

# Latin American Social Movements

*Globalization, Democratization,  
and Transnational Networks*

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## Chapter 4

# **SOCIAL MOVEMENT UNIONISM, SOCIAL MOVEMENT PARTYISM, AND POLICY OUTCOMES: HEALTH CARE PRIVATIZATION IN EL SALVADOR**

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Between 1999 and 2003, Salvadoran health care unions and their civil society support groups launched two massive campaigns in order to prevent the partial privatization of the public medical system. The mobilizations were the largest in post-civil war and newly democratized El Salvador. The labor strikes by the public health care sector unions alone were the longest in the history of the country—not an easy feat in a nation with a long tradition of mass organizing. Besides the impressive level of popular mobilization, however, is the outcome of the struggle. On two separate occasions, the movement forced the government to concede and formally agree to halt the outsourcing of public hospital units and services. In neoliberal Latin America, preventing an unwanted economic policy via mass mobilization is more the exception than the rule. Certainly, neoliberal policy implementation frequently sparks mass mobilization in Latin America (Walton and Shefner 1994; López Maya 1999; Eckstein 2001b; Almeida 2002; Auyero 2002). I concentrate here on the dimensions associated with a movement actually turning back such efforts—a less common phenomenon but key to understanding the prospects for deeper structural reforms in the region. The conditions associated with these movement-favorable policy outcomes constitute the subject of this chapter.

Public sector privatization has served as the cornerstone of neoliberal policies throughout Latin America over the past two decades (Edwards 1995). As part of a larger policy reform package, ranging from currency devaluations, lowering of import tariffs, subsidy reductions on basic consumer goods, transportation and public spending in

general, privatization of public industries, infrastructure, and services has provided a rapid and short-term means to generate badly needed revenue. Public sector privatization emerged especially strong in the 1990s and early 2000s in Latin America. Privatization is intimately connected to a country's indebtedness. International lending institutions condition loans on a nation's ability to sell off public assets to make payments on past foreign borrowing. Government privatization programs have been carried through in all countries on the continent, usually with meager public opposition. Nonetheless, at times privatization has triggered some of the most intense and dramatic waves of popular unrest observed in the last ten years in the region.

In Bolivia, Peru, Costa Rica, and Paraguay privatization of public resources, services, and utilities has generated massive civil society resistance. Both the privatization of natural gas deposits and potable water distribution served as the roots of multiple episodes of popular unrest in Bolivia between 2000 and 2005, leading to the fall of two presidents, several states of siege, the death of at least 70 demonstrators, 500 additional people injured, and a constitutional crisis (Lewis 2004). The attempted privatization of electricity distribution in Arequipa, Peru, in mid-2002, sparked large-scale protests leaving several dozens of Peruvian citizens injured, and two dead, and causing over \$100 million in property damage. In March and April 2000, the attempted privatization of telecommunications and electricity in Costa Rica (*Ley de transformación del ICE*) led to mass street marches and roadblocks. Witnessing the largest public demonstrations in recent history, the ruling PUSC and social-democratic opposition (PLN) parties backpedaled from their plans to open up state-run electricity and telecommunications to international markets. In Paraguay between 2002 and 2005, workers, students, public employees, and *campesinos* sustained a major campaign to prevent the privatization of telecommunications, water, and the railroads under legislative Laws 1615 and 1932 (*La Nación* July 1, 2005). Early in the protest campaign, in July 2002, two demonstrators were killed by security forces and President González Macchi declared a state of siege to end rioting and property damage (*BBC News* July 16, 2002). Given the recent historical import of these major national crises in the Americas, we need a greater understanding of the conditions associated with the actual implementation of privatization and other neoliberal measures versus the circumstances when civil society successfully blocks or rolls back such policies.

### SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY AND POLICY OUTCOMES

A relatively less developed part of social movements research, as opposed to movement emergence or individual recruitment, is in the area of the consequences or impacts of social movements (Stearns and Almeida 2004; Jenkins and Form 2005). Though there has been considerable empirical and theoretical work on social movement outcomes in recent years to overcome this deficit (Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly 1999; Amenta, Caren, and Olasky 2005), the majority of these studies focus on policy outcomes of *new benefits and advantages* for aggrieved groups. Given that much of the mobilization in contemporary Latin America tends to be defensive and driven by neoliberal economic programs, scholars need to give more attention to the ability of social movements to prevent the implementation of *unwanted* economic and social policies (i.e., collective bads) as well as protect popularly favored ones from austerity cuts. This is the milieu in which policy battles are being waged in the Americas in the twenty-first century. The present chapter concentrates on conditions drawn from the political soci-

ology and social movement literature to explain successful mobilization in Latin America against these unpopular economic policies.

The present chapter employs political mediation theory that centers on the political context in which social movements struggle and seek to have an impact on political and economic elites (Amenta, Caren, and Olasky 2005). Political mediation theory predicts that, "it takes a combination of favorable political contexts, mobilization, and assertive actions to bring about far-reaching state outcomes" (ibid.: 515). We apply these analytical insights on movements struggling to influence unwanted neoliberal policies in Latin America. Our framework centers on three conditions that seem most critical for political challengers attempting to prevent the loss of economic and social benefits; these conditions include 1) favorable public opinion; 2) social movement unionism; and 3) social movement partyism. These three key dimensions reflect the combination of an encouraging political context, mobilization, and forceful action that will be discussed in relation to the economic liberalization policies that have transformed the role of the state in Latin American society over the past twenty-five years.

### PUBLIC OPINION AND DEMOCRATIZATION

In democratizing and democratic states, public opinion matters to policymakers. Nonetheless, in the early years of a democratizing regime public attitudes may only slowly penetrate into the calculations of policymakers. In the beginning phases of a democratic transition, with all the corresponding political uncertainties (e.g., which political parties and constituencies will triumph?, will the transition be completed?, etc.), it is not evident to state actors what the consequences may be for varying responses to issues that garner widespread public attention. In addition, authoritarian legacies left over from the pre-democratic era likely weaken the influence of public opinion in fledgling democracies. An authoritarian political culture as well as the survival of political parties and state bureaucrats with direct links to nondemocratic rule all act as forces inhibiting the permeation of popular sentiments about key national themes into the halls of elite political decision making. Over time, though, we would expect policymakers to become increasingly receptive to public opinion as the state continues on a consistent path of democratization (i.e., successive competitive national elections, peaceful transitions of executive power, relative political stability, etc.) (Booth 1995). This is the political context for several Latin American states between the mid-1980s and early 2000s.

Once a democratic transition occurs and when over 50 percent of the public rejects a particular policy, it places reelection in serious question for ruling political parties and minority parties that support the policy (Burstein 1979). Unfavorable public attitudes also threaten job security of appointed ministry officials and their staffs (e.g., the oscillating fortunes of ministers of the economy and finance in several Latin American states). Of course, the saliency of the policy to the general public would also be important (Burstein and Linton 2002) or what social movement scholars refer to as the "centrality" of a policy to a society's larger belief system (Snow and Benford 1988: 205). Across-the-board new sales taxes or increasing the retirement age to receive pension payments are likely to be meaningful policies in the everyday lives of large numbers of the citizenry. These kinds of neoliberal proposals, if implemented, may eventuate in negative consequences in future elections for the parties and officials serving as the main proponents and boosters of the policy.

However, governments, legislators, and executives debate and pass all kinds of legislation and policies in the interlude between national elections. A negative neoliberal measure may be balanced out by other policies that have popular support such as "get tough on crime" laws or cultural issues where there is a large societal consensus. In addition, lesser-developed countries often implement neoliberal policies because they are in a dependency relationship with international financial institutions to make debt-servicing payments and secure future lines of credit (Walton and Seddon 1994). This may push especially dependent governments and state managers to carry out unfavorable economic policies despite a public against such changes. Additionally, neoliberal governance has become institutionalized in world society as the appropriate way for domestic political elites to manage national economies (Fourcade-Gourinchas and Babb 2002; Henisz, Zelner, and Guillén 2005) in order to appear legitimate with international financiers and trading partners. It is for these reasons that public opinion alone, even in democratic states, might not be a sufficient condition to prevent the implementation of an unpopular economic policy. Indeed, the rather abrupt historical transition in twenty-five years from a state-led development program to a neoliberal strategy in most countries in Latin America provides evidence that state managers more often than not adopt these economic development policies even when there is mild to strong opposition within public opinion. A well-organized social movement campaign combined with public opinion against a free market policy raises the costs significantly for national policymakers to implement an impending unfavorable economic plan.

#### SOCIAL MOVEMENT UNIONISM

Beyond public opinion, the emergence of a social movement would boost civil society's leverage against privatization or other unwanted economic policies. Public opinion as portrayed in representative national surveys and polls offers a snapshot in time of individual feelings about a particular policy. A social movement is a *collective* struggle that demands varying levels of time, resources and commitment from its volunteer members (Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004). Thus, a social movement is clearly a higher level of organized discontent than public opinion sentiment. At the same time, a social movement thrives in an environment where public opinion is in alignment with its own goals (i.e., both wanting to stop an impending policy).<sup>1</sup> Democratic governments are much less likely to ignore or repress a social movement that enjoys public opinion support for its objectives. Social movements also give embodiment to public opinion attitudes as an organized expression of civil society's dissension with a state's neoliberal policy-making trajectory.

The character of the social movement also matters. A movement organized in a single sector with few allies has a much more difficult time bringing about favorable policy outcomes (Almeida and Stearns 1998). In the case of neoliberal policy implementation, the social movement campaign usually begins with the sectors most affected or threatened by the policy change. For example, in the case of telecommunications privatization, if a movement materializes, it would likely begin with workers in the government-run institution—the state telephone workers union. The catalyst to mobilization would involve fears of union decertification, mass layoffs, and other uncertainties related to the privatization process. Theories of social movement unionism inform us that labor campaigns that focus on two features—community mo-

bilization and non-institutional tactics—are more successful than campaigns that lack these properties (Seidman 1994; Schock 2005). We apply the insights from the social movement unionism literature to the impact of anti-neoliberal policy protests in Latin America.

*Wider community mobilization.* When a unionized workforce serves as the primary affected constituency of a neoliberal policy, theories of social movement unionism suggest that the labor union must attempt to organize or cooperate with other sectors in order to sustain the struggle. Focusing only on the narrow concerns of the workers in the sector to be privatized (though certainly not a “narrow” issue to the workers in question), such as job loss and indemnification matters, will not likely harness the support of outside groups such as other labor unions and community groups. When the labor unions targeted by a neoliberal measure effectively reach out to other social sectors to mobilize in a sustained campaign against unwanted policy shifts, they give *social* expression to public opinion that is already against the policy. Public opinion ceases to act solely as an abstract construct of unconnected individuals and begins to amass as an organized force that represents a broad cross-section of civil society. Favorable public opinion to a movement’s goals also makes a multi-sectoral or social movement unionism campaign easier to assemble (Van Dyke 2003)—strengthening the overall “mobilization potential” of the populace (Klandermans 1997: 16). Challengers invest much less time in socially constructing the neoliberal policy as a social problem in need of redress (e.g., through popular education campaigns) if public opinion already stands against it (Snow and Benford 1988). A societal “demand” exists for political change (Klandermans 2004). Instead, activists direct scarce resources into coordinating strategies leading to much more rapid and widespread mobilization than if public opinion had to be swayed or built from scratch. Thus, prevailing public opinion provides a kind of “coat rack” in which several sectors can “hook on” to the oppositional coalition.

In Costa Rica in 2000, such a widespread community-labor alliance emerged to prevent the privatization of the state telecommunications and electrical power system (ICE). The number of organized state workers in the ICE was no more than 15,000. The ICE workers aligned with the university community, NGOs, environmentalists, community groups, and port workers in early 2000 to launch a successful campaign to prevent the privatization process. With the added support of these actors external to the labor organization, the scale of popular mobilization in March and early April of 2000 reached unprecedented levels with street marches of tens of thousands of demonstrators and protest actions reported in all seven of Costa Rica’s provinces. A similar amalgamation of public employees and NGOs—along with indigenous organizations, successfully coalesced in Ecuador in November 1995 to prevent the privatization of several state enterprises and the social security system (Zamosc 2004).

If labor unions, facing a looming unfavorable neoliberal policy shift such as privatization, fail to coordinate a larger campaign beyond the union’s organizational boundaries they will likely face an uphill battle and be deemed a privileged labor aristocracy enjoying socioeconomic benefits that the majority of the nonpublic sector workforce lacks (e.g., retirement system, health care coverage, recreational facilities, vacation, seniority privileges, etc.). For example, Sandoval (2001: 184-185) reported that in a 1995 opinion poll of São Paulo, Brazil, residents that, “84.3% felt that employees of state enterprises were privileged workers.”

*Non-institutional tactics.* Another facet of social movement unionism besides a multisectoral coalition (i.e., labor unions, community groups, students, nongovern-

mental organizations acting in concert) resides in the use of non-institutional tactics. A defining characteristic of social movements involves the employment of strategies for political influence that clearly appear outside the conventions of institutionalized politics such as mass disruption, street marches, boycotts, and expressive actions (Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004; Trevizo 2006). Along with community support, these non-institutional tactics constitute the "social movement" in social movement unionism. Legislators and executives may fail to listen to civil society demands against neoliberal reforms because of international financial institution pressure and/or because elections remain too far off to be worried about the political repercussions. In such cases of government intransigence, a labor-community coalition will likely engage in disruptive protest campaigns to try and force state managers to negotiate or retract the policy. Non-institutional tactics provide a negative inducement that can create greater levels of uncertainty for policymakers (Piven and Cloward 1979; McAdam 1982 [1999]; Almeida and Stearns 1998), providing political and economic elites an incentive to negotiate or offer some concessions to the anti-neoliberal coalition in exchange for a cessation in disorderly movement actions.

In June of 2004, Guatemalans launched a successful disruptive protest campaign against an impending increase in the national sales tax. The campaign involved a general strike, mass street marches, and roadblocks placed strategically throughout the country impeding traffic on major roads and highways. A day into the national strike, the government of Oscar Berger temporarily rescinded the tax hike and set up a special commission to analyze the necessity of such an austerity measure. Developing a wide multi-sectoral coalition that employs institutionally disruptive tactics certainly does not ensure a mobilization drive will succeed against socially harmful economic liberalization measures. Having an ally inside the polity aids an anti-neoliberal social movement campaign further in terms of pressuring for change *within the government* and reaching a legally binding resolution to the conflict. A strong oppositional political party likely serves as the most important ally inside the polity.

### SOCIAL MOVEMENT PARTYISM

The social movement literature counts a substantial number of studies that emphasize the role of external actors facilitating collective action for disempowered groups as well as increasing the likelihood of movement-generated gains (Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Almeida and Stearns 1998). Outside groups play such an important role in social movement politics that Tarrow (1998: 79-80) places "influential allies" as one of the five defining features of the structure of political opportunity that shapes the external environment in which challengers struggle.<sup>2</sup> In a survey of studies using the political process theory of social movements, McAdam (1996a: 27) consigns "the presence or absence of elite allies" as one of four key elements on his "highly consensual list of dimensions of political opportunity." Out of the universe of these potential external and influential allies (e.g., institutional and political elites, cultural producers, scientists, celebrities, etc.), movement-sympathetic groups *inside the government* or state actors seem to be especially important in terms of attaining policy success (Trevizo 2006). Social movement scholars have referred to this relationship as state-movement "interpenetration" (Wolfson 2001) or the "state-movement intersection" (Banaszak 2005).

In a recent article focusing on movement-state alliances shaping favorable policy impacts for national environmental movements, Stearns and Almeida (2004) found that

the more ties an anti-pollution movement establishes with state actors—local governments, courts, political parties, and state agencies—the more likely it is to achieve movement-desired outcomes (e.g., stricter environmental standards, compensation payments for pollution victims, etc.). We focus here on the relationship between the anti-neoliberal labor-community coalition and one particularly important state actor, an oppositional political party. The best scenario in terms of influencing policy outcomes would be for the labor-community alliance to link with the dominant political party in the legislature and/or the executive branch since such a party has the political capital to implement policy change (Stearns and Almeida 2004). Nonetheless, such a situation is highly unlikely in the sense that it is the dominant political party that is most often committed to the neoliberal agenda for both economic and ideological reasons (Babb 2001). Moreover, it is likely that the dominant party generated part of the crisis in the first place by bringing the free market reforms into formal political debate.

It is more probable that the labor-community coalition will form a relationship with an oppositional political party with whom it has an ideological affinity (Maguire 1995; Stearns and Almeida 2004). In the arena of Latin American neoliberalism, such a relationship is most likely to form with a left-of-center or nationalist political party. While the most important contribution an oppositional political party can make to a social movement unionism campaign centers on acting as an ally inside the legislature (Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995: 289) and impeding the neoliberal policy reform, there exist other roles a political party can play to sustain opposition.

Besides acting as an advocate inside the polity, an oppositional political party may aid a social movement campaign by sending official representatives to protest events, encouraging rank-and-file party supporters to participate in social movement activities, and allow local governments under its control to support the social movement campaign, including city workers. Just as a traditional labor union can turn to more social movement forms of collective action by organizing other social sectors and engaging in non-institutional tactics, so too can a political party. Such was the case in Nicaragua in April and May of 2005 over the issue of rising public transportation rates (climbing between 15 and 30 percent) linked to the sudden increase in global petroleum prices (Carrillo and Enríquez 2005). Bus driver cooperatives, university students, and community groups, aligned with the largest oppositional political party in the country—the Frente Sandinista para la Liberación Nacional (FSLN)—to pressure the national government to lower bus fares. After a month of intense street protests, FSLN mayors (benefiting from recent electoral gains) and legislative deputies successfully achieved a three-month government subsidy to prevent a bus fare price hike.

The involvement of electoral parties in contentious movement-type activities will not come as a surprise to scholars of collective action since many political parties began their careers as social movements (Keck 1992; Aminzade 1995; Goldstone 2004).<sup>3</sup> This conversion process of movement to political party slowly unfolded over several decades in many advanced capitalist democracies. In Latin America's democratic transition, however, many political parties just recently completed the move from social movement to an electoral political party within a single generation (e.g., the Workers' Party in Brazil, the Partido de la Revolución Democrática in Mexico, FREPASO and Polo Obrero in Argentina, Movement toward Socialism in Bolivia, the Alianza Nueva Nación in Guatemala, FSLN in Nicaragua, Frente Amplio in Uruguay, FMLN in El Salvador, Pachakutik in Ecuador, etc.). The trend continues in the late 1990s and early 2000s in the region and appears especially evident with indigenous movements forming electoral political parties (Van Cott 2005).



This recent social movement history means that many of the leaders and members of oppositional political parties have organizational experience in various social movement organizations (SMOs), while active rank-and-file party affiliates retain overlapping memberships in SMOs, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and their respective electoral party. For instance, Seidman (1994) found that in the early years of Brazil's Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) in the mid-1980s, the Party's membership was largely composed of unionists affiliated with the militant labor federation Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT). In a more recent example, in 1996, social movement organizations in Ecuador associated with the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), Confederación Única de Afiliados del Seguro Social Campesino (CONFEUNASSC), and the Coordinadora de Movimientos Sociales founded the indigenous-based political party—el Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik Nuevo País (MUPP-NP), which has grown to be one of the strongest opposition political parties in the country (Collins 2004; Zamosc 2004). In sum, in several Latin American countries the boundaries appear blurred between social movements outside the polity and political parties inside (see also Goldstone [2004] for cases beyond Latin America). The larger the oppositional political party (in terms of absolute size and political representation in local and national government) that aligns with the social movement unionism campaign, the more influence it commands in mobilizing people and pressing for policy change inside the state. We place all of these movement-contributing roles of an electoral political party (inside and outside of the polity) under the rubric of "social movement partyism."

To summarize, unfavorable public opinion alone is unlikely to stop neoliberal policy reform and such reforms are rarely put to a popular referendum. Labor unions in sectors most threatened by economic liberalization will be more successful if they can move to a social movement unionism organizing strategy—that is, mobilizing other sectors beyond their own organizational boundaries. Such widespread mobilization is difficult to generate, but if achieved, will help pressure for policy change. Finally, a strong oppositional political party that practices social movement partyism in concert with social movement unionism may provide the kinds of coalitions and accumulation of social forces necessary to compel the government to rescind its unfavorable policies. I examine this framework below with the case of public health-care privatization in El Salvador and then discuss the implications of the findings for other similar struggles in the region.

### PUBLIC HEALTH CARE PRIVATIZATION IN EL SALVADOR

With the conclusion of El Salvador's civil war at the beginning of 1992, the country began to deepen its level of global economic integration and move onto a stricter path of neoliberal policymaking.<sup>4</sup> The pro-neoliberal political party—the National Republican Alliance (ARENA)—came to executive power in 1989. Through the mid-1990s, ARENA controlled a majority of El Salvador's 262 local governments, legislative seats, and ministerial cabinets. The dominant neoliberal party, along with its think tanks and pressure from international financial institutions, embarked on a state "modernization" program throughout the decade of the 1990s. The economic program began in earnest in 1989 through the early 1990s with the re-privatization of the banking system, agro-export sector, and the closure of the basic grains regulatory institute. During the tenure of ARENA president Calderón Sol (1994-1999), neoliber-

eral policymaking picked up pace with a formal "state modernization" program passed by the legislature in 1995. The modernization legislation called for the retirement of 15,000 state employees, raising the value-added tax by three percent, and the privatization of sugar refineries, telecommunications, electricity distribution, and the government-run pension program.

These neoliberal policy packages passed through the legislature with mixed public opinion and mild to moderate opposition by the affected public employees. State workers protested massive layoffs in 1995 and early 1996 with sporadic strikes, street marches, and hunger strikes. The state telephone workers led the largest demonstrations against privatization of the telecommunications system between 1995 and 1997. Their campaigns rarely brought in larger sectors of civil society and in the end lost out to privatization, which reduced the telecommunications work force by two-thirds. All these protest campaigns in the mid-1990s rarely produced a street march of over 10,000 people.<sup>5</sup> It was not until the government attempted to privatize part of the public health care system that widespread and sustained anti-neoliberal mobilization materialized.

### **PUBLIC OPINION AND HEALTH CARE PRIVATIZATION**

While public opinion has been mixed on various privatization programs implemented by the Salvadoran government in the mid-1990s, the public has consistently opposed privatization of El Salvador's two main public health care systems.<sup>6</sup> Nationally representative public opinion polls taken by the most prestigious survey institutes in the country between 1997 and 2003 show that between 55 and 87 percent of the public opposed health care privatization (see Table 1.0).<sup>7</sup> Though the national government undertook small steps toward privatization in the mid-1990s in both public health care systems with the subcontracting of some health and maintenance services to private firms, in 1999 the government moved forward with a pilot program to begin privatizing two of the Salvadoran Social Security Institute (ISSS) hospitals located in greater San Salvador. Health care unions responded in mid-to-late 1999 by launching sporadic work stoppages demanding both an end to the privatization process and respect for a collective bargaining agreement signed by the previous administration of Calderón Sol in 1998. Buttressed by the strong public sentiment against health system privatization, the health care unions in the ISSS began a formal strike campaign in November 1999.

### **SOCIAL MOVEMENT UNIONISM IN PUBLIC HEALTH CARE**

The campaigns to prevent health care privatization in El Salvador consist of two distinct waves. The first campaign was launched between November 1999 and March 2000. The second wave spanned from September 2002 until June 2003. Both waves included the ISSS health care unions reaching out to other sectors besides their own, making them true social movement unionism campaigns as defined above. In the fall of 1999, the government made public its plans to partially privatize the ISSS Amatepec and Roma hospitals. The ISSS health care workers' union—*Sindicato de Trabajadores del Instituto de Seguro Social (STISSS)*—launched a strike wave demanding the cessation of privatization and respect for its previously signed collective contract. In No-

vember 1999, the doctor's union of the ISSS (SIMETRISSS) strategically allied with STISSS, demanding an end to private concessions in the ISSS hospital system.

The central government and the ISSS officials refused to negotiate with the striking health care unions and fired 221 workers affiliated with STISSS. Fortunately for the health care unions, in the year prior to the strike a renewed effort commenced to unify public sector unions in a formal coalition. The Movimiento de Organizaciones Laborales Integradas (MOLI) formed in 1998 to prevent further job cuts and privatization in the public sector as a whole. MOLI brought twelve public sector unions and associations under a single coordinating umbrella representing 50,000 state workers. Several of the MOLI unions supported the health care workers' strike and demands by making public statements, threatening solidarity strikes, holding short work stoppages, and participating in street actions.

	<i>In Agreement</i>	<i>In Disagreement</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>N</i>
Would you be in agreement or disagreement if the ISSS were privatized? (November 1997)	23.4%	55.5%	21.1%	1202
Would you be in agreement or disagreement if the ISSS were privatized? (December 1999)	16.5%	74.3%	9.2%	1326
Are you in agreement with the privatization of health care? (January 2003) <sup>a</sup>	12.65%	87.35%	0.0%	2040

Sources: Centro de Opinión Pública and Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública

Note: <sup>a</sup> This poll was administered in greater San Salvador. The other polls are nationally representative.

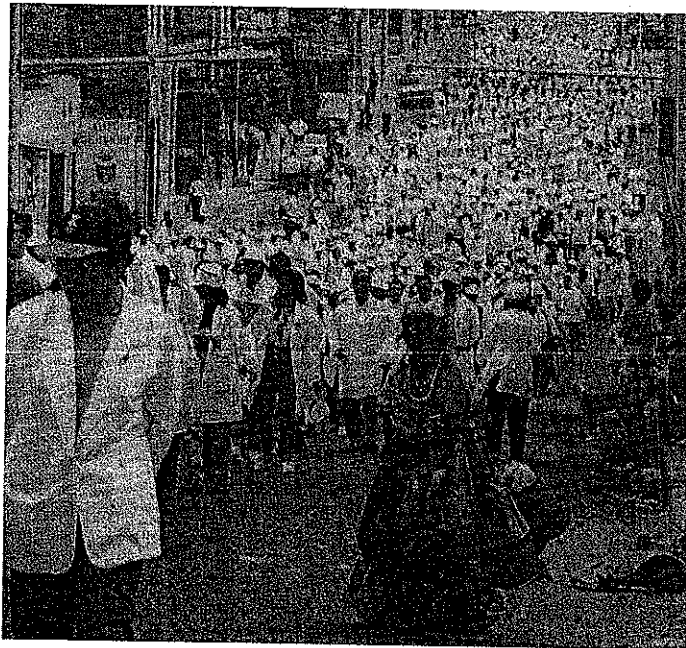
**Table 4.1. Public Opinion and Health Care Privatization**

As the strike dragged on into December and January, STISSS and SIMETRISSS also brought out other social sectors such as university students and NGOs to support them in their street marches. Early in the strike campaign, in late November 1999, SIMETRISSS called a special meeting with civil society groups including representatives of NGOs, agricultural cooperatives, and university students, to convince them that health care privatization was a national issue. Their coalition building seems to have paid off. On December 8, 1999, a mass march for "Public Health" took place in which an estimated 20,000 people participated, including health care workers, students, labor unions, and community groups.

Over time the marches increased in size with more social groups present in February and early March of 2000. In early February 2000, peasants traveled from Chalatenango, San Vicente, and Usulután departments to hold simultaneous marches to the ISSS administrative offices in San Salvador demanding an end to public health care privatization. Peasant participation provides a clear illustration of the level of social movement unionism achieved, in that poor rural groups do not pay into the Social Security health system nor are they covered by it. Peasant organizations felt a sense of solidarity with the health care unionists and a threat to the public health system as a whole in which they are beneficiaries. Around this same time (February 2000), an ad hoc coalition of civil society groups formed to support the striking health care workers called the "Coordinadora de Organizaciones Sociales en contra de la Privatización" (COSCP). Street marches and public rallies were also held in at least a dozen towns

outside of San Salvador, including Usulután, San Miguel, Santa Tecla, Santa Ana, Sonsonate, Aguilares, Apopa, San Vicente, and Zacatecoluca. On March 6, riot police used water cannons, tear gas, and rubber bullets to disperse doctors and their supporters holding a sit-in on a street in the public hospital sector of San Salvador. The tear gas diffused into the nearby hospitals and affected several patients. In response, STISSS and SIMETRISSS along with their civil society supporters in the COCSP convoked a mass march on March 8 to the presidential palace. The demonstration drew an estimated 50,000 participants (by SIMETRISSS accounts). Finally on Saturday, March 11, the government negotiated with the unions and agreed to halt the privatization process—a day before national parliamentary and municipal elections.

Part of the accords reached in March 2000 between the health care unions and the state included the formation of a special commission composed of unions, health care administrators and recipients, NGOs, and the government. The goal of the multi-party



Source: Imágenes Libres

**Figure 4.1.** The *Marcha Blanca*, Avenida Cuscatlán, San Salvador, October 23, 2002.

commission was to generate a health care reform program with the consent of the most relevant sectors in provisioning and receiving public health care. In the summer of 2002, the proposal of the workgroup was ignored by the central government. At this same time, at an annual meeting of large private enterprise associations, the business groups introduced their own plan to be presented to the legislative assembly, which included a partial privatization of the ISSS public health system. These unfavorable gestures led to a new strike wave in the fall of 2002.

Both STISSS and SIMETRISSS began employing work stoppages in the ISSS hospitals in September 2002. The health care unions had been already meeting with NGO groups and communities throughout El Salvador in the summer of 2002, leading

teach-ins and seminars about health care privatization. By October 2002, a broad, pre-existing coalition of NGOs called the *Foro de la Sociedad Civil*, threw in its support for the striking health care workers. The Foro represented over fifty NGOs and community associations. By the end of October, members of the Foro de la Sociedad Civil joined with other groups of students and labor organizations to form the *Alianza ciudadana contra la privatización* (ACCP). In addition to peasant, student, and labor groups, the ACCP represented women's rights associations and ecology/consumer defense-focused groups. These civil society organizations engaged in street protests, vigils, and roadblocks on behalf of the striking doctors throughout the campaign. The roadblocks, marches, and sit-ins created a climate of mass disruption from October 2002 until May 2003 in San Salvador and the major towns and highways of the republic. Observers at the time acknowledged the health care workers' adroitness at constructing mobilization appeals consistent with public misgivings about health privatization, especially concerning the rising costs and increasing exclusion of the poorest sectors from access to medical services (González and Alvarenga 2002).

In addition to this extensive civil society camaraderie, the ISSS unions had the backing of workers and doctors in the general public health care system (the MSPAS). Health care workers in the MSPAS system engaged in both short-term work stoppages and longer strikes in solidarity with the ISSS workers between October 2002 and May 2003 (as they also carried out in the 1999-2000 strike). The efficacy of the second anti-health care privatization campaign—which was much larger and more intensive than in 1999-2000—was manifested in the seven *marchas blancas* (white marches) convoked in late 2002 and early 2003 (see figure 4.1). Beginning on October 16, 2002, the ISSS unions and their civil society allies organized mass street demonstrations in El Salvador whereby they deployed their symbolic capital (Giarracca and Bidaseca 2001) by dressing in white apparel and applying white body paint to display solidarity with the public health care profession (Umaña 2003). The immense white marches signified that “we are all health care workers.” One common white t-shirt worn and distributed by STISSS unionists during the strike and marches read on the backside, “Unidos defendamos la salud de todo el pueblo.”

The largest white marches attracted up to 200,000 participants from all social backgrounds, making them clearly the largest mobilizations in the post-civil war era (Schuld 2003). STISSS and SIMETRISISS membership combined totaled less than 7,000 unionists. Thus, the multitudinous *marchas blancas* displayed a heightened level of social movement unionism. Whereas the largest marches in the protest wave of the late 1970s preceding the civil war were often funeral processions for fallen activists and victims of state-sponsored violence, the white marches called for an end to privatization and the “merchandizing” of public health—marking a clear historical shift in popular claims-making from the era of authoritarian developmentalism to neoliberal democracy.

### THE FMLN AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT PARTYISM

Both protest campaigns enjoyed the support of the largest opposition political party, the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN), which was legalized as an official party after the negotiated end to the civil war in 1992. The former insurgents effectively transformed from a guerrilla army to a legal electoral party. The FMLN was relatively weak in the early to the mid-1990s as it adjusted to conventional and institu-

tional politics. In the 1994 parliamentary elections (the party's first electoral competition), the FMLN won 21 out of 81 parliamentary seats. However, in a bitter factional split, seven legislative deputies abandoned the party in 1995, reducing the FMLN representation in the legislative assembly to 14 seats. The seven defecting legislative deputies subsequently colluded with the ruling ARENA party to pass a regressive sales tax hike in 1995—a common measure in neoliberal policy packages. In the 1994 local elections, the FMLN only won 13 of 262 municipal government councils (Montgomery 1997). Nonetheless, in each successive local, legislative, and presidential election between 1994 and 2004 the opposition party gained more votes.

The 1997 legislative elections were a turning point for the FMLN. The party took control of the capital, San Salvador, and over four dozen other municipalities, while winning many seats in the unicameral national legislature. From this foothold, the FMLN continued to make gains in the 2000 and 2003 legislative and municipal elections. Thus, in the formative years of neoliberal reform in the early 1990s, social movements had few allies inside the polity to give them a hearing to prevent unpopular economic policies. By the late 1990s, however, this all began to change. The big breakthrough for the electoral opposition arrived with the 1997 elections.

In the 1997 legislative and local elections, the FMLN won 27 of 81 parliamentary seats, which clearly distinguished itself as the second largest political force in the country after the neoliberal ARENA party (Montgomery 1997). The FMLN also took control of 51 municipal governments, including 6 of the 14 provincial capitals (including San Salvador itself)—none of which the party had won in 1994. Though by the time it came to exercise its newly acquired oppositional power it was too late to prevent privatizations that ARENA already pushed down the legislative pipeline (such as the state telecommunications company ANTEL), the FMLN would be a leading voice to prevent public health care privatization between 1999 and 2003.

The FMLN's behavior in supporting the health care unions can be characterized as "social movement partyism." Not only did this oppositional political party act as a friend inside parliament voting against legislation allowing for private contracts in the public health care system, but also in supporting social movement mobilization efforts (Harnecker 2003). The FMLN along with other oppositional political parties supported a bill early in the 2002-2003 strike that constitutionally prevented the government from privatizing the public health sector. The anti-privatization legislation passed on two separate occasions in October and November of 2002, but was overturned when the ruling ARENA party aligned with a smaller center-right party to pass counter legislation in December of 2002 (Schuld 2003). Hence, parliamentary struggle alone was not sufficient to put the brakes on the privatization process.

The legislative representatives of the FMLN often participated in street marches. The legislative deputies of the FMLN marched in unison as a distinct column in the *marchas blancas* of 2002 and 2003, carrying their own banner stating solidarity with the health care workers. The oppositional party had also begun a tradition in June 2002 of holding a weekly public gathering in downtown San Salvador on Friday evenings called the *Tribuna Abierta*. During the 2002-2003 health care strike, elected FMLN officials openly encouraged the audience at the *tribunas abiertas* to participate in the *marchas blancas* and contribute to the anti-privatization campaign.

Party members and high-ranking FMLN politicians also participated in the more risky and disruptive protest tactics such as roadblocks, which at times were dispersed with tear gas, rubber bullets, and mass arrests. In October of 2002, FMLN mayors and legislative representatives showed up at highway sit-ins in diverse locations around the

country including in the western department of Ahuachapán and in the southeastern region at the Puente de Oro to protest health care privatization and economic liberalization. City employees of FMLN-controlled municipalities of greater metropolitan San Salvador also served as a key support group in major protests.<sup>8</sup> Finally, FMLN representatives acted as advocates within the justice system by publicly demanding the release of protesters arrested during the health care strike campaigns (Meza 2003). Voters rewarded the FMLN handsomely. Both protest campaigns peaked during the election season for legislative and municipal elections. In both elections (2000 and 2003), the FMLN made significant electoral gains and held on to their 1997 victories at the local and parliamentary levels—a payoff from movement-party interdependence.

Both rounds of anti-health care privatization mobilization resulted in the government negotiating a formal agreement (in March 2000 and June 2003) to halt the privatization process while in exchange the health care unions and their civil society support groups ceased work stoppages and disruptive and creative street actions. Thus, if we measure social movement outcomes by the stated goals of the main protagonists (Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995), these campaigns proved to be relatively successful. The level of mobilization was national, with health care union-community coalitions reproduced on a local scale in dozens of municipalities. Arguably, the El Salvador anti-health care privatization campaigns represent some of the largest and longest sustained struggles against a *particular* neoliberal policy in Latin America (with the possible exception of the Bolivian mobilizations against natural gas privatization and export). Even more important, however, is that the Salvadoran anti-health care privatization protests succeeded in halting the privatization process via social movement actions—a relatively rare occurrence in neoliberal Latin America.

In sum, the best that social movements can do in neoliberal Latin America may be to slow down the *rate* of economic change (Polanyi 1944: 37). One movement-generated victory against privatization or other neoliberal measures does not ensure that pressures for economic liberalization will not reemerge. In El Salvador in the early 1990s, public opinion was mixed about various government measures and schemes to privatize key public services and industries. Social movements that tried to mobilize against the reforms in the early to mid-1990s were usually only organized within their own sector and experienced a challenging time sustaining their protests—such as the state telecommunications workers' unions. At this same moment, oppositional political parties with ideological leanings against neoliberal reforms were relatively weak and controlled few legislative seats or municipal governments. Thus, the early to mid-1990s in El Salvador were neither favorable to social movement unionism nor to social movement partyism (not to mention a society exhausted by over eleven years of civil war in the midst of reconstruction).

When the government moved to privatize *relatively* affordable and accessible services such as public sector health care, the ISSS health care unions tapped into public opinion misgivings and brought in other social sectors to support the struggle—including other public sector unions, teachers, students, women's rights groups, NGOs, and agricultural cooperative associations. In the late 1990s, when the health care privatization process commenced, the opposition political party with a strong anti-neoliberal ideology climbed to a much more potent political position within the Salvadoran polity, controlling a third of legislative seats and the municipal governments where a majority of the population resided. These favorable conditions (public opinion, social movement unionism, and social movement partyism) converged to create a multi-layered barrier against health care privatization on two separate occasions. The Salva-

doran protest campaigns eventuated in one of the largest and most intensive mobilizations witnessed in the hemisphere against privatization.

### LESSONS FOR LATIN AMERICA

The Salvadoran social movement campaigns against health care privatization may be instructive for similar types of policy struggles in contemporary Latin America. Regional public opinion seems to be turning against privatization. In Bolivia, the popular upheavals in the early 2000s went even a step further than most anti-neoliberal struggles in the Americas by calling for the nationalization of natural gas reserves partially privatized at bargain rates back in 1996. Bolivians also drew on public opinion (in which over 80 percent supported nationalization of natural gas deposits), widespread multisectoral and multicultural organizing (e.g., indigenous groups, students, teachers, neighborhood-based associations), and oppositional political parties that practiced social movement partyism (i.e., the MAS and the Movimiento Indígena Pachakuti) (Lewis 2004). Similar types of coalitions have materialized in Paraguay and Costa Rica to prevent government privatization programs.

Additionally, we should consider negative cases whereby mass mobilization failed to achieve desired policy outcomes against neoliberal measures (the more common outcome). For example, in Guatemala in March of 2005, the legislature ratified the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA)—a neoliberal measure to open markets and reduce trade barriers between Central America, the United States, and the Dominican Republic. Mass protests occurred before, during, and after the parliament voted in favor of the treaty. The anti-CAFTA campaign was multisectoral with the participation of key labor federations, NGOs, Mayan peasant groups, students, and human rights associations. The movement employed roadblocks and street marches through the first three weeks of March. The security forces killed at least one demonstrator at a roadblock of teachers and peasants in Colotenango, Huehuetenango. Private enterprise estimated economic losses of 85 million quetzales from the protests, which shut down the central business district of Guatemala City for several days (Canahui 2005). Despite the mass uprisings, the government held to its position regarding CAFTA. What factors may help explain this negative movement outcome?

First, national public opinion polls taken back in December 2004 showed that nearly 70 percent of the Guatemalan public was unaware of CAFTA, making it less than a salient public issue. For those who were aware of the trade agreement, more thought it would benefit the country than harm it. Second, inside the parliament the voting was dramatically skewed in favor of CAFTA. Out of 158 legislators, 126 voted in favor of signing the free trade agreement, twelve deputies from the center-left opposition voted against it, and the remaining twenty were absent (Paredes Díaz 2005). Hence, two of the key conditions outlined previously—public opinion and social movement partyism—were relatively weak, providing a very *unfavorable* context for mass disruption to influence public policy. Though the cross-sectoral representation of the protest participants in the Guatemalan anti-CAFTA campaign was impressive as well as the intensity of the contention for a short period, the movement fizzled out by late March—during the traditional Easter holiday season in Central America.

It should also be noted, though, that one major variable in this study—social movement partyism—contains other political costs and benefits beyond the immediate protest campaign. Movement-political party links may best serve the needs of social



movements in ad hoc relationships. Over time, a movement could be co-opted by a political party and have its original goals displaced or ignored (i.e., removal of austerity policies) such as was the case with the labor movement and political parties in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Argentina, Mexico, and Venezuela (Murillo 2001). After the labor movement in these respective countries assisted in securing electoral victories for erstwhile pro-labor parties, the parties, once in power, managed the state in a neoliberal fashion through the early 1990s (*ibid.*). In Ecuador in 2003, an anti-neoliberal coalition in alliance with the indigenous-based political party Pachakutik (MUPP-NP), played a critical role in Lucio Gutiérrez' presidential victory. However, in less than 8 months, president Gutiérrez made a rapid U-turn and attempted to implement several neoliberal policies connected to an IMF standby loan, breaking his pact with the social movements and oppositional political party (MUPP-NP) that delivered him to executive power (Zamosc 2004; Almeida 2005).

On the other hand, an oppositional political party may be able to convert social movement and legislative success into more electoral power, which has the potential to win the executive branch and a legislative majority. Such a government may be able to partially hold back the tide of neoliberal reforms, or at least the most harmful ones to social welfare, but this seems to remain an open question in contemporary Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, and Venezuela. These two conflicting scenarios indicate that more research needs to be carried out on both the long-term risks and potential payoffs of social movement partyism.

To summarize, tax hikes, cuts in the national retirement system, and the privatization of public utilities and services are the kinds of policies that are likely to mobilize significant subsets of the population. Such forms of neoliberal policymaking provide a structural potential for multisectoral organizing beyond a single group or labor union. The existence of a strong oppositional political party acting as an advocate for the movement inside and outside the polity further strengthens the potency of the coalition(s) struggling against the unwanted economic policy (at least in the short term). Future research should examine more precisely and across more cases the likelihood of such a combination of social and political forces converging, the conditions under which they do, and the outcomes they achieve in terms of neoliberal policy implementation/non-implementation.

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#### NOTES

1. Social movements may influence public opinion negatively or positively. My focus here is how social movements and public opinion have an additive and cumulative influence on policy outcomes.
2. We also should mention that part of the social movement literature finds a demobilizing function of external groups when they align with the indigenous base of an insurgent group because of cooptation and goal displacement (McAdam 1982).
3. Of course, this is only one path to the establishment of a formal electoral party. An alternative path

could be from a schism among contending political elites that leads to the formation of a new party.

4. Since the late 1970s El Salvador was embroiled in violent political conflict. The civil war officially ran from the January 1981 guerrilla offensive to the signing of a United Nations brokered Peace Accords in January 1992. An estimated 80,000 Salvadorans lost their lives in the long and drawn-out conflict.

5. Other significant protest actions in this time period included campaigns by ex-paramilitaries for government indemnification payments, struggles over land redistribution connected to the Peace Accords, and intermittent battles between street vendors and local police in San Salvador.

6. El Salvador maintains two separate public health care systems. One is for the general population and is referred to as the Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance (MSPAS). The MSPAS covers about 80 percent of the population. The other system is the Salvadoran Social Security Institute (ISSS) and it provides health care services for between 15 and 20 percent of the population (or roughly about 1 million people). The ISSS is catered to the formal workforce where employees and employers pay into the system. The clientele are workers in the state sector and in large private firms and under the protection of collective contracts. Retirees and family members of the formal workforce that have made payments into the ISSS also have access to its health care services.

7. It should be noted that even though public opinion polls consistently registered majorities against public health care privatization, public opinion was more mixed on the tactics used by the health care unions and their supporters during strike campaigns.

8. Political parties allied on both sides of the conflict to the point that in the 2004 presidential elections, ARENA chose as its vice presidential candidate, Ana Vilma de Escobar, the former director of the ISSS during the 1999-2000 conflict and in favor of partial privatization. The FMLN picked the leader of the Colegio Médico as its vice presidential candidate—a leading organizer of the doctors' labor union and opponent to ISSS privatization initiatives.