protests around the region and understanding these protests will have explanatory power regarding the condition of Latin American governance. Furthermore, many of these protests will have serious political, economic, and social ramifications on the future of Latin American politics and may, in certain cases, lead to regime changes or have spillover effects into neighboring states. As such, it is important to examine the factors that are influencing the proliferation of

anti-government protests.

Argument

The main argument that is posed in this thesis is that opposition groups are the critical factor in the proliferation of anti-government protests. Specifically, this thesis analyzes both the Chilean and Nicaraguan case studies and notes that the opposition group explanations were supported in both instances. Without opposition groups, it would be significantly more difficult for anti-government protests to proliferate and mobilize.

Literature Review

Researchers and scholars have put forth different theories that explain why citizens would protest against the government and theories regarding mobilization. There are four distinct categories in which each of these explanations can be placed in: social factors, political/institutional factors, technological factors, and finally economic factors. The explanations within the social factors categories are loosely connected and related to the psychological and social factors of protest explanation. The political/institutional, economic, and technological factors within their respective categories are interconnected with each other and build compound explanations. These four main categories embody the main literature that seek to answer why protests against the government occur.

1) Social Factors

Observing the social factors that influence the rise of anti-government protest, one of the main ideas that has circulated is the local community's values and the government's values either clashing or coinciding (Akkus, 2019). Should the community's values be in line with the government they would be much more willing to support the government's repression of anti-government protest. Akkus (2019) studied the Gezi Protests in Turkey and the cultural and communal attitudes of the local communities in Turkey and found that willingness to support or oppose the government

is correlated with the values of an individual and the community, oftentimes in the social context of conservatism versus liberalism. Should these implications hold true for Latin America, one could expect protests against the government to be at least partially motivated by a perceived difference in social values that the protesters do not agree with.

Another key component of social factors that explain why anti-government protests occur is the role of the imaginary. In the post neoliberal era of Latin America, studies indicate that the social imaginary of protesters has shifted from a specific position on the political spectrum to a targeted grievance against specific failures from political institutions. The language of the imaginary has been converted to one of a non-aligned middle/working class fight in the name of the “Republic” rather than any specific political alignment (Ferreiro, 2016). Considering this in the Latin American context, this would indicate that in the social context, modern anti-government protests are being framed from no particular political standpoint but rather reflect a psychological falling out with the government that they aim to make vocal and to restore the integrity of the “Republic.” In the broader context of comparative politics, Kim’s (2018) study of Korean anti-government protests compound the idea of protesting as a psychological means of expressing emotion regarding the government. Kim (2018) found that, in a collective sense, protests communicated the idea that the people are ultimately in control of the government, not the other way around. In an individual sense however, the study found that protesting served as a form of personal satisfaction, of venting grievances that individuals had against the government (Kim, 2018). These two studies if applied to a contemporary Latin American context would indicate that at least in the psychological and social sense, anti-government protests are occurring as a psychological response to perceived grievances and are being used to vent emotion towards the government about the grievances they’ve endured, rather than any particular ideological gripes with the government.

One final piece of the social factor explanation as to why anti-government protests are occurring is Latin American citizens’ opinions of Latin American anti-government protests. In Mourao’s (2016)

study, it was found, after extensively surveying Latin American citizens, that as long as anti-government protests remain peaceful and legal, Latin American citizens have come to see these protests as normalized within society. This normalization of anti-government protest in Latin America reflects societal legitimization of expressing grievances against governments (Mourao, 2016). The normalization of these anti-government protests indicates that in Latin America that in the absence of expressing grievances and complaints against the government in a meaningful way through conventional and institutional means, Latin American citizens have resorted to using anti-government protest as a means to vent their emotions where other means just aren’t effective in that regard.

II) Political and Institutional factors

Scholarship regarding political/institutional factors points to strength, or lack thereof, of political institutions as one of the main factors driving contemporary anti-government protests. On the one hand, many institutional explanations revolve around the weakness of political institutions that give citizens an incentive to protest. Arce (2010) showed that there was a direct link between a Latin American country’s political party strength and the level of protest activity. Specifically, in 17 Latin American countries, Arce (2010) found that stronger political parties were correlated with lower frequencies of anti-government protests. Machado et al. (2011) found a similar correlation between the perceived strength and legitimacy of political institutions and the frequency of protests: When Latin American citizens believed that their political institutions were strong and operating in their favor, the level of protest incidence was significantly lower than when citizens believed their political institutions were weak or illegitimate.

Lastly, this trend of weak institutions providing the catalyst for protest continues when looked at in the context of game theory. Buenrostro (2006) observed European protests through the lens of game theory and came to the conclusion that protesters will often choose to protest when they believe that their government would be weak enough to bend to their demands or that there is precedent sug-

gesting an opportunity for political change. This pattern of weak political institutions and the higher frequencies of protests suggest that the weak political institutions not only set a precedent that traditional political institutions are no longer able to function correctly, but create an implication of political opportunity through extra-institutional means that protesters would attempt to capitalize on. Doran (2017) further strengthens this pattern by finding that Latin American governments will actively try to maintain the perception of strength and ability as evidenced by an ever increasing number of Latin American governments criminalizing public protests in an effort to appear strong and capable in the wake of mounting “from below” opposition movements.

The relationship between institutional strength and anti-government protesters can be considered U-shaped however: Institutions that are perceived as too strong also lend themselves to higher frequencies of anti-government protests. Garcia (2017) analyzed the frequency of anti-government protests and the size of legislative coalition size, finding that, regardless of party type, Latin American legislatures who have legislative coalitions or overemphasized majorities that exceed 55% of the legislature are significantly correlated with an increase in anti-government protests. This suggests that akin to weak political institutions, in the eyes of Latin American citizens, political institutions that become too strong are no longer serving the people and would come with a whole set of political grievances that would also serve to fuel political mobilization against the government.

Another important aspect of the Political and Institutional factors explaining anti-government protests is the role that opposition groups play in their proliferation. Su (2015) found that among 107 democracies, the existence of opposition groups as catalysts for political protest in his second theory better explained the determinants of political activity and the uptake of anti-government protest. Su (2015) also found that when opposition groups are unified against the government, protest frequency and mobilization capacities increase; Su (2015) noted, however, that the mobilization capacity of a country plays a much larger role in the incidence of anti-government protest in de-

veloping countries as opposed to developed ones. These conclusions strengthen Trojo’s (2014) findings in the context of autocratic regimes opening up to multi-party elections. Trojo found that when these elections are opened up, opposition groups and social movements partner together and result in a significant uptick in anti-government protests due to the resulting window of opportunity that is opened. These anti-government protests would continue as long as there is a prospect for victory or until protesters believe they have received fair treatment (Trejo, 2014). Both studies view opposition groups in a country as a catalyst for political mobilization and the organizers behind anti-government protests that when applied to a Latin American context could help to explain the proliferation of anti-government protest.

III) Technological factors

In regards to the Technological factor, namely social media, scholars have posited that social media can affect the frequency of anti-government protests. Barbara et. al (2015) found that in regards to the core-periphery dynamics of protest, social media political posts have been used as a strong tool for the periphery protesters in order to help the mobilization of people and resources for the anti-government protest. Furthermore, Barbera et al. (2015) found that social media, when used by low-commitment and periphery protesters, is able to amplify the position of the core protesters and creates a type of cascading effect that causes many to become committed core protesters. The idea that social media can be used as a mobilization tool coincides with Mourao’s (2016) study that aimed to look at the role that social media played in Latin American anti-government protests. Mourao (2016) found that while moderate anti-government protests were aided by social media’s mobilization capability, the benefits did not extend to radical protests to the same degree. These findings would suggest that although social media does have a part to play in the ability for the mobilization of anti-government protests, there are other factors that would need to accompany these factors to make a significant difference.

IV) Economic factors

In the economic sector, there are a myriad of interconnected and dynamic factors that all relate to the economy yet in some cases blur the line with some political aspects as well. First, Justino et al. (2019) analyzed some of the economic factors that push Latin American citizens to protest, finding that downturns in the economy as well as higher individual redistributive preferences were the most important factors affecting an individual's likelihood to protest against the government. This would indicate that at least on some basic level the state of the economy, regardless of economic ideology, is a prime motivator for Latin American citizens to protest against the government.

In existing literature, the role of neoliberal economic policy as an anti-government catalyst is among the most contentious explanations. On the one hand, there are proponents who hold that neoliberal policy would serve as a catalyst for anti-government policy because of the nature of austerity measures. Bellinger et al. (2010) investigated whether economic liberalization affected anti-government protests and found that rather than demobilizing the people, economic liberalization actually served to increase political activity as citizens felt the need to resist or modify economic policy that affects their lives. This idea that economic liberalization is a motivating factor for anti-government protests coincides with Pavlic's (2018) study which analyzed Chilean university students and their frequency of protest, finding that there were significant correlations between working class students and students with debt and their frequency of protest against the government due to neoliberal policies (Pavlic 2018). Furthermore, Almeida (2007) found that neoliberal policy and austerity measures agitated anti-government protests because of the fact that working-class and public-sector employees were the ones who would be directly affected by those austerity measures and have their livelihoods threatened. In the aforementioned studies, the consensus is that neoliberal policy and its austerity measures are instigative of anti-government protest because they directly threaten the livelihood of working-class and public sector citizens, and as such they are attempting to

voice their grievances against the government for implementing policy that goes against the people.

Some literature, however, disagrees with the notion that neoliberalism and economic liberalization is a catalyst for anti-government protest. Refuting Bellinger's et al. (2010) study, Solt et al. (2014) instead found that it is not economic liberalization that acts as a catalyst for anti-government protests, but rather other political factors. Solt et al. (2014) argue that the pattern found in the Bellinger et al. (2010) study was reflective not of the economic liberalization policies in Latin American countries, but rather the nature of Latin American autocracies. Therefore, Solt et al. (2014) propose that it is not economic liberalization that is the arbiter of anti-government protests but rather statist economic policies in Latin American autocracies that explain the pattern of anti-government protests found in Bellinger's et al. (2010) study, (Solt et al., 2014). Under this school of thought, it is not economic liberalization or neoliberal policies that prompts citizens to protest against the government but rather other compounding political factors such as the existence of an autocratic government and their economic policies that would serve as a justification for anti-government protest.

The academic literature surrounding the economic factors of the explanations for why anti-government protests occur also factors in the specific demographics of protesters. Somma et al. (2020) identified two separate categories of protest: survival protests, referring to protests against direct threats to citizen's material and social survival, and furtherance protests, protests that seek to push the government to improve some aspect of the society. The study found that in regards to survival protest, this type of protest actually attracted citizens that were close to the national average income while the furtherance protests were attracting citizens from the higher socioeconomic echelons of society. The pattern that the scholars put forth is that higher access to socioeconomic resources would lend itself to increased participation in furtherance protests as opposed to survival protests because citizens in the higher socioeconomic brackets have lower incentives to participate in survival protests (Somma et al., 2020). These findings are aligned with Zarate-Tenorio's (2019) study which found that when

Latin American protests against the government are on the basis of state-targeted grievances and are coupled with the availability of material resources, the citizens who are most likely to protest against the government were the ones who were the closest to the middle of the income distribution of their respective country. The reasoning behind this is as follows: The poor are unable to protest against the government because they lack the material resources required for organization and effectiveness, while the rich are not incentivized to protest because they already have an abundance of resources (Zarate-Tenorio, 2019). Both studies suggest that when grievances towards the state are economic or resource-based, protestors are more likely to be in the middle class or within the median income distribution.

Finally, within the explanations encompassed in the economic factors category, it is necessary to note the role that organized labor groups play in the instigation of anti-government protest. Zarate-Tenorio (2014) notes that in Latin America, organized labor groups play an extremely potent role in anti-government protests because they are so intertwined with the economic and social facets of the country. Zarate-Tenorio (2014) holds that these labor groups are some of the most powerful political organizers and their actions have long-term positive effects on increasing the level of government sanctioned social spending. Zarate-Tenorio (2014) also found that large-scale protests, especially those with involvement with organized labor groups, have created a deterrent effect in Latin America, discouraging governments from cutting human capital spending. This suggests that organized labor groups play a critical role in the dynamics of Latin American anti-government protest.

V) Conclusion

From the existing literature studying the causes of anti-government protests, we can observe four main factors: social, political and institutional, technological, and economic. Social factors encompass literature that analyzes the role of community values, psychological/individual justifications, the imaginary, and the normalization of

anti-government protest in Latin America. Political and institutional factors include literature analyzing the perceived strength/weakness of political institutions and the government as a whole, and the role that opposition groups play in serving as a catalyst and organizer of anti-government protest. Technological factors mostly encompass the role of social media as a mobilization tool for anti-government protests. Finally, economic factors include the roles, or lack thereof, of neoliberal policies, individuals with redistributive preferences, demographics of citizens most inclined to participate in anti-government protests, and labor groups in the mobilization and of anti-government protest.

Methodology

Dependent Variable

In this research project, my focus is on contemporary Latin American anti-government protests. In Latin America, there has been a proliferation in the frequency of anti-government protests in the contemporary era. This paper focuses on major, ongoing protest movements in Latin America. Therefore, the dependent variable will be major protest movements, specifically the frequency of protests in the respective case studies. To measure my dependent variable, I will use data that is publicly available from The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), specifically its data concerning Latin America. In order to access protest incidence data prior to 2019, I will also be using information from Harvard University's Data verse regarding the incidence of Mass Mobilized protests. I will examine the frequency of anti-government protests from the beginning of these datasets to use as a test for my explanatory variables.

Explanatory variables

In this thesis, I study the factors identified in the literature review: social, political, opposition groups, and economic factors. Due to the lack of a comprehensive database with data that would pertain to the research in this study, the theories presented in the technological factors for protest

frequency have been omitted from this research.

When looking at the social perception factors, I will use various surveys and questionnaires that are available from the World Bank, specifically the Worldwide Governance Indicators and will be used in order to take a look at the perceived reputation and strength of Latin American governments from the case studies.

In regards to the political factors, I analyze specifically, political institution composition and strength, and the existence of major opposition groups and their ability for existence. In regards to Institutions, the legislative institutions of the case study countries will be analyzed for coalition size and perceptions of institution strength. Further, each case study country will be analyzed if there is a major opposition group or not operating in the protest movement and the circumstances of their operations; that being whether they are allowed to be there or not. Political institution strength and the existence of opposition groups are to be analyzed separately.

For the economic factors question, when examining economic policy, I will study the different economic decisions that each of the case study countries have adopted to observe how they coincide with the economic theories of why anti-government protests occur. Specifically, I will be using information from the Heritage Foundation to observe how each case study country's economic policy stacks up in economic openness and how it connects to the ideas of economic openness and correlation to protest incidence.

Methods

In this thesis project, I will be using a mixed methods research design to come to a conclusion. I will be using two case study countries in a most different systems design (MDSD) for this research. Regarding the explanatory variables, I will be able to study survey responses, economic policies, the makeup of political institutions, and finally the existence of opposition groups and circumstances. My dependent variables will not vary, those being the frequency of anti-government protest. However, my independent variables may vary only in the realm of the opposition group question due to the

different governing types of Chile and Nicaragua.

Case Selection

In this thesis project, I will be examining two different countries: Nicaragua and Chile using a MDSD. Chile is Latin America's highest-ranked country on the Human Development Index while Nicaragua is one of its lowest-ranked countries. Further, Chile is a liberal democracy that is seen as a triumph for democracy in the region, with the exception of the Pinochet regime. Nicaragua, on the other hand, is an autocratic regime that has struggled to maintain the integrity of its democracy since the end of its conflict with the Contras. In many ways, Nicaragua and Chile differ, however they have both had a high frequency of anti-government protests in the contemporary era. The purpose of choosing a MDSD is to look at the political commonalities that Latin American countries share when it comes to anti-government protest, especially considering that Latin American countries are very different.

Pathway of Analysis

For the purposes of analysis, four major areas will be studied and will be tested on both the Nicaraguan and Chilean case studies; the economic policies, the social perceptions of the respective governments through survey results, political institution strength, and finally the question of opposition groups. The autocratic nature of Nicaragua's government compared to Chile's liberal democracy means the sole differing explanatory variable will vary on how opposition groups in autocratic regimes affect the incidence and mobilization of anti-government protests when multi-party elections are allowed as opposed to the explanations of how they operate in liberal democracies.

Analysis & Findings

Economics analysis

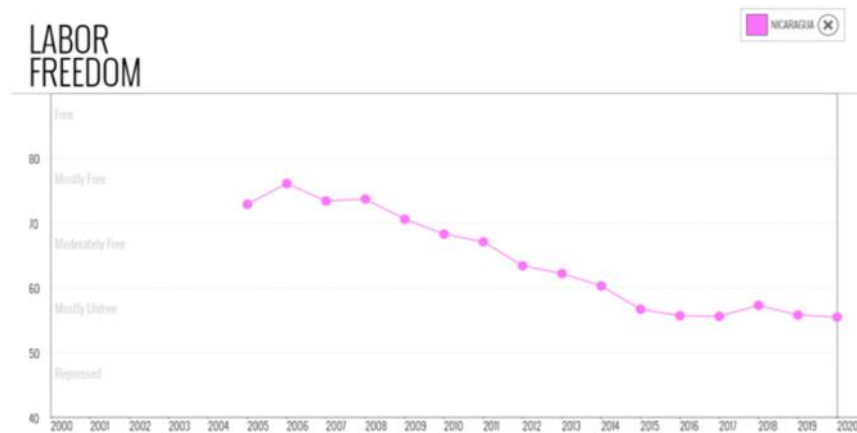
A) Nicaragua

Existing literature reveals a state's economic per-

formance and policies as important factors affecting anti-government protests that acts as a motivator for citizens to protest in the streets. Specifically studying the role of economic openness and neoliberalism in the nature of Latin American politics, many scholars posit that economic openness and neoliberalism are catalysts for protest, while others rebuke that idea and instead believe authoritarian regimes enacting statist policy is a cause of anti-government protests. The Heritage Foundation,

a conservative think tank that has created a database and analyzes the economic openness of every country, has a variety of indicators that are useful for observing economic policy: business freedom referring to levels of privatization in the economy and levels of regulation, labor freedom referring to levels of labor laws and regulation, and government spending referring to the score that reflects how much government spending is being allocated to human capital and infrastructure. In the case of

Figure 1: Labor Freedom Score for Nicaragua 2005-2020



Source: The Heritage Foundation economic openness database (2021)

Figure 2: Business Freedom score for Nicaragua 2005-2020



Source: The Heritage Foundation economic openness database (2021)

Nicaragua, the Heritage Foundation provides a significant amount of information regarding the state of its economic openness and how it has evolved. It should be noted that since the presidential election of Daniel Ortega in 2007, there has been a push against neoliberal policies to maintain his reputation as a Pink-tide leader and as a “champion of the people.” The trends in Nicaraguan economic policy since 2007, for the most part, run counter to the ideas of economic liberalization; yet Ortega’s policies are not radically pink tide characterizable.

For instance, Figure 1 indicates that since Ortega’s election in 2007, there has been a marked downward trend in the levels of labor freedom, to the point where the database would classify it as a mostly unfree system (Heritage Foundation, 2021). Furthermore, in the realm of business freedom, though not entirely rooted in anti-austerity policy, the higher rate of government regulation present in Figure 2 places Nicaragua as “mostly unfree,” even in the period of 2015-2018 when the freedom increased considerably (Heritage Foundation, 2021). Finally, Figure 3 indicates that the level of government spending since the election of Ortega in 2007 has remained relatively steady with the exception of 2013 (Heritage Foundation 2021).

According to Figure 4, the frequency of protest incidence from the time of Ortega’s election in 2007 remains relatively low with some discrepan-

cies until 2018, when the protest incidence increases dramatically. Should the theories that scholars like Almeida (2007), Arce (2010), Pavlic (2018), and others put forth regarding the ideas of economic liberalization and its effects on protest incidence be true, the proliferation of protests in 2018 would be difficult to explain under neoliberal economic conditions. The labor and business freedom scores for 2018 remained part of a trend that cemented Nicaragua’s economic policy as contrary to neoliberal and economically liberal policy, and the trend of government spending had not changed much since 2015 (Heritage Foundation 2021). Instead, the increase of protest incidence in Nicaragua in 2018 may be reflective of the explanation put forth by Solt et al. (2014) that held that it is autocratic regimes pushing statist policies which lead to a proliferation of protest incidence. Their explanation is partially reinforced due to the fact that the catalyst for the 2018 protests was the nature of social security reforms, reforms that would have increased the taxes paid for social security programs while removing a significant number of citizens from eligibility to receive such benefits; it is important that depending on interpretation may be considered an example of economic austerity and could give some credence to other findings, (Carnegie Endowment, 2020). Furthermore, the actual spending of the Nicaraguan government had been steadily increasing, though marginally, prior to the

Figure 3: Government Spending score for Nicaragua 2005-2020

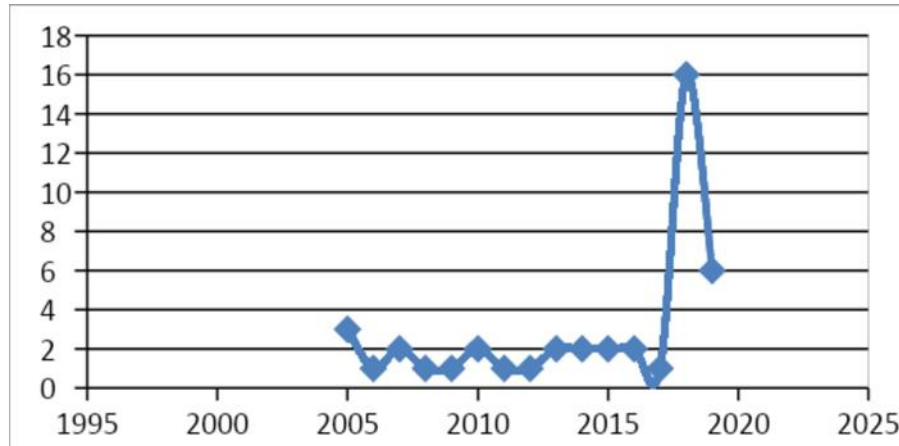


Source: *The Heritage Foundation economic openness database (2021)*

2018 protests as evidenced by the scores from the Heritage Foundation (2021) as noted in Figure 3; this would be problematic for the ideas put forth by scholars such as Pavlic (2018) or Bellinger et al. (2010) in which they put forth that austerity measures that threaten citizens' livelihoods would be instigative of protest incidence. Following the logic put forth in these explanations, one would expect that major protest incidence to have occurred in the time between 2013 through 2014 when government spending was cut significantly as evi-

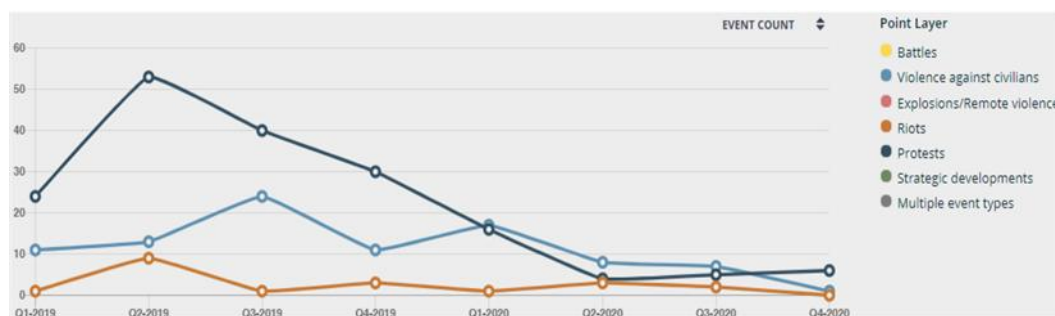
denced by Figure 3. However, in that time frame, no major protest incidence occurred that would appear to support the aforementioned explanations that austerity measures and economic threats to livelihood are catalysts for protest incidence. Though the Nicaraguan case study provides more evidence for the statist explanation, ultimately the Nicaraguan case study does not provide enough support for economic factors to clearly draw strong conclusions for this research.

Figure 4: Mass Mobilized Protests in Nicaragua 2005-2019



From the Mass Mobilization Protest Database by Clark and Reagan, Harvard Dataverse (2021)

Figure 5: Protest, Riot, and Political Violence events in Nicaragua 2019-2020



From the ACLED database (2021)

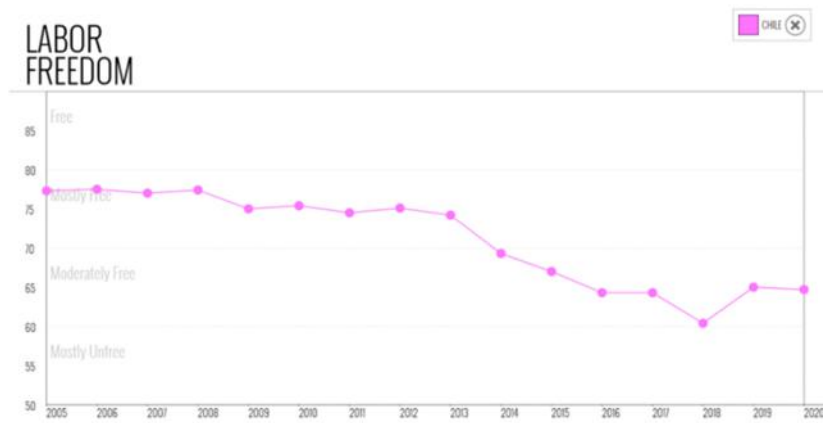
B) Chile

The Chilean economic policy could be one that is described as much more economically liberal than many other Latin American countries. With Pinochet's military coup in 1973, the country began to incorporate a significant amount of neoliberal reforms and overhauls; the significant influence of the "Chicago Boys" and dramatic privatization, as well as economic liberalization led to Chile being a country with a significantly entrenched neoliberal culture. Since then, Chile has

maintained a primarily economically liberal policy, even in times of leftist administrations. Chile has remained a bastion of economically liberal policy within the region and the Heritage Foundation's economic freedom scores reflect that.

In the case of Chile, there is a distinct and prevailing trend when it comes to the economic openness of the country; the trend shows that even in the times in which it dips, the Chilean economy is still firmly economically liberal. This trend is strong from the time in which the data starts, in 2005, all

Figure 6: Labor Freedom Score for Chile 2005-2020



From the Heritage Foundation economic openness database (2021)

Figure 7: Business Freedom score for Chile 2005-2020

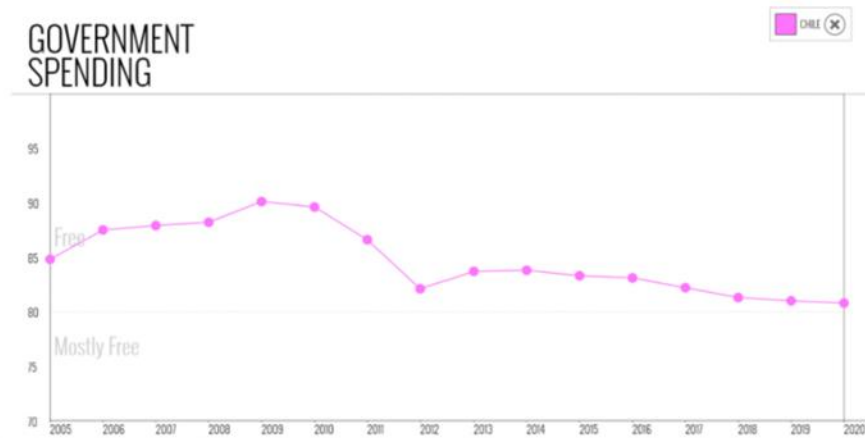


From the Heritage Foundation economic openness database (2021)

the way up to 2020 (Heritage Foundation, 2021). According to scholars like Almeida (2007) or Arce (2010), more frequent protests should occur in times of more rampant neoliberal economic policy. However, in the Chilean case, neoliberal policy is consistently high since the beginning of the data. Even in the era of Bachelet, a leftist president, the economic policy has remained consistently neoliberal. Ironically, the major spike in protest incidence that occurs around 2019, as seen in Figure 9,

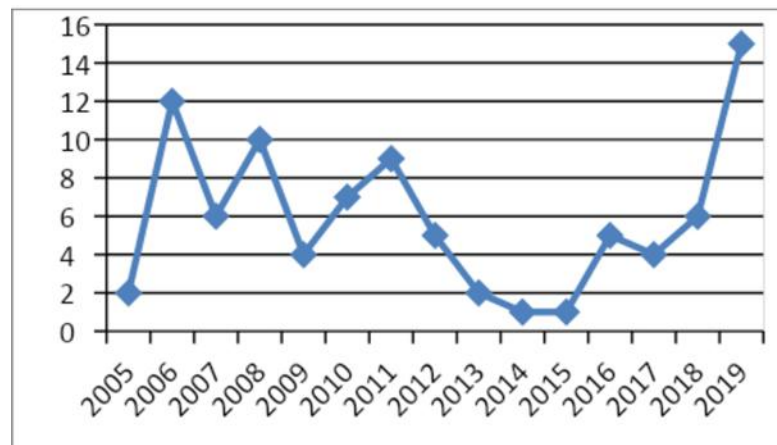
comes at a time when labor freedom is downward trending and government spending only marginally decreased, (Heritage Foundation 2021). However, seeing as the catalyst for Chilean Protests in 2019 was an increase of the Santiago Metro subway fare, neoliberalism may still have a role in the proliferation of protest incidence (BBC 2019). In Chile, neoliberal economic policy is something that looms large and is ever present in its politics and economy; it has become a part of the social

Figure 8: Government Spending score for Chile 2005-2020



From the Heritage Foundation economic openness database (2021)

Figure 9: Mass Mobilized Protests in Chile 2005-2019



From the Mass Mobilization Protest Database by Clark and Reagan, Harvard Dataverse (2021)

reality in Chile. It is for this reason that neoliberalism may be considered as a necessary but not sufficient ingredient to the nature of protest incidence. In combination with other factors, neoliberalism may lead to a rise in protest incidence, but in the case of Chile, direct neoliberalism does not seem to be the sole or even main contributor to the protest spike. As such, the Chilean case study does not find strong evidence that neoliberal policy is directly linked to spikes in protests as scholars like Almeida (2007) and Arce (2010) would put forth. Ultimately, in the Chilean case study it is difficult to draw conclusiveness about the individual effects of neoliberalism on protest frequency.

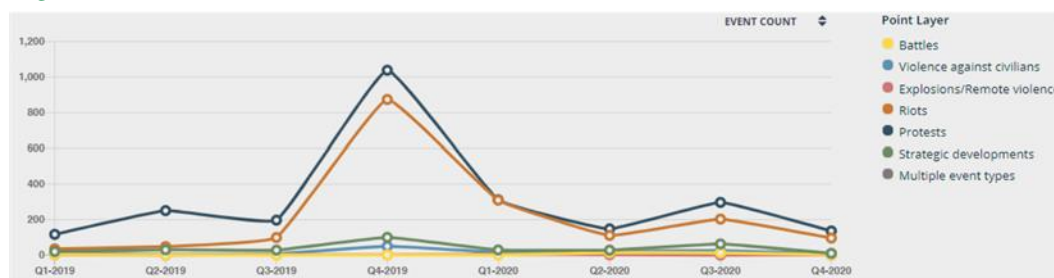
Political Institution Strength analysis

A) Nicaragua

Academic literature has also put forth multiple different explanations regarding the nature of political institutions' strength and their effect on the proliferation of anti-government protests. As was noted earlier, scholars like Arce (2010) put forth that when political institutions or party strength are weak, the protest frequency increases as protesters see an opportunity to push their demands. Conversely, when political institutions are considered too strong, that would also increase protest frequency as it would appear to the people that the government no longer works for them. Garcia (2017) specifically takes a look at the national legislative body and finds that when a legislative coalition or a party controls more than 55% of the seats, protest proliferation increases signifi-

cantly. In the Nicaraguan case study, the situation appears to be one in which the political institutions are perceived to be too strong and no longer working for the people. To begin, the Nicaraguan legislative body, a unicameral body called the National Assembly, elects its deputies every five years along with the President in the general election. The most recent general election occurred in November 2016 and resulted in 71 out of the 92 available seats in the National Assembly to be delegated to the FSLN as well as Daniel Ortega of the FSLN winning his third consecutive term as President of Nicaragua. Though the FSLN won the previous elections in 2011 for both the National Assembly and President, there was a marked increase in seats that the FSLN won in 2016. As a result, the current composition of the Nicaraguan National assembly sees the FSLN controlling a staggering 77% of the legislature. Furthermore, allegations of corruption against the FSLN and the main opposition party, the PLC, maintain that the FSLN has bought out or intimidated many PLC members, giving the FSLN an even greater degree of de facto control in the National Assembly (Estepa, 2011). Even if the allegations of corruption are omitted, that leaves the FSLN constituting 77% of the Assembly, significantly over the 55% threshold that Garcia (2017) put forth in his study. Figure 4 reflects this; in 2011 the FLSN gained above 50% of seats in the National Assembly and there were consistently anti-government protests. This is until 2017, where there is a dip, and then 2018 skyrockets the protest incidence. It is important to note, however, that the Ortega administration is one that is difficult to call

Figure 10: Protest, Riot, and Political Violence events in Chile 2019-2020



Source: *The Heritage Foundation economic openness database (2021)*

democratic. Freedom House's score for Nicaragua for 2017 was "Partly free" with a 47/100 and then significantly dropped for the 2018 year to "Not Free" with a 32/100 (Freedom House, 2020). Seeing as in 2014 the Ortega administration removed constitutional term limits for the presidency and the increasingly authoritarian nature of the government, the National Assembly may, for practical purposes, be a rubber stamp of the Ortega administration. In addition, the Ortega regime's response to the protests occurring in March and April 2018 may have furthered the narrative that the administration as an institution had grown too powerful and was no longer serving the people. On April 18th, 2018, the police and authorities, reporting to Ortega, opened fire using lethal force on protesters and killed 26 people (BBC, 2018a). Immediately after, media outlets began to be censored unconstitutionally and there was a crackdown. After these events, protest proliferated exponentially until the middle of 2019, as Figure 4 notes. These factors give credence to the academic explanations that scholars such as Garcia (2017) put forth that a political institution's strength is correlated to protest incidence in a country. The Nicaraguan case study shows strong support for aforementioned political factor explanations affecting the frequency of protests.

B) Chile

Chile, on the other hand, presents a different situation than what was observed in the Nicaraguan case study. To begin, Chile's legislative body relies on a bicameral system, and in neither is there a majority party of legislative coalition. As of the 2017 election, the Chilean Chamber of Deputies' biggest legislative coalition is "Chile Vamos" with 72 out of 155 seats, constituting 46% of the chamber. Similarly, "Chile Vamos" holds 19 out of 43 seats in the Chilean Senate or 44% of the chamber. In either chamber, the ruling coalition, "Chile Vamos," does not hold a majority of the legislative seats, meaning that in the Chilean case study, Garcia's (2017) position does not have strong support for the proliferation of protest incidence. That being said, it is important to note that in the Chilean context, 45% is a very significant plurality, one of the largest in Chilean history. Chile Vamos is the biggest coalition by a significant margin, yet it just

does not qualify as one of the major factors under Garcia's (2017) explanations. However, the referendum for a new constitution which passed in October of 2020 could possibly be interpreted as not viewing the current government as legitimate (BBC 2020). As it stands, however, the evidence as presented creates a situation in which the aforementioned explanations do not have explanatory power. Ultimately, the Chilean case study does not support the explanations put forth by scholars in explaining the incidence and proliferation of anti-government protests.

Social Perception of Government analysis

A) Nicaragua

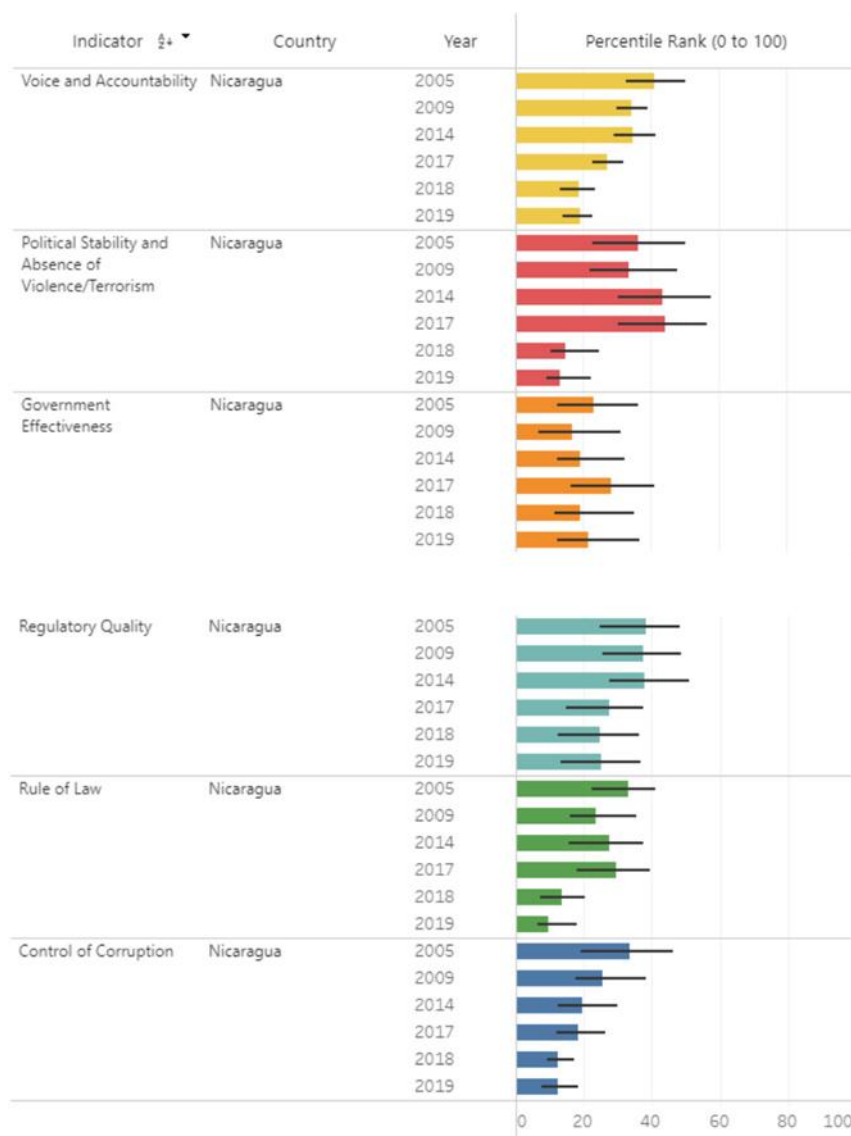
When observing social factors, it is important to analyze the social perceptions of the governments of Nicaragua and Chile in order to put to the test the social explanations that account for the proliferation of protests against the government. Specifically, survey results reflect citizen's perceptions and opinions of the government's ability to govern and its reputation. The World Bank utilizes six different indicators to analyze governance capacity: Voice/accountability, political stability, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption. Nicaragua's scores for the governance indicators are as follows.

In the case of Nicaragua, there is a notable decrease in almost all categories of governance indicators from the 2017 year to the 2018 year results. These results would show support for a variety of explanations regarding the proliferation of protest incidence in Nicaragua. Firstly, Kim's (2018) explanation of the collective justification for protest as a means of popular communication to the government and to voice the demands and sentiments of the people seems to be supported. The steep drop in Figure 11 from 2017 to 2018 in the categories of "control of corruption" and "voice and accountability" could indicate that the people no longer feel that they are in control of their government and are protesting in a bid to reassert more popular control. This explanation is strengthened in the context of the aftermath of the April 19th protests, which was one of the most visible examples of the Ortega regime becoming increasingly

more repressive and a possible signal to the populace that the government was taking increasingly greater strides away from popular control. Furthermore, these governance indicators seem to provide support for other explanations for the proliferation of anti-government in Nicaragua. The explanations put forth in the studies by Machado et al., (2011) as well as Buenrostro (2006) revolve around the

state's political weakness and actors taking advantage of such situations. When looking at the governance indicators, the indicators "government effectiveness," "political stability," and "rule of law" make it clear that the government appears to be weak and unable to conduct its operations properly. This would support the explanation put forth by the aforementioned studies as the government

Figure 11: Worldwide Governance Indicators for Nicaragua 2006-2019



From the World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators project (2020)

appears weak, perhaps weak enough that protesters believe that they would be able to force the government to cave to their demands. The game theory explanation seems to be especially pertinent when analyzing the effects of the aftermath of April 19th. The repressive actions of the Ortega administration may have signaled that the regime was on the defensive and too weak to respond in any other manner. Interestingly, in the context of game theory, this would support the idea of a negative

feedback loop that signaled even stronger to the populace that the government may be able to cave into demands which were taken advantage of by anti-government protesters. As a result, multiple explanations appear to be supported in the Nicaraguan case study when inspected in the context of social indicators, specifically, the data regarding the perception of Nicaraguan's ability to govern.

B) Chile

The Chilean case study on the other hand ap-

Figure 12: Worldwide Governance Indicators for Chile 2006-2019



From the World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators project (2020)

pears to display a different situation when it comes to the social perceptions of Chile's ability to govern.

In the case study of Chile, it is important to note that with the exception of "Political stability," all other governance indicators are stable. In the case of "control of corruption," there was actually a slight improvement while the "government effectiveness" indicator does not experience any change at all. Further, the indicators of "Voice and Accountability," "Regulatory Quality," and the categories of "Rule of Law" and "Regulatory Quality" decreased slightly. The most significant decrease in a governance indicator is of "Political Stability" with a 5-point drop. This decrease can most likely be attributed to the proliferation of anti-government protests in 2019. Seeing as the governance indicators remain relatively stable from the different years, it is difficult to note any support from the social elements that could function as explanations to the proliferation of anti-government protests in Chile starting in 2019. This creates a difficult situation for the explanations put forth by Buenrostro (2006) or Machado et al. (2011) as the governance indicators seem to display a situation where these explanations are not applicable. Having seen that the "Government Effectiveness" and "Rule of Law" indicators remain stable, there is little support that the proliferation of anti-government protest could be attributed to a government weakness or game theory explanation; neither indicator would necessarily insinuate that the Chilean government is weak. Furthermore, the increase of the "Control of Corruption" and stability of "Voice and Accountability" actually seems to run counter to the explanations put forth by Kim (2018); the indicators do not seem to support a narrative that the people no longer feel in control of the government. Ultimately, when it comes to the social perceptions that can be noted from the governance indicators, the Chilean case study does not create much support for any of the explanations put forth by scholars regarding how social perceptions lend themselves to proliferating the incidence of anti-government protest.

Opposition Group analysis

A) Nicaragua

Regarding the opposition group factor, this analysis will use the explanations put forth by Trejo (2014) and Su (2015) to observe how the opposition groups specifically contribute to the proliferation of anti-government protests. Unfortunately, seeing as there is no opposition group database or other comprehensive information pool, this analysis will have to be conducted in a much more holistic and non-exhaustive manner that will focus on the major opposition groups. First, one of the most forthcoming explanations regarding the opposition group factor in explaining the proliferation of anti-government protests comes from Su's 2015 study. This study put forth that when opposition groups are unified, the mobilization capacity would increase and that there would be a marked proliferation of anti-government protests as a result of this combined effort. In this respect, there is evidence in the Nicaraguan case study to support such an explanation. Following the proposal, attendance, and subsequent cancellations of the national dialogues in May 2018, there was the notable formal creation of various opposition groups that from then would become organized groups, (BBC, 2018b). One of these major opposition groups would be known as the April 19th University Movement and would be a large coalition of student protesters from different universities around Nicaragua (Velasquez et al., 2018). Another one of the major opposition groups formed as a result of the national dialogue is the Civic Alliance, a heterogeneous organization that is a coalition of peasants, students, business sectors, human rights activists, and others (Alianza Civica, 2019). Interestingly, as is noted in Figure 4, even after the formation of these groups, there is continued proliferation of protest activity in Nicaragua until January 2019, in which there is a marked decline of protest activity. This would give credence to the explanations put forth by both Su (2015) and Trejo (2014) that the collaboration and organization of efforts by the opposition groups would allow for greater mobilization efforts and lead to significant growth of anti-government protests. However, the contrasting point should also ring true; ceased collaboration between opposition groups would then lead to a decrease in anti-government protests. On

February 25th 2020, the formation of the National Coalition occurred; this coalition was meant to unify most of the major opposition groups together in order to build support and strength between the opposition groups for the upcoming 2021 general election. Yet, due to alleged internal power struggles, corruption, and disputes, the coalition lost the support and cooperation of the Civic Alliance, one of the most high-profile groups (Alvarez, 2019). However, Figures 4 and 5 show an opposite trend; around the same time of the formation of the National Coalition, there is a decrease in the level of protests; yet, at the time in which the Civic Alliance was leaving the coalition, there was an uptick in the levels of protest activity. This situation would weaken the explanatory power of the explanations put forth by Su (2015) and Trejo (2014). One of the important tenets of Trejo's (2014) explanation is that of a prospect for victory and treatment with respect and how it correlates to protest frequency; Trejo (2014) posits that opposition groups will continue to protest against the government so long as the prospect for victory is there or when they believe they have received fair treatment. In this respect, there are elements of the Nicaraguan protest timeline that would significantly strengthen Trejo's (2014) explanation. An example that would corroborate the ideas of fair treatment and respect, or lack thereof, for protesters can be seen in the events of April 19th, where the government and pro-government paramilitaries gunned down protesters around the country (BBC, 2018a). The blatant murder of protesters goes completely against the idea of fair treatment for protesters and may have inflamed the protesters to not only continue protesting, but caused an increase in anti-government protest activity. This would support Trejo's (2014) explanation regarding the fair treatment of protesters leading to a decrease in protest. Another example of the government not treating protesters fairly was the suspension of the national dialogue on May 23, 2018, as the Ortega government believed protesters were pushing a coup d'état agenda. (BBC, 2018c). The Trejo (2014) explanation is supported through the suspension of the national dialogue and the continued proliferation of anti-government protests after the dialogue as figure 4 notes; this could be

interpreted as the opposition groups continuing to feel as though they are not being treated fairly and are continuing to fight against the government through protest. This would strengthen the argument put forth by Trejo (2014) and has explanatory power on the continued protest proliferation until January of 2019. The victory prospect explanation may also explain the sharp decline in protests that occur at the beginning of 2019. Around the time at which the downward trend in 2019 occurred, the Ortega regime expelled all independent human rights investigation groups under the justification that they are "interventionists" and continued systematically repressing all dissidents against the regime (El Herald, 2018). This, under the Trejo (2014) explanation, could indicate that the opposition groups no longer believed victory was attainable; the rejection of the independent commissions could indicate that the Ortega regime for all intents and purposes will not be willing to negotiate. Further, the continued and, in some cases, increased repression against protesters could indicate that the protesters would not be able to achieve any type of victory in the near future and as such there would be no motivation to continue to protest against the government. Even in the face of some counterintuitive situations like the Civic Alliance leaving the National Coalition, the Nicaraguan case study for the most part seems to provide evidence for the opposition group explanations put forth by Trejo (2014) and Su (2015).

B) Chile

The Chilean case study also demonstrates the possible influence of the opposition group theory influencing the proliferation of anti-government protests in 2019. On the question of Su's unified opposition against the government, this requisite would seem to be met. From the onset of the protest movement, Chilean protesters have been heterogeneous; there are protesters from the lower and working classes, indigenous protesters, student protesters, some of the upper-class, and many other strata of society (Johanson, 2019). However, it is important to note that, unlike the Nicaraguan case study, in the Chilean protests there has been no formally organized opposition groups or structures; no political party or leaders have emerged to call for a unified protest voice (Johanson, 2019).

That being said, the unified opposition that has occurred in Chile seems to corroborate the explanation put forth by Su, that it would increase mobilization capacity and the incidence of protest. The mobilization concept specifically seems to be in play here, because unlike the protest movements of 2011 or 2014 which were primarily student-based, the protests of 2019 had reached a record of more than 1 million people protesting at once. The sweeping inclusion of many other groups seems to support the mobilization aspect of Su's explanation and could explain why such a massive protest turnout occurred (Johanson, 2019). Although Chile is not an autocratic state, the prospect for victory element of Trejo's (2014) explanation seems to have some credence in the Chilean case study. In the analysis of Chile's proliferation of protests, there are two main time frames in Figure 10, in which there are spikes in protests: Quarter 4 of 2019 and Quarter 3 of 2020. These protest spikes coincide directly with important political decisions. On November 15, 2019, the Chilean National Congress agreed to hold a referendum for a constitutional rewrite and on October 25, 2020, the referendum occurred, which passed with 78% in favor of a rewrite (BBC, 2020). This situation would support the victory prospect element of Trejo's (2014) explanation; the Chilean protesters were afforded opportunities to make the desired changes and the opposition groups would mobilize right before each of these decisions was made in order to make sure that they would be able to pass their desired outcome. As such, in both Su's (2015) explanation and the victory prospect element of Trejo's (2014), the Chilean case study would seem to support the explanations.

Conclusion

Ultimately, regarding the theories that surround the nature of anti-government protests in Latin America, only those theories that surrounded the specific nature of opposition groups seemed to have evidence in both the Nicaraguan and Chilean case studies (Su, 2015; Trejo, 2014). However, that is not to say that the other explanations that the rest of the scholars put forth are null; in fact, many of these explanations when tested had evi-

dence being supported in the Nicaraguan or Chilean case studies. The difficulty with analyzing the nature of Latin American politics and protest arises in the fact that Latin America is not monolithic; the region of Latin America contains more than 20 countries and each one has its own unique history and respective issues.

After analyzing both the Chilean and Nicaraguan case studies for evidence that supported the explanations that centered around social perspectives, opposition groups, political institution strength, and the economic requisites, the only explanations that had bilateral support were those that revolved around how opposition groups interact with each other and the ruling government. On the question of the economic requisites, Nicaragua's economy is purposely increasingly regulated in a bid to fight against neoliberalism, while Chile's neoliberal culture is so entrenched that it is not a sufficient factor in the proliferation of protest. Regarding the strength of political institutions, the Nicaraguan legislature as a whole seemed to fit the bill regarding explanations by Garcia (2017) and Arce (2010); yet the Chilean case study did not provide much strong support. Similarly, with regards to the social perspectives explanations that Kim (2018), Machado et al. (2011), and Buenrostro (2006) put forth, again the Nicaraguan case study provides strong evidence seeing as there were serious drops in the governance indicator survey results, but in Chile, the survey results did not change significantly and does not provide support to the explanations posed by the aforementioned scholars.

As was noted earlier, the explanations by Su (2015) and Trejo (2014) were the only theories that held constant between both Nicaragua and Chile: that the opposition group is one of the primary catalysts for anti-government protests and the manner in which they interact with each other and with the ruling government is crucial in analyzing the proliferation of protest. Following this, the reasons for why these protests occurred during these specific times and not much prior may also be explained through the opposition group explanations. Following Trejo's prospect for victory element of his explanation (2014), certain events may have been the opportunities or "protest casus belli" that legit-

imized and mobilized the populace to the opposition groups. In other words, groups who already had grievances with the social order and status quo would capitalize on events that create social unrest to organize and mobilize the populace. This type of opportunity is often needed for mass mobilization and often is the prime opportunity to launch a protest campaign with the most effectiveness. In the Nicaraguan case, the events of April 19th would create significant social unrest that opposition groups funneled and used to direct popular frustration towards the government in the form of mass protests. In Chile, the price hike for the metro similarly was unpopular and groups would channel these grievances into protests against the government. In essence, these “trigger events” could be the signals to opposition groups that these are the most legitimizing opportunities for their endeavors and paints the prospect for victory in a manner that is more concrete but also creates the most favorable circumstances for these groups in terms of mobilization and popular view.

In many ways, these findings are able to be generalized to not only a greater Latin American context but also a global context as well. To begin, the explanations put forth for the opposition groups are not prejudiced solely to Latin America but are based around a much more global perspective. Further, the conditions that explanations set forth for explaining the frequency of protests are not based

on the Latin American reality; the conditions are able to be found in any country around the world. These explanations are based on the existence, interactions, and psyches of opposition groups. Opposition groups are entities that exist in almost every country and are not unique to Latin America or these specific case studies.

The results of these findings are important for a variety of reasons. Latin America is currently experiencing a wave of anti-government protests around the region, and understanding these protests will have explanatory power into the condition of Latin American governance. Further, many of these protests will have serious political, economic, and social ramifications on the future of Latin American politics and may in certain cases lead to regime changes or have spillover effects into their neighboring countries. Seeing the massive role of opposition groups in the proliferation of anti-government protests, understanding the psyche and action process behind opposition groups can help in not only analyzing anti-government protests, but also the aim, effects, and composition of the anti-government protests. In order to further the debate and analysis of the literature, the theory that was posed in this paper should be tested in the context of other Latin American states in order to see if these explanations still maintain their explanatory power.

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